

Yirat Shamayim
The Awe, Reverence,
and Fear of God

EDITED BY
Marc D. Stern

Robert S. Hirt, Series Editor

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THE ORTHODOX FORUM

The Orthodox Forum, initially convened by Dr. Norman Lamm, Chancellor of Yeshiva University, meets each year to consider major issues of concern to the Jewish community. Forum participants from throughout the world, including academicians in both Jewish and secular fields, rabbis, rashei yeshivah, Jewish educators, and Jewish communal professionals, gather in conference as a think tank to discuss and critique each other's original papers, examining different aspects of a central theme. The purpose of the Forum is to create and disseminate a new and vibrant Torah literature addressing the critical issues facing Jewry today.

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Series Editor's Preface

Dr. Bernard Revel (d. 1940), the first President of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) and founder of what would later become Yeshiva University, when casually encountering students, would unexpectedly ask, not “How are you progressing with your Torah and general studies?” but “How is your *yirat shamayim*?”

Fundamentally, Dr. Revel was prodding the students to look more deeply into themselves to gauge the impact of their value system on their studies and actions, regardless of the specific discipline or activity. Was the student's life informed by the value of *yirat shamayim*; living in the presence of God in one's real world?

We are grateful to Marc Stern, the editor of this seventeenth volume in the Orthodox Forum Series, and the authors of the articles that follow, for exploring to what extent *yirat shamayim* informs our lives within the private domain and the public square.

Today, faith and religious values have become centerpieces of political and social agendas and the focus of widespread debate. In

the Western world, where economic success has not in itself resulted in a more meaningful life, and in the Islamic Middle East, where opportunities for personal and economic advancement remain mirages for the masses, turning to religion has increased dramatically among people of all ages, particularly among the young. Reflecting on its presence in the real world is a vital undertaking.

It is our hope that this volume will provide useful insights into how consideration of *yirat shamayim*, the awe, reverence, and fear of God can add value both to our daily spiritual and mundane activities. The very endeavor of examining the concept of *yirat shamayim* is an act reflecting the value itself.

Robert S. Hirt
April 2008

Introduction:

I Failed to Guard My Own Vineyard

Marc D. Stern

A glance at the impressive shelf of (as of this writing) 16 volumes of the Orthodox Forum shows that, with no more than a handful of exceptions, the subjects explored all touch upon the intersection of Orthodoxy with some external phenomena: interactions with non-observant Jews, war, *tikkun olam*, business ethics, “scientific” biblical and Talmudic scholarship, and egalitarianism.

These volumes and their focus toward the world accurately mirror the outward, non-self-reflexive, focus of centrist or modern Orthodoxy. One of the distinguishing characteristics of that branch of Orthodoxy is precisely its concern with the outside world, combined with a sense of obligation to, and not merely exploitation of, it.

That engagement with a world, only some of whose core values Orthodoxy shares, carries with it exposure to values, ideas, and methods (*e.g.*, critical biblical studies, egalitarianism) which require examination before being assimilated – if at all – into Orthodox

practice and thought. All this is desirable and necessary, but it should not come at the cost of “guarding our own vineyard,”¹ of exploring and nurturing the fundamentals of our service to God. The neglect of these inwardly directed, parochial obligations – such as the focus of this volume, the fear of God – might be dismissed as nothing more than the neglect of an uncontested principle taken for granted and routinely put into practice. Perhaps, too, it comes from a commendable reluctance to speak with confidence and familiarity about the Unknowable.

But at least to me it seems that the reason is in large part different and more worrying. It is as if we in the modern Orthodox community – I do not exclude myself – are discomfited by God talk. This reticence is not, God forbid, because we are guilty of substituting orthopraxy for orthodoxy – although there is some measure of that – but because we have not developed a modern vocabulary of fear of God. That fear is, or should be, an indispensable element of our religious commitment and environment. The failure to cultivate a sense of what *yirat shamayim* demands of us in all of our contemporary circumstances distorts and impoverishes our religious life and our communal discourse. Indeed, in this regard, it must be said that we have not nurtured our own garden.

Perhaps, too, the silence stems from a fear of pushing a topic when rabbis are uncertain if it will strike a ready chord amongst laypeople, or, perhaps, whether raising the question itself will cause people to abandon actual practice if they find themselves wanting in *yirat shamayim*.

Two unscientific anecdotes suggest this may be a false fear. I raised the subject when speaking out-of-town on *shabbos*, and found acute interest in discussing it – after people got over the shock of being asked what they thought *yirat shamayim* meant. My wife had a similar enthusiastic if surprised response when she asked her students at Bruria High School to discuss their understanding of *yirat shamayim*. But Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, in his contribution to this volume, pointedly refuses to eliminate this concern with where such discussions might lead as a legitimate concern.

Rabbi Tzi Dov (Harold) Kanotopsky identified one source of the problem over sixty years ago:²

Unfortunately, this [familiarity with God, and an absence of fear of Him] is the mental attitude of a good many Jews today. They feel a little too close to and too friendly with Torah and with God.

* * *

The rabbis express this thought explicitly in a *midrash* [*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Parashat Yitro, Parasha 4*].... They comment on the phrase... “The entire mountain was filled with smoke” because God descended on the mountain in fire. The Torah was given in fire, and, in its essence, resembles the nature of fire.

This is the nature of fire. If one comes too close to the flame, he will be smitten by the heat. If one detaches himself completely from the fire, he will remain cold. Therefore, man must warm himself at an appropriate distance from the fire.

* * *

My relationship with God and his Torah must be such that while we are close and even intimate, it is not a relationship on an equal basis. We must always bear in mind that while God is...a merciful God and our merciful Father who loves us and calls us His children.... we cannot and dare not approach God and Torah over a counter of expediency and attempt to negotiate with Him according to our values and priorities. For God always remains...the jealous God, the demanding God, the exacting God.

It is entirely true that...the love of God, is the highest degree that man can attain in the worship of the Almighty. But sometimes I feel that we have too much [love] and too little [fear]. We may have too much love of God and too little fear of God.

I cannot testify to the accuracy of this depiction of the situation sixty years ago – Rabbi Kanotopsky was himself an acute observer

of American Jews – but it would appear as if nothing much has changed.

This volume is an attempt to begin a discussion of *yirat shamayim* in modern language and in light of our current circumstances; to insist that the subject deserves, nay demands, our sustained attention; and to enable all of us to better integrate it into our lives, at the same time to avoid shallow and empty descriptions of piety or arrogant smugness. Neither should it compel (as it seems to in some Orthodox circles) a growing denial of modern biological and social science, and a systematic denigration of the importance of human endeavor.

The subject of *yirat shamayim* as a topic for a forum grew from a conversation with Rabbi Elchanan Adler on a *shabbos* afternoon. We were bemoaning the fact that in *haredi* literature, discussions of *yirat shamayim* are commonplace while they are uncommon in modern Orthodox sources. (The significance of that difference is less clear.) Rabbi Adler gets credit for the idea of making *yirat shamayim* a Forum subject. Disagreements with this introduction are to be blamed on me alone.

The topic of *yirat shamayim* is explored here from a variety of perspectives. These plainly do not exhaust the topic. For reasons beyond our control (and concerns of space and time), some aspects of *yirat shamayim* are not explored. There is, crucially, no comprehensive exploration of *yirat shamayim* as it impacts halakhic observance, the problem of *humra* and *yarei shamayim yotzei et kulam* (the God-fearing person will satisfy all views), so characteristic of the halakhic world of the *Mishna Berura*, but not the contemporaneous *Arukh ha-Shulchan*. Although we have Professor Alan Brill's important essay on *yirat shamayim* in modern Hasidic practice, we don't have an exploration of *yirat shamayim* across the full range of Hasidic views, as they exist now, and as they were in the past. And while the issue was explored at the Forum, we have not reprinted all the essays dealing with the problem of educating to *yirat shamayim* in all the yeshiva high schools.

Even if these aspects of *yirat shamayim* had been explored, and even if each of the articles we do publish strikes a chord, and even if

we had even a broader range of views than we have, I am certain that we have fallen short. *Yirat shamayim* lies flat on the page. It is easier to talk about *yirat shamayim*. In some circles, the phrase is tossed about readily. Judgments about it – and who really possesses it – are made far too easily, often dependent on matters of, at best, tertiary importance, such as the size of a man's hat brim and its color.

Precisely because *yirat shamayim* is primarily an internal sense, generally impossible to accurately assess from the outside, there is an understandable tendency to seek easy and readily applied external criteria by which to measure it. Parents and educators seek litmus tests to measure success in inculcating it. Such criteria easily give rise to superficial assessments and can mask blatant abuse – think of some of our recent child abuse or *kashrut* scandals – but they are also social markers of the importance we attach as a community to *yirat shamayim*. I am personally skeptical of the value of such markers, but I am, in more reflective moments, ready to concede that I might be wrong. After all, these counter-cultural markers do declare a commitment to the service of God.

The best way I know to learn and teach *yirat shamayim* is to see it up close when it is palpably genuine. Stories of *gedolei yisroel* – if true and not just hagiography – and, better yet, up-close observation of those who are truly *yarei shamayim* (whether a *gadol b'yisroel* or a *ba'al ha-bayis*) may in the end be the best way to teach *yirat shamayim*, and not just to children. In this regard, this or any other volume about *yirat shamayim* will fall short. Still, our tradition insists on full discussion of abstract religious concepts, and assumes, as with other aspects of Talmud Torah, that the discussion is both intrinsically valuable and conducive to good practice.

* * *

Yirat shamayim, like *midot tovot* (good character traits), or belief and trust in God (*emunah* and *bitachon*), is a phrase in the lexicon of every Orthodox Jew. But like those other phrases, it is a phrase whose meaning is often only vaguely understood, or is reduced to some broad, lowest common denominator. Professor Warren Zev Harvey begins the discussion by attempting to bring precision to the

discussion by defining terms. He surveys the meaning of the phrase, as used in the Talmud, to modern writers and thinkers, persons as variegated as Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman and Professor Yeshayahu Liebowitz.

Professor Harvey's broad survey raises any number of important points. Is *yirat shamayim* an end to itself or simply a necessary precondition for other goods? Is it an indispensable guarantor of simple social morality (as Rabbi Wasserman thought, and the Rav at least once wrote), or is it just one among many such motivations, including natural morality? Is it an ethical or a religious value, or both? Is it a universal or particular value? In the first footnote to his article, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein observes that while he writes from a Jewish perspective, much of what he discusses is universally relevant.

It is important to call attention to another subject Professor Harvey discusses: the relation between *yirat shamayim* and intellectual contemplation and Torah study – a subject discussed also by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, Rabbi Shalom Carmy, and Rabbi Elyakim Krumbein. Is one the end of the former? Is one to be accorded a higher priority than the other? More daringly, as Rav Kook argued, *yirat shamayim* without cultivation of knowledge can actually impede spiritual progress. Professor Harvey writes:

The dual propositions that *yirat shamayim* must be associated with knowledge and with morality were affirmed forcefully in modern times by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Ha-Kohen Kook. In his *Orot ha-Kodesh*, II, *rosh davar*, he taught that “*yirat shamayim* is everything, all life and goodness” and can raise one to “the heights of the heavens,” but he warned that when it gets distorted into *yirat ha-mahashavah* [“the fear of thought”] it leads one into the “mire of ignorance” which “takes away the light of one’s soul, makes one’s power fail, and one’s spirit gross.” He also warned, “*yirat shamayim* must not push aside the natural morality of a human being;” and indeed the “sign

of pure *yirat shamayim* is precisely the enhancement of our natural morality.

Like Rashi on Job 4:6, Rabbi Kook contrasted *yirat shamayim* based on knowledge with *yirat shamayim* not based on it. In his *Arpelei Tohar*, he writes: “a human being becomes sluggish and idle by reason of *yirat shamayim* that lacks knowledge (*she-ein-bah de’ah*).” [Footnotes omitted.]

Finally for purposes of this summary, Professor Harvey’s essay recalls the Rav’s distinction between *yirah* (roughly, awe) and *pahad* (fear), a distinction to which Rabbi Carmy also devotes considerable attention:

Judaism, continued Rabbi Soloveichik, requires *yirat shamayim*, but not fear. The Bible never commands us to have *pahad* for God, but only *yirah* [e.g., Exodus 20:17; Leviticus 25:17; Deuteronomy 10:20]; and the Talmud inculcates the virtue of *yirat shamayim*, not *pahad shamayim*. While Judaism does not advocate *pahad*, “the whole Torah in its entirety is founded on the foundation of *yirah*.” [Footnotes omitted].

The core ideas encapsulated in the phrase *yirat shamayim* are enduring and unchanging. But different circumstances call for different emphasis and certainly different methods of education to *yirat shamayim*. Rabbi Krumbein, writing of the Musar movement of the nineteenth century, for example, acknowledges that Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, founder of the movement, urged adherents to contemplate the awful punishments which awaited those who did not fear God, or who sinned in other ways. That emphasis, Rabbi Krumbein argues, would be inappropriate in contemporary circumstances. Nevertheless, Rabbi Krumbein shares Rabbi Salanter’s insistence that Torah study alone is typically insufficient to ground religious and moral development:

We see someone using his impressive intellect for the sake of advanced Torah achievement. Do we need to ask what is going on inside him? Are we witnessing the healthy ambition of a century ago? Or perhaps a single-minded self-absorption, inspired by the utter totality of modern commercialism and consumerism? Can we today trust the façade of a happily learning yeshiva student, and assume that his inner reality is likewise unencumbered with emptiness, doubt or repressed religious crisis? By any remote chance, is he essentially finding refuge in Talmud study, while his inner self is being gnawed away by the post-modernist obliteration of depth in all its forms? Can we today ignore the possibility that the Torah study is a compulsive immersion, which reflects a need – already noted in *Mesilat Yesharim* – to avoid confronting the self? Or may we safely assume that even if it is, *hamaor she-ba* – “the light within” Torah – will straighten out everything?

Today, then, he suggests the following revised form of *Musar* study:

There must be a pervasive openness and respect for the student’s viewpoints and inclinations. *Musar* in our time is a call, not a rebuke. Responding to the call is a personal matter of individual choice. We must be willing to introduce tension into the subject matter. Differences among various sources should be learned in an atmosphere of free discussion....

The curriculum itself must first have a clear idea of what it means by *musar*. I would favor a broad definition: the branch of Torah that teaches a person how to be and live, as opposed to how to behave in given situation, which is the focus of *Halakha*. Behavior is only one aspect of life, and it doesn’t necessarily involve the cultivation of religious imperatives such as faith and *yirat shamayim*. *Musar* concentrates on personal spiritual concerns such

as emotional life, character, traits, and the setting of goals. Teaching these areas is not only a matter of theory and concepts, but also of practical skills.

The curriculum itself would have three parts. A prologue would clarify the idea of ethical and spiritual progress as a distinct religious desideratum. From there we arrive at the other two parts: *musar* as a field of study, and as a discipline.

Similarly, Dr. Alan Brill, reviewing relevant strands of Hasidic thought, acknowledges that Hasidic ideas about *yirat shamayim* will not readily be assimilated whole into the contemporary religious practice. Nevertheless, he urges that there is a way to fill the void:

Particularly revealing is the popularity of a Neo-Hasidic *musar* work rapidly devoured by those seeking a path to God in our communities – Rabbi Itamar Shwartz’ *Belivavi Mishkan Evneh*. Its basic message is that we must overcome our physical natures through submission, separation, and removal from the false physical world. Then, after separation through following *hasidut*, one learns to have fear of God through nullification of the self.... Since all events are from God, there is a complete relinquishing of the sense of autonomy, choice, and reflection.

Why does this appeal to people with suburban lives? I submit that it provides a way to get outside of the physicality and vanity that characterize such lives. The constant white noise of contemporary life is the backdrop for this desire to call a halt to the sounds of consumerism, media overload, and even intellectual innovation. When the secular means we use to insulate ourselves and maintain security despite our fears fail, extreme fear of heaven serves as a replacement for the fears of contemporary life.

Note that for Rabbi Krumbein the problem to be addressed is an outgrowth of (if one may say such a thing) “too much” unalloyed

Torah study; for Dr. Brill, the problem is too much human endeavor of all kinds. But Dr. Brill's prescription involves a negation or at least suspension of human endeavor, and a demotion of its importance. One may question whether that is likely to be an acceptable approach across the community – and, if it would be, whether it is an acceptable one.

Questions about how to advance *yirat shamayim* have many implications. One important example is the debate in national religious circles in Israel over the study of *Tanakh* (Bible) *b'govah eynayim* – eye to eye, as it were. That is, when studying biblical characters and episodes, should we evaluate them “eyeball to eyeball” as equals (or at least fundamentally as persons similar to ourselves), or as figures entirely distinct and removed from ourselves.

Part of this debate, which has been waged intensely in *dati-leumi* and *haredi-leumi* circles in Israel for several years, but which is largely unknown in the United States, is simply textual. Does the biblical text offer directly, or, as the late Nahama Leibovitz insisted was usually the case, indirectly, something which amounts to a value judgment? Ignoring such textual judgment distorts the text just as much as would reading into it value judgments that are absent. Of course, we can point to examples of the humanizing of the text to the point of distortion, where the text is made laughingly unrecognizable by exaggerated attempts to “humanize,” for example, the patriarchs. The flaw with such clumsy efforts to humanize biblical figures is not so much theological as textual. It is just bad interpretation.

The debate, though, is also even more largely about how one should use the biblical figures as role models for *yirat shamayim*. Leading *haredi* figures – especially those associated with the *Musar* movement, but not exclusively³ – have insisted on the perfection, or near perfection, of biblical figures. Their apparent “sins” are dismissed as slight deviations, unfitting for persons of their stature, but hardly a blip for us mere mortals. Undoubtedly, this tendency, which often requires exegetical contortions, is motivated by the concern that if the biblical figures are acknowledged to have sinned, the reader cannot know what to learn from them and what not to learn from them.

Neither Rabbi Nati Helfgot nor Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein in the papers presented here accept that extreme position. Rabbi Helfgot quotes Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein's curt dismissal of the use of petrified models of piety – even as he and Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein disagree sharply about how to present biblical figures to elementary or secondary school students. Rabbi Helfgot believes that carefully exposing students to flaws of great people, even as we emphasize that their shortcomings are after all small departures from otherwise exemplary lives, is good pedagogy (as well as good biblical interpretation). Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein suggests that it is important to first nurture children in a deep and abiding respect, love, and admiration for our biblical heroes as models for God-fearing people, and for Chazal's understanding of them. In an addendum, Rabbi Lichtenstein speculates that the differences between him and Rabbi Helfgot may reflect pedagogical differences between Israeli and American schools.

There may be less dividing the two than meets the eye; neither is an unadorned fan of *Tanakh b'govah aynim*; neither endorses the *haredi* view (and that of Rabbi Tzvi Tau)⁴ which rejects the humanizing approach in principle. Rather, they debate what educational method will best make biblical figures accessible to young people as role models.

The problem of education toward *yirat shamayim* is not one limited to yeshiva or day school students. Adults, too, need such education. Erica Brown explores the role of fear in adult education, especially adult education addressed to non-Orthodox Jews. Her approach highlights a different perspective on fear. In adult education, she reports, fear of educational failure, of being exposed as ignorant, is an overarching problem confronting adult educators. Then, too, the press to cover material does not allow time for the reflection necessary for *yirat shamayim*.

Moreover, when asked directly at the Forum whether adult educators functioning in a non-Orthodox setting typically raised issues of *yirat shamayim*, Brown said no – that such issues are not easily raised in the average adult education class because they were well beyond where the students were religiously. It would be interesting

to compare that response with the practice of Orthodox *kiruv* groups such as NCSY or Aish-ha-Torah. Do they discuss *yirat shamayim* in any meaningful way? If they do – and not in some unrecognizable and diluted fashion – does it serve to attract or repel? And if they do not, what should we make of the silence?

Rabbi Jack Bieler, in remarks which could have incorporated Rabbi Kanotopsky's decades-old lament about there being too much love, and not enough fear, in synagogue, addresses the painful problem of the absence of awe and reverence in the modern Orthodox synagogue. Reviewing the relevant *halakhic* sources, as well as the mandated and customary architecture of the synagogue, Rabbi Bieler concludes that *yirat shamayim* should be manifest in public behavior in the synagogue. Yet, he observes "a visitor to the most contemporary modern Orthodox synagogues in North American would be hard pressed to report that he experienced an atmosphere that reflected...particular engagement with and fear of God." (It is fair to question whether this is a problem limited to modern Orthodox synagogues.) He makes numerous suggestions of how to correct the problem.

The problem of education and the synagogue are not only, or even chiefly, technical problems related to identifiable deficiencies in those institutions (say, poor teachers or overly long and too formal services). Rather, they are just a manifestation of a more general problem, or set of problems, all of which impede the nurture and expression of *yirat shamayim*. These impediments are analyzed in Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein's comprehensive and elegant article. Although I cannot hope to do justice to Rabbi Lichtenstein's analysis, and surely not to his lyrical prose, he points to two problems as central: the rise of science and the tendency to humanism, that is, the placing of humans (not God) at the center of our moral and day-to-day discourse. Neither of these phenomena is inherently problematic, nor, *a priori*, incompatible with religious seriousness, and yet each alone (and both together) create substantial problems for *yirat shamayim*.

The problem of science and its insistence on mechanical laws is well known. Less well known and less frequently discussed is the

problem of humanism. Humanism, as Rabbi Lichtenstein uses the term, does not mean secular humanism, the doctrine that man may not ethically defer obligations to a Creator. He means instead a rejection of religious quietism in place of religiously directed human activity. While observing that these phenomena are by no means exclusively products of the modern age, they are particularly intense in contemporaneous circumstances. Coupled with the growing faith that science can explain all, the result is a sense of human independence whereas “religious existence is significantly interwoven with a sense of dependence.” The “amenities afforded by affluence, as well as the self-image buttressed by it, may often reduce one’s reliance upon divine sustenance.”

What is to be done? Rabbi Lichtenstein offers a range of suggestions how these adverse effects might be ameliorated. No surprise here, he suggests neither repudiating science nor humanism entirely; science for obvious reasons, and humanism because “the exercise of human choice is the linchpin of the entire *halakhic* universe.” He rejects as well the suggestion that in light of contemporary circumstances it would be best to stress observance over belief or adopt ascetic approaches. In the end we have little choice:

We shall persist in cultivating [human] moral sensibility, but with the profound sense that where we encounter difficult terrain, after we have walked the extra mile, we humbly but thoroughly submit to divine norm and wisdom. That is the gist of the crucial test of the *akedah*, the conjunction of responsive *hineni* with tremulous fear and trembling. [Footnotes omitted.]

Moreover, he notes:

[W]e shall not denigrate *yirah* in the interest of spiritual ease and psychological comfort. Rather, we shall live and act out of the profound sense that fear and joy, tremor and love, are, vis-à-vis the Ribbono Shel Olam, intertwined and reciprocally fructifying. This sense was

one of the linchpins of the Rav's religious thought and experience...

Of course, Rabbi Lichtenstein also emphasizes the importance of Talmud Torah to cultivating *yirah*.

Rabbi Shalom Carmy's characteristically rich paper similarly defies easy summary. Deftly weaving into a coherent whole, insights from figures as distinct as Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner, Rabbi Kook, the Rav and various *ba'alei musar*, Rabbi Carmy attends to the central question: if humans dislike fear – and they do – and desire to avoid it – and they do – “why would [people] want to fear God at all?” The proper question is not why “they no longer fear God as much.” Cataloging the various categories of fear-temporal fears: fear of being abandoned by God; fear of punishment (including hell), and fear of God's grandeur, Rabbi Carmy assesses each of these on their respective religious merits and in light of our contemporary situation. He concludes:

[T]he desire to flee from God's presence, however absurd, is part of our experience. This is obviously true where we feel guilt and moral shame.... It is no less true when we are overwhelmed by an encounter that is too much for us, even in the aesthetic realm. And as we have seen, the experience of God's grandeur intrinsically communicates a sense of our unworthiness and finitude...[as does the] realization that flight is impossible. The inability to escape God is an essential component of the experience of fear, whether it arises primarily from moral ontological inadequacy. The awareness that God is with us, no matter how far we fly, is often a source of overwhelming comfort...Sometimes it gives comfort even at times when God's presence and solicitude is the occasion of reproach, as in Jonah 2....

[T]he proper response in the face of the *mysterium tremendum* is humility. The proud human being is to lower himself, and the physical expression of this is hiding in the cleft of a rock, making oneself less prominent,

taking up less space. “The reward of humility is the fear of God” [Proverbs 22:4]. “Humility leads to fear of God.”

[*Avoda Zara* 20b]

Rabbi Kenneth Auman, a rabbi occupying a large and important pulpit, addresses as a starting point the problem of “flipping out,” of children who return from a year (or more) of study in Israel “more religious” than their parents. For our purposes Rabbi Auman uses a definition of *yirat shamayim* more limited – and far more practically oriented – than the other presenters. He defines it as a “motivated feeling, a genuine desire to create a relationship with God through the strict discipline of, and the joy and satisfaction in, *shimrat hamitzvot*.”

That definition allows one to bypass the didactic problem: “if *yirat shamayim* is indeed primarily a feeling...that becomes part of one’s character, it cannot be ‘taught’ anymore than happiness can be taught to a melancholy person.” Instead, he suggests:

There are two somewhat contradictory strategies that ought to be employed when the religious educator inevitably realizes that despite his or her best efforts, he is seeing very few results. One strategy is to attempt methods of communication other than the standard teaching to which he is accustomed. The biblical text, “so that you will learn to fear God your Lord as the days,” can be instructive. We noted that while most of the commentators avoided understanding the word *tilmad*, as learning, they did take it to mean effecting a positive change in attitude – either by becoming habituated to *yirat shamayim* or by being inspired to it. Both habituation and inspiration can be important tools in the rabbi’s or educator’s communication arsenal.

Surveying other methods of habituation – including the use of (or reluctance to use) role models, Rabbi Auman cautions that while habituation is more important than education:

Nevertheless, education does indeed play a role in the overall process, as a precursor to the inspiration or habituation.... We might say that while education is not necessarily the method of choice for imbuing *yirat shamayim*, it is indeed a prerequisite for the process.

Here, too, Torah study plays a role:

Our rabbis teach...the ignorant cannot be truly pious or righteous, which in our context means that one must possess a minimal amount of knowledge as to what is required Jewish behavior before being motivated to behave Jewishly. All the motivation in the world cannot be defined as *yirat shamayim* if that motivation does not lead one along the path of Torah and *Mitzvot*.

At the end of the volume there are dueling papers by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik and myself debating whether the government has a role to play in fostering *yirat shamayim*. (He thinks it does; I disagree.) Rabbi Soloveichik's article is particularly noteworthy for its close and careful reading of his great uncle's essay, "Confrontation." Aside from its other considerable merits, his paper is an important although controversial exposition of that seminal paper. What divides us, I think, aside from different ideas about the proper role of government, is whether in an age of secularism and consumerism an official notation of the importance of God is essential or a distraction. Our disagreement is less about the problems we face than about possible solutions and their costs.

Dr. Mark Gottlieb, an educator, presents a paper which outlines one possible way of teaching about *yirat shamayim*. Dr. Gottlieb calls for a refocusing of the curriculum in boys' yeshivot with the aim of providing a comprehensive world view rooted in *yirat shamayim*. Implicit in Dr. Gottlieb's article is a call for some modification of the almost exclusive focus on Talmud in the curriculum. While that call will no doubt provoke debate, it is worth noting that both he and my wife, Marcy Stern, who presented a paper at the

Forum (not reproduced here for a variety of reasons not related to the merits), spoke at the Forum about teaching *yirat shamayim* at a girls' high school, and report a thirst by students to address the topic. One hopes educators take note.

* * *

The discerning reader will by now detect both commonalities and dissonances in the various approaches to *yirat shamayim* laid out in this volume, chief among them, varied assessments of the viability of religious humanism. I am certain though, that all of those who participated in the publication of this volume share the common goal of increasing *yirat shamayim*, and that the hope that the liturgy for *motzei Shabbat* – that during the coming week, we “should be cleaved to the fear of God” – will be fulfilled for each of us as individuals, for us as a community, and, indeed, for all mankind.

NOTES

1. *Shir-ha-Shirim* 1:6.
2. R' T.D. Kanotopsky, *Rejoice In Your Festivals*, ed. D.A. Zomick (2007), pp. 79–81. See also, *ibid.*, pp. 70–73.
3. See J.J. Schachter, On the “Morality and the Patriarchs: Must Biblical Heroes Be Perfect?” in Z. Grumet, ed., *Jewish Education In Transition: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Jewish Education* (2006) for a discussion of Rabbi Aharon Kotler.
4. See R' Tzvi Tau, *Tzadik B' Emunatu Yichye* (2004); R' H. Angel, “Torat Hashem Temimah: The Contributions of R' Yoel bin Num to Religious *Tanakh* Study,” *Tradition* 40, 3 (2007), p.5.

1

Yirat Shamayim in Jewish Thought

Warren Zev Harvey

Yirat shamayim (fear of God, fear of Heaven, reverence for God, or piety) is a basic moral term in Rabbinic literature, appearing dozens of times in the Talmud, Midrash, and liturgy. In medieval and modern Jewish culture, it is the favored Hebrew word for “piety.” The term is composed of *yirah* (fear, awe) and *shamayim* (heaven). As in other Rabbinic terms (e.g., *malkhut shamayim*, the kingdom of God; *le-shem shamayim*, for the sake of God), the word *shamayim* is a metonym for “God.”¹

In my following remarks, I shall try to elucidate the term *yirat shamayim* by examining its use in some major classical contexts. I shall be concerned only with the term *yirat shamayim*, which may or may not be sometimes synonymous with *yirah* (fear, awe), *yirat Elokim* (fear of God), *yirat heit* (fear of sin), or similar terms or phrases. These other expressions shall be discussed only when it seems that they throw light on the meaning of *yirat shamayim*. In particular, I

shall emphasize that *yirat shamayim* is not synonymous with *oved mi-yirah* (one who serves God out of fear of punishment).

EXCEPT THE FEAR OF HEAVEN

The most famous Rabbinic discussion of *yirat shamayim* appears with variations in three different places in the Babylonian Talmud: *Berakhot* 33b, *Megillah* 25a, and *Niddah* 16b. The version in *Berakhot* reads as follows:

Rabbi Hanina [bar Hama] said: Everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven [*yirat shamayim*], as it is said: “And now, O Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear?” [Deuteronomy 10:12].

Is then the fear of Heaven a small thing?! Did not Rabbi Hanina say in the name of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai: God has in his storehouse nothing but the treasure of the fear of Heaven [*yirat shamayim*], as it is said: “The fear of the Lord is His treasure” [Isaiah 33:6]. Yes, for Moses it was a small thing. For as Rabbi Hanina said: It is like a person who is asked for a big vessel and he has it, it seems to him to be small; if asked for a small vessel and he does not have it, it seems to him to be big.

The text teaches that everything is determined, except for *yirat shamayim*. What does this mean? What is the *everything* that is determined, and what is the *yirat shamayim* that is not? It arguably means that there is strict causality in the world and all our actions are determined, but our consciousness is free, that is, we are free to assume a pious or impious *attitude*. In other words, we are not free to act, but are free to think, to feel, to believe.² It strikes me that Rabbi Hanina’s dictum should perhaps be understood against the background of Stoicism. The Stoics taught that all is determined except *ataraxia* or *autarkia*, and these traits are attained primarily by freeing oneself from *fear of the gods*. Rabbi Hanina may be responding to the Stoics: determinism is overcome not by rejecting the fear of Heaven, but by embracing it.³

This reading of Rabbi Hanina's dictum, according to which it refers to one's consciousness not actions, is plausible and might well reflect his original intent, but it is flatly contradicted by the text in *Niddah*:

Rabbi Hanina bar Pappa expounded: The angel in charge of pregnancy is named "Laylah." He takes a drop of semen and places it before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: "Lord of the Universe, what shall be with this drop? Mighty or weak, wise or stupid, rich or poor?" But he does not say "wicked" or "righteous," in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Hanina [bar Hama]. For Rabbi Hanina said: Everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven, as it is said: "And now, O Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear?" [Deuteronomy 10:12]⁴

Rabbi Hanina's dictum, "Everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of heaven," has generally been interpreted in the light of the text in *Niddah*.

Thus, Rabbi Saadia Gaon, in discussing freedom of action in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, iv, 4, writes that God does not coerce human beings "either to obey or disobey Him," and as a proof-text he cites: "Everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of heaven." According to Saadia, therefore, *yirat shamayim* is the virtue of obedience (Arabic: *al-tā'ah*) to God and reflects free choice.⁵

Rashi, in his Commentary on *Berakhot* 33b, interprets *yirat shamayim* explicitly in the light of *Niddah* 16b: "*Everything is in the hands of Heaven*. Everything that happens to a human being is in the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He. For example, whether one will be tall, short, poor, rich, wise, foolish, white, or black, is all in the hands of Heaven. However, whether one will be righteous or wicked is not in the hands of Heaven. This He placed in the hands of the human being, and he set before him two paths, that he might choose for himself the fear of Heaven [*yirat shamayim*]."⁶ The physical conditions of one's life are not in one's control, but one's moral behavior is in one's control, and righteousness is called *yirat shamayim*.

Maimonides is in general agreement with Saadia and Rashi with regard to Rabbi Hanina's dictum. In his *Eight Chapters*, chapter 8 (cf. chapter 2), he teaches, like Saadia, that *yirat shamayim* is the virtue of obedience (*al-tā'ah*) to God. This power to obey God, Maimonides explains, is in the appetitive part of the soul and thus voluntary. He indicates that this power is, in effect, the power to choose the moral virtues. He concludes: "By saying *everything* [is in the hands of Heaven], the [Rabbis] mean the natural matters about which a human being has no choice, such as one's being tall or short, or a rainfall or a drought, or the air being putrid or healthy – and so too with regard to everything in the world, except for the motion and the rest of man."⁷ Everything is determined, except for human action; and the virtue of acting in obedience to God – regardless of what nature holds in store for us – is *yirat shamayim*.

The dictum of Rabbi Hanina is discussed a second time by Maimonides in an epistle to Rabbi Obadiah the Proselyte (*Responsa*, ed. J. Blau, no. 436). Following Rabbenu Bahya ibn Pakuda (*Duties of the Heart*, iv, 4), Maimonides explains to Obadiah that *all* actions of a human being involve obeying or transgressing some commandment. Now, since *yirat shamayim* is according to Rabbi Hanina voluntary, that is, since we have free choice to obey or disobey God, it thus follows that "all the actions of a human being are in the province of *yirat shamayim*." *Yirat shamayim* is thus not confined to the synagogue, the kitchen, or the Sabbaths and holidays: every choice of action that confronts us is a test of our *yirat shamayim*.

Rabbi Nahman Krochmal, in his *Guide of the Perplexed of Our Time*, gate 10, declared that Maimonides' interpretation of Rabbi Hanina's dictum was "correct" (*ha-be'ur ha-nakhon*) and that indeed, according to the Rabbis, "all the actions of a human being that are within his choice are included in *yirat shamayim*."⁸ Hermann Cohen, similarly convinced by Maimonides' interpretation of Rabbi Hanina's dictum, went one step further and concluded in his *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, chapter 17, that the Talmud "expressly exempts" individual human freedom from God's omnipotence.⁹ Yeshayahu Leibowitz was also profoundly influenced by Maimonides' comments on Rabbi Hanina's dictum, and summed

them up in simple terms: a human being has no control over “the laws of nature” but does have control “over himself.”¹⁰

Rabbi Hanina’s prooftext for his dictum is Moses’ rhetorical question at Deuteronomy 10:12. “And now, O Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear?” The continuation of this text explains the meaning of *yirat shamayim*: “to walk in all [God’s] ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul; to keep for thy good the commandments of the Lord and His statutes, which I command thee this day.” These words may be understood to corroborate the general approach of Saadia, Rashi, and Maimonides: *yirat shamayim* is the virtue of choosing to act in obedience to God.

At Deuteronomy 10:12, Moses thus asks in effect: What does God require of thee, O Israel, but only *yirat shamayim*? The gemara then wonders: “Is *yirat shamayim* a small thing?!” How could Moses say that God requires “only” *yirat shamayim*, as if *yirat shamayim* were something easy or “a small thing?” Is not *yirat shamayim* God’s unique treasure, as it is written: “The fear of the Lord is His treasure” [Isaiah 33:6]? The answer to this riddle is clear: for Moses, the servant of God, it is “a small thing,” but for everyone else it is a “big thing.”

Rabbi Hanina’s dictum may now be summed up. “Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except *yirat shamayim*.” God predetermines everything except for *yirat shamayim*. It is the power of human beings to act in obedience to God, i.e., to act morally. *Yirat shamayim* is a “big thing” and God’s unique treasure.

YIRAT SHAMAYIM AS THE HUMAN ESSENCE AND PURPOSE

The idea that *yirat shamayim* is a “big thing” and God’s unique treasure is reinforced by several other sources. A medley of these sources is found at *Shabbat* 31b. It is recorded there, for example:

Rabbah bar Rav Huna said: Anyone who has learning [*torah*] but not the fear of Heaven [*yirat shamayim*] is like a treasurer who is given the inner keys but not the outer keys. How will he enter?

Rabbi Jannai exclaimed: A pity on him who has no courtyard but makes a gate for his courtyard!

Rabbi Judah said: The Holy One, blessed be He, created His world only that men should fear Him, as it is said: “and God hath done it that men should fear before Him” [Ecclesiastes 3:14]....

Rabbi Johanan said in the name of Rabbi Eleazar: The Holy One, blessed be He, has nothing in His world but the fear of Heaven, as it is said: “And now, O Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear?” [Deuteronomy 10:12] It is also written: “And unto man he said, behold [*hen*], the fear of the Lord is wisdom” [Job 28:28], and in the Greek language “*hen*” means one.

According to Rabbah bar Rav Huna’s metaphor, *yirat shamayim* is a necessary condition for a human being’s greatest virtue: learning. However, according to Rabbi Jannai’s metaphor, *yirat shamayim* is itself a human being’s greatest virtue.¹¹ It is the end, not a means to the end. Rabbi Judah goes further: *yirat shamayim* is not only the purpose of human beings, it is the purpose of the entire world; God created the world for the sake of *yirat shamayim*. Nothing is more important than *yirat shamayim*! This is also the view of Rabbi Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, has nothing else in His world but *yirat shamayim*. *Yirat shamayim* is number one – unique, primary, first of all things.

On the basis of Deuteronomy 10:12, Rabbenu Jonah ben Abraham of Girona (*Gates of Repentance*, III, 7) taught that “the fear of God is the foundation of the commandments” (*yesod ha-mitzvot*). Citing *Shabbat* 31b together with Rabbenu Jonah’s teaching, Rabbenu Nissim ben Reuben of Girona concluded that “the fear of God is the intention of the Creation of the world and the foundation of the Torah” (*Derashot Ha-Ran*, homily 7).¹²

That *yirat shamayim* is the chief human virtue is learned also from Ecclesiastes 12:13. Thus we read in *Berakhot* 6b (cf. Yerushalmi *Berakhot* 2:8):

Rabbi Helbo said in the name of Rav Huna: Every man in whom there is the fear of God [*yirat shamayim*], his words [of prayer] are heard, as it is said: “The end of the matter, all having been heard, fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole man.” [Ecclesiastes 12:13]

What means “for this is the whole man?”

Rabbi Eleazar says: The Holy One, blessed be He, says: “The whole world was created only for his sake.”

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana says: This one is equal to the whole world.

Rabbi Simeon ben Azzai says and some say Rabbi Simeon ben Zoma says: The whole world was created only to attend to this one.

Rabbi Helbo interprets “all having been heard, fear God,” as teaching that the prayers of the person who fears God, i.e., who has *yirat shamayim*, are “heard.” The other Sages hyperbolically explain in what sense the person who has *yirat shamayim* is called “the whole man.” The upshot of all the views is one and the same: it is *yirat shamayim* that gives value to human life, and the individual who fears God is the purpose of creation.

Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, in his Commentary on Ecclesiastes 12:13 (second interpretation), explains “this is the whole man” as follows: “the fear of the glorious and awesome God” is *ikkar kol ha-adam*, the essence of a human being. Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, the Maharal of Prague, in his *Netivot Olam* (Yirat Ha-Shem, ch. 6) interprets Ecclesiastes 12:13 as meaning that *yirat shamayim* is the *takhlit* or purpose of the human being. Combining Ibn Ezra and the Maharal, Moses Mendelssohn, in the *Be’ur* on Ecclesiastes, *ad loc.*, explains that the fear of God and the observance of his commandments are *ikkar ve-takhlit ha-adam*, the essence and purpose of a human being. The essence and purpose of being a human being (*kol ha-adam*) is *yirat shamayim*.

RABBI ELHANAN WASSERMAN
ON ECCLESIASTES 12:13

Doubtless the most radical interpretation of Ecclesiastes 12:13 is that of Rabbi Elhanan Bunim Wasserman, written about a decade before he was murdered by the Nazis in Kovno in July 1941. In a homily entitled *Yirat Shamayim*, he expounded the verse as follows:

“The end of the matter, all having been heard, fear God, and keep His commandments, *for this is the whole man*” [Ecclesiastes 12:13]. The intention in this is that it should not enter your mind to say that the fear of God is a virtue in a human being and whoever does not have the fear of God is a human being but lacks a necessary virtue. The text comes to tell us that this is not so. For one who does not have *yirat shamayim* is not a human being at all, but an animal, *for this is the whole man* [i.e., *yirat shamayim* is the whole man] and without it one does not have the rank of a man....

[E]ach human being is a microcosm containing within him the characteristics of all creatures, higher and lower. Thus, the faculties of all the vicious animals in the world are present in the human being. And you have no vicious animal more terrible than this one! Moreover, does not the human being possess instruments of destruction that no other beast in the world possesses – namely, thought and speech.

If a beast of prey must be bound with an iron chain, how many chains are needed to stop a terrible beast like man? Now, when God created man, he certainly created the chain to bind him so that he not destroy the world. And what is this chain? It is the fear of God, which alone has the power to stop a man from being like a beast of prey. Other than it, no ruse in the world is capable of restraining a human being from wreaking harm. Even if one is a sage and philosopher like Aristotle, his wisdom will not protect him when his passion attacks him. Thus

Abraham said to Abimelech, “*only* the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife’s sake” [Genesis 20:11]. The implication of “only” is that with the exception of the fear of God they did not lack any of the intellectual or moral virtues, but all this is of no avail if the fear of God is not among them.¹³

Rabbi Wasserman goes beyond Ibn Ezra, the Maharal, and Mendelssohn in his interpretation of “this is the whole man.” *Yirat shamayim* is not only the essence and purpose of the human being, but without it *one is not a human being at all*. This definition of humanity is explicitly anti-rationalist. What defines a human being is not the *logos* (thought and speech), but *yirat shamayim*. No one, not even a philosopher like Aristotle who has achieved great wisdom, is able to chain his bestial passions, unless he possesses *yirat shamayim*. It is *yirat shamayim* alone that separates the human being from the beast. Moreover, without *yirat shamayim*, man is not merely a beast, but the most terrible beast on earth.

IS THERE A VIRTUE GREATER THAN YIRAT SHAMAYIM?

It would seem, therefore, that according to our Rabbis there is no virtue greater than *yirat shamayim*. This impression is certainly fortified by the powerful words of Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman. What could be greater than *yirat shamayim*? It is the essence and purpose of a human being! It is *kol ha-adam*! There is, however, one surprising dictum in the Talmud that indicates that there is something greater than *yirat shamayim*. The dictum is found in the following passage in *Berakhot* 6b:

Rabbi Hiyya bar Ami said in the name of Ulla: Greater is one who enjoys one’s labor than one who fears Heaven [*yerei shamayim*]. With regard to the fearer of Heaven it is written, “Happy is the man that feareth the Lord” [Psalms 112:1]. However, with regard to one who enjoys one’s labor it is written, “When thou eatest the labour of thy hands,

happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee” [ibid. 128:2]. *Happy shalt thou be* – in this world. *And it shall be well with thee* – in the world to come. Now with regard to the fearer of Heaven, “and it shall be well with thee” is *not* written.

If *yirat shamayim* is understood – following Saadia, Rashi, Maimonides, and others – as the virtue of obedience to God or as righteousness, then it is difficult indeed to imagine how the manual laborer can be greater than the *yerei shamayim*. Moreover, isn’t the manual laborer also supposed to be a *yerei shamayim*? In addition, it is undeniably odd that *yirat shamayim* should not gain one a place in the world to come, but manual labor should do so.

One way to understand the curious dictum is to presume that “*yirat shamayim*” is being used in what might have been its original meaning in the dictum at *Berakhot* 33b and *Megillah* 25a, namely, it designates a consciousness or an attitude, not a deed or an act. If so, then the dictum may be an affirmation of the *vita activa* over the *vita contemplativa*, or *maaseh* over *talmud*. A second way to understand the curious dictum is to presume that “the labor of one’s hands” refers to *talmud torah* (cf. *Megillah* 6b: *yagata u-matzata taamin*). If so, then the dictum may be an affirmation of learning over piety, or *talmud* over *maaseh*. In any case, the dictum “Greater is one who enjoys one’s labor than one who fears Heaven” makes sense only if we restrict the meaning of “*yirat shamayim*” or expand the meaning of “labor.”¹⁴

JOB AND TWO KINDS OF YIRAT SHAMAYIM

Rashi makes a bold comment about *yirat shamayim* in his Commentary on Job. At Job 4:6, Eliphaz the Temanite says to Job: “Is not thy fear thy foolishness?” (*ha-lo yiratkhā kislātekha*). Rashi comments:

Is not thy fear thy foolishness? Now your end proves your beginning. For your fear [*yiratkhā*], by means of which you were God-fearing [*yerei shamayim*; cf. Job 1:2, 8–9] is

your foolishness [*kislatekha*]. It is due to foolishness, not to a perfect knowledge [*lo mi-daat shelemah*]. Similarly, “thy hope and the integrity of thy ways” [ibid. 4:6] – it’s all foolishness!

Rashi is in effect asserting here that there are two kinds of *yirat shamayim*. There is a *yirat shamayim* based on perfect knowledge, and there is a *yirat shamayim* based on foolishness. Clearly the first kind of *yirat shamayim* is the true one, while the second is a flawed imitation. Two individuals may in general display the same external behavior, observe the same commandments, and follow the same customs, but one is a true *yerei shamayim*, whose actions are based on “perfect knowledge,” and the other a faulty imitation whose actions are based on foolishness. Their actions will differ only in extreme times. Rashi’s paraphrase of Eliphaz’s accusation is controversial, and many authorities, including the Tosafists and the Jewish Publication Society translation, avoid the controversy by translating: “Is not thy fear thy *confidence*,” i.e., does not your *yirat shamayim* give you confidence and strength?¹⁵

Maimonides’ interpretation of the story of Job in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, III, 22–23, is precisely in line with Rashi’s comment on “Is not thy fear thy foolishness?” He explains that Job originally knew God “only through the traditional stories and not by way of [intellectual] speculation.” In his ignorance, “Job had imagined that the things thought to be happiness, such as health, wealth, and children, are the ultimate goal.” However, God appears to Job out of the whirlwind, and shows him the great Leviathan and other creatures. He teaches him that “our intellects do not reach the point of apprehending how these natural things” are brought into being, and Job thereby attains true knowledge.¹⁶ Maimonides’ interpretation of Job should be read in the light of his aforementioned discussion in the *Eight Chapters*, chapter 8. True *yirat shamayim* is not dependent on natural things, which are not determined by human choice. Job’s original *yirat shamayim* was based on ignorance and imagination. His final *yirat shamayim* was based on knowledge.

MOSES AND JETHRO ON YIRAT SHAMAYIM

Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, like Rashi before him and Maimonides after him, insists that *yirat shamayim* presupposes wisdom and knowledge. He expresses this idea in his Commentary on Exodus 18:18–25 (long version). The biblical text tells of Jethro's advice to Moses:

And Moses' father-in-law said unto him: "The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away... Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel... And thou shalt provide out of all the people men of valor, fearers of God [*yirei Elohim*], men of truth, hating unjust gain; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens... So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law... And Moses chose men of valor out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

Ibn Ezra makes here two comments that concern the relationship of *yirat shamayim* to wisdom and knowledge:

And thou shalt provide... [Jethro] said "fearers of God," who have no fear of human beings, but only of God alone. Instead of [saying "fearers of God"], Moses said: "wise and understanding men" [see Deuteronomy 1:13]. For it is impossible to be properly a fearer of Heaven [*yerei shamayim ka-ra'uy*] unless one is wise...

And Moses chose men of valor... He did not mention "fearers of God," for [God] alone knows the heart of human beings. However, Moses said that he chose for us *wise* men [ibid.], for this he could know. Nonetheless, there may be a wise man who is not a fearer of Heaven [*yerei shamayim*].

Ibn Ezra observes that Moses deviated significantly from the lan-

guage of his father-in-law, Jethro. Whereas Jethro had advised him to choose as judges individuals who are *fearers of God*, Moses chose “*wise and understanding men*” and omitted the phrase “fearers of God.” Ibn Ezra explains that Moses did not presume to know who is truly a *yerei shamayim*, since only God knows this, but he could know who was wise and understanding. Ibn Ezra adds, however, that Moses’ substitution of “wise and understanding men” for “fearers of God” was problematic inasmuch as it involved a compromise; for while all *yerei shamayim* are wise, not all wise individuals are *yerei shamayim*. From Ibn Ezra’s comments, it is clear that *yirat shamayim* is a disposition of the soul that is not discerned by observers. Only God knows for certain who is a true *yerei shamayim* and who is an impostor. Human beings, who know not the hearts and minds of other human beings, cannot know this, and Moses did not presume to know it. It also emerges from Ibn Ezra’s comments that wisdom is a necessary but not sufficient condition of *yirat shamayim*.

“AND THOU SHALT FEAR THY GOD”

The biblical phrase “and thou shalt fear thy God” appears five times in Leviticus. Its meaning is relevant to understanding the Rabbinic concept of *yirat shamayim*. Here are the five instances:

- (1) “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, *but thou shalt fear thy God*: I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:14)
- (2) “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, *and thou shalt fear thy God*: I am the Lord.” (ibid. 19:32)
- (3) “And ye shall not wrong one another, *and thou shalt fear thy God*, for I am the Lord thy God.” (ibid. 25:17)
- (4) “Take thou no interest or increase from [the stranger], *and thou shalt fear thy God*, that thy brother may live with thee.” (ibid. 25:36)
- (5) “Thou shalt not rule over [thy bondman] with rigor, *and thou shalt fear thy God*.” (ibid. 25:43)

In *Bava Metzia* 58b, Rabbi Judah explains that all these cases are instances of “something relegated to the heart” (*davar ha-masur la-lev*), that is, something that cannot be known by observers. For example, one must not pretend to be interested in buying something one does not have the money to buy (a violation of Leviticus 25:17). Again, one must not advise someone to sell his good field and buy a jackass, and then purchase his field as soon as he has sold it (a violation of Leviticus 19:14).¹⁷

The biblical phrase “and thou shalt fear thy God” is used, thus, in situations in which one is able to do something unethical without it being known to other human beings. The one who pretended interest in buying what he had no money to buy can claim that at the time he thought he had the money; and the one who gave the bad advice about the field and the jackass can claim that at the time he thought it was good advice. In these situations, the unethical deed is not knowable to other human beings, but is known only to God, who knows all thoughts. In such cases where the fear of human beings cannot prevent one from doing the unethical deed, only the fear of God can do so. “The fear of God” (“and thou shalt fear thy God”) in these Levitical texts is thus a fundamental ethical principle, and seems to be a conceptual forerunner of the Rabbinic concept of *yirat shamayim*. One Rabbinic text that echoes this ethical principle is found in *Tanna de-bei Eliyahu*, 23 (19) and recited daily in the morning prayers prior to *Pesukei de-Zimrah*: “Let a person always be a fearer of God [*yerei shamayim*] in secret, assent to the truth, and speak the truth in his heart.”

NEHAMA LEIBOWITZ ON FEAR OF GOD AS A UNIVERSAL VALUE

In her renowned discussion of “The Midwives” (Exodus 1:15–17), Nehama Leibowitz argued convincingly that “the fear of God” is in the Bible a universal ethical principle. Her discussion should be read together with Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman’s homily on Ecclesiastes 12:13. She pointed to four texts in which the fear of God is used in this way:

- (1) "And Abraham said [to Abimelech]: Because I thought, only *the fear of God* is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife's sake." (Genesis 20:11)
- (2) "And Joseph said unto them...This do and live, for *I fear God*." (ibid. 42:18)
- (3) "And the king of Egypt spoke to the midwives of the Hebrews... and he said: when ye do the office of the midwife...ye shall look upon the birth stool, if it be a son, then ye shall kill him... But the midwives *feared God*, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded." (Exodus 1:15–17)
- (4) "Remember what Amalek did unto thee...how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all that were enfeebled in the rear, when thou wast faint and weary, and *he feared not God*." (Deuteronomy 25:17–18)

Leibowitz notes that in all four cases the fear of God serves as a regulatory ethical principle between individuals of different nations, and in particular between the ruling nationals and the minorities: "the fear of God is expressed with respect to a member of *another nation*, a member of a minority, for the relationship toward the foreigner, toward the powerless and the unprotected is the criterion of whether the fear of God is in one's heart or not."¹⁸ The fear of God is thus considered by the Bible to be a universal ethical value. This usage of the "fear of God," like the usage of the phrase "and thou shalt fear thy God," evidently had an influence on the Rabbinic concept of *yirat shamayim*.¹⁹

YIRAT SHAMAYIM AND LOVE OF GOD

A highly suggestive use of the term *yirat shamayim* is found in Rashi's commentary on Song of Songs 1:1. Rashi cites the dictum of Rabbi Akiba, "All the Writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies [Mishnah, *Yadaim* 3:5], and explains: "for it is entirely *yirat shamayim* and the acceptance of the yoke of His kingdom." Rashi seems to mean that since the Song of Songs is entirely about the love of God, it is entirely about *yirat shamayim*. The idea that there

is an essential connection between the love of God and the fear of God is found often in medieval literature, although the term *yirat shamayim* is not always used.

In his classic discussion of the love of God in his *Duties of the Heart*, gate 10 (The Gate of Love), Rabbenu Bahya ibn Paquda asserts that the fear of God is the “rung” or “step” closest to the love of God (gate 10, introduction), and that it is a “sign” of that love (ibid., chap. 6). Rabbi Isaac ben Joseph of Corbeil (*Sefer Mitzvot Katan*, commandment 4) insisted that “love and fear can exist in the same place,” and cited Abraham as proof. Abraham is described by God as “Abraham who loves Me” (Isaiah 41:8) and also as “God-fearing” (Genesis 22:12).²⁰

RABBI KOOK ON YIRAT SHAMAYIM, KNOWLEDGE, AND MORALITY

The dual propositions that *yirat shamayim* must be associated with knowledge and with morality were affirmed forcefully in modern times by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Ha-Kohen Kook. In his *Orot ha-Kodesh*, III, *rosh davar*, he taught that “*yirat shamayim* is everything, all life and all goodness” and can raise one to “the heights of the heavens,” but he warned that when it gets distorted into *yirat hamahashavah* (“the fear of thought”) it leads one into the “mire of ignorance” which “takes away the light of one’s soul, makes one’s power fail, and one’s spirit gross.” He also warned: “*yirat shamayim* must not push aside the natural morality of a human being;” and indeed the “sign of pure *yirat shamayim*” is precisely the enhancement of our natural morality.²¹

Like Rashi on Job 4:6, Rabbi Kook contrasted *yirat shamayim* based on knowledge with *yirat shamayim* not based on it. In his *Arpelei Tohar*, he writes: “a human being becomes sluggish and idle by reason of *yirat shamayim* that lacks knowledge [*she-ein bah de’ah*].”²²

HESCHEL ON YIRAT SHAMAYIM AS A MODE OF LIVING

One major contemporary Jewish philosopher who dedicated an entire essay to *yirat shamayim* was Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. It

was one of the first pieces he wrote, after immigrating to the United States in 1940. The essay was written in Hebrew and entitled simply “*Yirat Shamayim*.”²³ He also published an English adaptation, entitled “An Analysis of Piety.”²⁴

At the outset of his Hebrew essay, Heschel noted that the term *yirat shamayim*, as commonly understood among Jews, does *not* refer to the emotion of terror or fear, but is a general term designating “the character traits of the religious individual and his relationship to God.”²⁵ Later in the essay, he writes: “*yirat shamayim* is a mode of living, the orientation of the human being toward the holy.”²⁶ He also distinguishes between *yirat shamayim* and faith: while faith is “a way of thinking” (*derekh mahashavah*), *yirat shamayim* is “an attribute of life” (*middat hayyim*).²⁷ In accordance with this understanding of *yirat shamayim*, Heschel translated the term in his English essay as “piety.”

In his *God in Search of Man*, however, Heschel translated *yirat shamayim* as “the awe of Heaven.” He writes there that *yirat shamayim* is “almost equivalent” to the word “religion;” for “in biblical language the religious man is not called ‘believer,’ as he is for example in Islam (*mu'min*), but *yerei Ha-Shem*.”²⁸

RABBI SOLOVEITCHIK ON YIRAT SHAMAYIM VS. PAHAD

In an important homily, originally delivered in Yiddish, Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik distinguished sharply between *yirat shamayim* and *pahad*. The “fear of Heaven” (*yirat shamayim*), he insisted, is *not* at all “fear” (*pahad*). “Fear and *yirah*,” he argued, “are two different emotional phenomena, which are almost contradictory. Where there is fear there can be no *yirah*, and vice versa.”²⁹ Judaism, continued Rabbi Soloveitchik, requires *yirat shamayim*, but not fear. The Bible never commands us to have *pahad* for God, but only *yirah* (e.g., Exodus 20:17; Leviticus 25:17; Deuteronomy 10:20). The Talmud inculcates the virtue of *yirat shamayim*, not *pahad shamayim*. While Judaism does not advocate *pahad*, “the whole Torah in its entirety is founded on the foundation of *yirah*.”³⁰

The fundamental difference, according to Rabbi Soloveitchik,

between *yirah* and *pahad* is that the former is rational and the latter irrational. *Yirah* is based on “wisdom and intellect” (*hokhmah ve-sekhel*), while *pahad* is what psychologists call “phobia.” In *pahad*, a person is helpless. In *yirah*, a person is able to take measures, to resolve difficulties, to defend oneself against dangers. *Yirah* is related to *ra'oh* (to see): “if a person has eyes in his head and sees correctly the processes of historical development in the world, and the laws regulating the universe, and conducts himself with intelligence and carefulness in the paths of life – he will be full of *yirah*.”³¹ *Yirat shamayim*, explains Rabbi Soloveitchik is closer to love than to fear:

Yirah and love are intertwined. It is said, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God” [Deuteronomy 6:5]. And it is said, “And thou shalt have *yirah* for thy God” [Leviticus 25:17]. One may very well love a human being, and also have *yirah* for him. There is no contradiction whatsoever in this. It is an affirmative commandment to have *yirah* for one’s father and mother: “Ye shall have *yirah*, every man for his mother and for his father” [Leviticus 19:3]. Certainly the mother and father do not hate their son or daughter. When one says *yirah*, one does not at all intend to indicate that there is a worry that the person who is the object of the *yirah* will cause one harm or damage... *Yirah* is connected with honor. “Honor thy father and thy mother” [Exodus 20:12] is apposite to “Ye shall have *yirah*, every man for his mother and his father.” *Yirah* and honor; as opposed to this, *pahad* is intertwined with – and connected with – hate and detestation.³²

Rabbi Soloveitchik’s analysis is similar to those of Saadia, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, and others, in that he emphasizes that true *yirat shamayim* is based on wisdom and knowledge. It is similar to Heschel’s analysis in that he emphasizes that *yirat shamayim* is not a species of fear. In addition, it develops the medieval theme that *yirat shamayim* is associated with the love of God. In citing

Leviticus 25:17, Rabbi Soloveitchik connects *yirat shamayim* also to the metaphysical passion of the awe of God (*yirah*) as expounded, for example, by Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhhot Yesodei ha-Torah 2:2; 4:19).³³ *Yirat shamayim* is thus related to the knowledge, love, and awe of God.

LEVINAS ON YIRAT SHAMAYIM AS FREE FEAR

There is a significant philosophic discussion of *yirat shamayim* in Emmanuel Levinas' lecture *talmudique* on *Berakhot* 33b, entitled "Of Religious Language and the Fear of God."³⁴ Much like Rabbis Heschel and Soloveitchik, Levinas contends that the *yirah* in *yirat shamayim* does not refer to fear of any coercive force. It is not fear of punishment. No threat is involved. Neither is seduction. It is in his phrase "a free fear" (*crainte libre*), not "in the hands of Heaven." He explains that it is in effect the sobering awareness of one's infinite ethical obligations to other human beings, and in this awareness God is revealed. The "sense of terror" in the presence of the suffering of the human Other thus bears witness to the divine Other. The fear of God is manifested in the fear for the other human being – the fear lest he or she be harmed or die.³⁵ Caring for other human beings, we prove the existence of God. *Yirat shamayim* proves the existence of God.³⁶

In the course of his discussion, Levinas makes some suggestive but insufficiently developed remarks about the connection between *yirat shamayim* and the love of God. *Yirat shamayim*, he states, evidently influenced by Rabbenu Bahya, is an "unavoidable stage" in the love of God, and is moreover "the most difficult" stage.³⁷ The love of God, which is disinterested and not "the gratitude of the belly" (*reconnaissance du ventre*), "envelops the fear of God" while the fear of God fixes the level of the love.³⁸

YIRAT SHAMAYIM AS JEWISH PAIDEIA

A sustained and profound discussion of *yirat shamayim* is found in *Roads to the Palace* by the Israeli philosopher of education, Professor Michael Rosenak. He suggests that *yirat shamayim* is the basic educational ideal in Jewish culture, "the comprehensive character ideal

signifying the educated Jew,” “the dominant end-aim of rabbinic educational reflection,” the “high road to the palace of ideal human existence and self-realization.”³⁹ It is “a comprehensive image of character, virtue, and goodness.” It does not mean merely carrying out God’s commandments, but doing so “with a certain pious intention.” Its “highest expression” is sometimes said to be the love of God. It is “the hallmark of a fine Jewish character, but every decent human being, Jew or Gentile, was in some sense expected to have it.”⁴⁰ It is perhaps the basic value-term in the Jewish *paideia*.⁴¹

YIRAT SHAMAYIM VS. AVODAH MI-YIRAH AND YIRAT HEIT

If *yirat shamayim* is indeed closer to love than to fear, it must be clearly distinguished from *avodah mi-yirah* (the service of God out of fear of punishment). The Talmud contrasts the service of God out of fear of punishment with the service of God out of love (*Sotah* 31a, *Bava Batra* 16a; cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10). The contrast is between service for an ulterior motive (*she-lo lishmah*) and service for its own sake (*lishmah*). The service of God out of fear of punishment is discouraged and disparaged, while that out of love is encouraged and praised. It is evident that *yirat shamayim*, a term of high praise, is closer to the praiseworthy “service of God out of love” than to the blameworthy “service of God out of fear of punishment.”

Similarly, a distinction should be made between *yirat shamayim* and *yirat heit* (the fear of sin). The meaning of *yirat heit* is clear from a well known Rabbinical interpretation of Exodus 20:16: “that His fear [*yirato*] may be on your face [*al peneikhem*] that ye not sin.” According to the Rabbinic interpretation, the fear on the potential sinner’s face is shame (*bushah*, *boshet panim*); and thus “shame leads to the fear of sin” (*Nedarim* 20a).⁴² One refrains from sin because one is ashamed to be seen sinning. Clearly, *yirat heit* is not the highest virtue, certainly not close to *yirat shamayim*.

For Ashkenazi Jews, the most well known uses of *yirat shamayim* and *yirat heit* are found in “Rav’s Prayer” (*Berakhot* 16b), which is

recited (albeit in a corrupt form) in the Ashkenazi rite as part of the Announcement of the New Month. Rav's Prayer reads as follows:

May it be your will, O Lord our God, that you grant us a long life, a life of peace, a life of goodness, a life of blessing, a life of sustenance, a life of physical health, a life in which there is fear of sin [*yirat heit*], a life in which there is no shame or disgrace, a life of wealth and honor, a life in which we shall have in us the love of Torah [*ahavat torah*] and the fear of Heaven [*yirat shamayim*], a life in which all our wishes are fulfilled with goodness.

It is striking that the request for *yirat heit* appears early in the prayer together with the requests for physical health, the avoidance of shame and disgrace, and wealth, while the request for *yirat shamayim* appears at the climax of the prayer, immediately after the love of Torah. *Yirat shamayim* is intertwined with the love of God's Torah. The most noble request that we, as Jews, can make of God is that He grant us *ahavat torah ve-yirat shamayim*.

A CONTEMPORARY USAGE

In contemporary popular usage, *yirat shamayim* often refers to outward observance, the physical observance of the commandments, or the *strict* physical observance of the commandments. According to this usage, *yirat shamayim* is measured by, say, one's standards of *kashrut* or by the number of *humrot* one adopts on Shabbat. One might muse that *yirat shamayim* has come a long way. It began, perhaps, as a kind of consciousness or attitude, as distinguished from physical deeds; everything is in the hands of heaven, and only our consciousness or attitude, that is, our *yirat shamayim*, is free. Now it is used to refer to physical deeds, as distinguished from our consciousness or attitude!

This contemporary usage is found not only among the folk, but sometimes also among leading rabbis and scholars. Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz), for example, has expounded the contemporary

usage in his recent Hebrew essay, “Faith and the Fear of Heaven.”⁴³ He defines *yirat shamayim* as “the actual performance of the commandments” (*kiyyum mitzvot be-fo’al*). Faith, according to Even-Israel, is “the theoretical and spiritual basis of *yirat shamayim*.” It consists in ideas, while *yirat shamayim* is the realization of those ideas.⁴⁴ Faith is “internal,” while *yirat shamayim* is “external.”⁴⁵

According to Even-Israel’s analysis, it is possible that one could have no faith, but nonetheless excel in *yirat shamayim*, that is, perform the commandments meticulously. Moreover, he believes that among today’s Orthodox Jews there are indeed such people. He expresses this thought as follows:

Thus there are formed different groups of people who are *yirei shamayim* (in the practical sense – they observe the commandments), but are not possessors of faith (*baalei emunah*). Faith is not a factor for them in their observance of the commandments. From a philosophical standpoint, these people could be agnostics, or simply people for whom the subject of faith is of no interest at all.⁴⁶

In describing such Jews who have *yirat shamayim* but no faith, Even-Israel remarks that they embrace “orthopraxy” not “orthodoxy,” and cites the quip about those “who fear the *Shulhan Arukh* more than they fear the Sovereign of the Universe.”⁴⁷ Even-Israel’s fascinating discussion of faith and *yirat shamayim* expounds a notion of *yirat shamayim* that is today widespread in the Orthodox Jewish community throughout the world. However, it is not well attested in the classical and medieval Jewish sources.

MORA SHAMAYIM AND YIRAT SHAMAYIM

I wish to conclude my discussion of *yirat shamayim* with some comments about a related expression, *mora shamayim*. In translating *mora shamayim*, I will use the same English term I have used for *yirat shamayim*, namely, “the fear of Heaven.” Moreover, I suspect that the two terms are close synonyms. The term *mora shamayim* appears in a celebrated passage in Mishnah Avot 1:3 (cf. 4:12):

Antigonos of Socho received [the Torah] from Simeon the Righteous. He used to say: Be not like servants who serve the Master in order to receive a reward, but like servants who serve the Master not in order to receive a reward. And let the fear of Heaven [*mora shamayim*] be upon you.

What is the connection between the two parts of Antigonos' dictum? What is the connection between serving God for its own sake, that is, serving God out of love, and experiencing "the fear of Heaven?" I know of two answers: one is found in the Commentaries of Maimonides and Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro, *ad loc.*, and the other was suggested to me by Professor David Shatz in an e-mail communication.⁴⁸

Maimonides explains: "*Even though* you serve [God] out of love, do not cast aside fear entirely." Similarly, Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro writes: "*Even though* you serve God out of love, serve Him *also* out of fear." In other words, according to Maimonides and Rabbi Obadiah, Antigonos is teaching us to serve God "not in order to receive a reward," and *also* "in order to receive a reward." He is presenting us in effect with a riddle.

Professor David Shatz writes: "*Prima facie*, whatever *mora shamayim* is, it is not fear of punishment, since Antigonos opposes ulterior motivation. If *mora shamayim* is synonymous with *yirat shamayim*, then *yirat shamayim* is not fear of punishment." *Yirat shamayim* or *mora shamayim* is thus not similar to the service of God out of fear, but is indeed similar to the service of God out of love. This would confirm Rabbi Soloveitchik's important assertion that *yirat shamayim* and the love of God are closely intertwined.

CONCLUSION

To be sure, there are in the Rabbinic, medieval, and modern sources many different views about the meaning of *yirat shamayim*, just as there are many different views there about the meanings of other fundamental concepts. My presentation was intended to be suggestive, and certainly not exhaustive. Nonetheless, I shall allow

myself now to sum up very briefly the general thrust of the sources reviewed in it.

Yirat shamayim or “the fear of Heaven” is the virtue of obeying God and His commandments. It is the essence and purpose of the human being. It is based on wisdom and knowledge, and is the quintessential expression of freedom and choice. It is exemplified by moral behavior. Although we call it “the *fear* of Heaven,” it derives not from the irrational passion of fear, but from the rational passion of love.

NOTES

1. On the metonymy, see Rabbi Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 1v, 3. In addition to *yirat shamayim*, Halevi cites Psalms 121:1, Ecclesiastes 5:1, *Yevamot* 12b, and *Tanna de-bei Eliyahu* 19 (23).
2. This is the original meaning of the dictum according to some commentators, e.g., Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Emunato shel ha-Rambam* (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 67.
3. Rabbi Hanina conversed with Antoninus (*Avodah Zarah* 10a), who may be the Stoic philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius.
4. A parallel text in *Midrash Tanhuma*, Pekudei, 3, reads: “male or female, weak or mighty, poor or rich, short or tall, ugly or handsome, fat or thin, humble or haughty.”
5. Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), pp. 188–89.
6. Cf. Nahmanides on Deuteronomy 5:26, s.v. *mi yitten*: “Inasmuch as the choice of a human being is his to be righteous or wicked and everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven, the text says [‘Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear Me and keep all My commandments’].”
7. *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, ed. R.L. Weiss and C. Butterworth (New York, 1975), pp. 8–86.
8. *Kitvei Rabbi Nahman Krochmal*, ed. S. Rawidowicz (Waltham, 1961), p. 74.
9. *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. S. Kaplan (New York, 1972), p. 382.
10. Leibowitz, *Sihot al Shemonah Perakim la-Rambam* (Jerusalem, 1986), p. 253. In *Emunato shel ha-Rambam*, p. 67, Leibowitz explained Rabbi Hanina’s dictum thus: everything is determined except the decision “to take upon oneself the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven.”
11. Cf. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *Leaves of Faith* (Jersey City, 2003), p. 92: “Paradoxically, through a constant reciprocal process, [Torah study] both sustains piety and is sustained by it. Keener study leads to keener piety, and more fervent devotion leads to profounder knowledge. The dialectical interplay of *talmud Torah* and *yirat shamayim* is the heart of Torah life.”

12. *Derashot Ha-Ran*, ed. Leon Aryeh Feldman (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 117–19 (cf. pp. 9–92); (Jerusalem, 2003), pp. 268–74 (cf. pp. 528–30); and see also homily 10 on Deuteronomy 19:12.
13. Rabbi Elhanan Bunim Wasserman, *Kovetz Maamarim* (Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 39–40; (Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 79–81 (cf. p. 74). The homily was first published in 1932.
14. See Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac of Uceda, *Midrash Shemuel*, on *Avot* 1:10.
15. Cf. Psalms 78:7; Job 8:14; 31:24. See Tosafot on *Bava Metzia* 58b, s.v. *ha-lo yiratkha kislakekha*; cf. *Sanhedrin* 89b.
16. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963), pp. 492–93, 496.
17. Cf. *Sifra*, Leviticus, *ad loc.*, and Rashi on Leviticus, *ad loc.* As Rabbi Yaakov Jaffe observed to me, Rashi had difficulty understanding Leviticus 25:36 as a *davar ha-masur la-lev*, and he interprets it as such only in his rather forced second interpretation.
18. Nehama Leibowitz, *Iyyunim Hadashim be-Sefer Shemot* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 32–33.
19. See *Shabbat* 156b, where “the terror of Heaven” (*eimta di-shemaya*) is held to prevent one from stealing.
20. According to *Sifrei*, Deuteronomy, 32, love and fear “exist in the same place” only in the *middah* of God. Rabbi Isaac’s statement alludes to this source, and intimates that Abraham’s uniting of love and fear was *imitatio Dei*.
21. *Orot ha-Kodesh* (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 23, 26–28.
22. *Arpelei Tohar* (Jerusalem, 1983), p. 32. Cf. Avinoam Rosenak, *Ha-Halakhah ha-Nevu’it* (Jerusalem, 2007), p. 104, n. 329, who distinguishes between “positive” and “negative” *yirat shamayim* according to Rabbi Kook.
23. “Yirat Shamayim,” *Sefer ha-Shanah li-Yehudei America* 6 (1942), pp. 61–72.
24. “An Analysis of Piety,” *The Review of Religion* (1942), pp. 293–307.
25. “Yirat Shamayim,” p. 61, note.
26. “Yirat Shamayim,” p. 63; “An Analysis of Piety,” p. 296.
27. “Yirat Shamayim,” p. 65; “An Analysis of Piety,” p. 298.
28. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York, 1955), p. 77. See the discussion of Heschel on *Shabbat* 31b in Michael Marmur, “Heschel’s Rhetoric of Citation: The Use of Sources in *God in Search of Man*,” doctoral dissertation (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 149–50. In Heschel’s comments on *yirat shamayim*, Marmur finds a critique of Spinoza and Mordecai Kaplan.
29. Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, *Yemei Zikkaron*, trans. Moshe Krone (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 172.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, p. 174
33. See *Guide*, III, 52, where Maimonides asserts that awareness of standing before the Great King leads to pious behavior. This striking passage is quoted by Rabbi Moses Isserles at the beginning of his *Mappah* and also by Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried at

- the beginning of *his Kitzur Shulhan Arukh*. In Maimonides' text, the Great King is not God, but the Intellect that is the bond between God and human beings.
34. Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, trans. G.D. Mole (Bloomington, 1994), pp. 86–98, 205–08. I thank Dr. Annabel Herzog for showing me her unpublished notes on Levinas' discussion of *yirat shamayim*.
 35. *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 207. Levinas cites *Sifrei* Deuteronomy, 346: "When you are my witnesses, I am God; when you are not my witnesses, I am not God."
 36. This formulation is Herzog's.
 37. *Beyond the Verse*, p. 94.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
 39. *Roads to the Palace* (Providence and Oxford, 1995), pp. 86–87.
 40. *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 110.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
 42. But cf. Yerushalmi *Shekalim* 3:3, BT *Sotah* 49b, *Avodah Zarah* 20b: "*anavah* leads to fear of sin." However, the *Zohar*, III, 145a, citing Proverbs 22:4, connects *anavah* with *yirat shamayim*, not *yirat heit*: "Everyone who has *yirat shamayim* in him merits *anavah*."
 43. "*Emunah ve-Yirat Shamayim*," in Moshe Halbertal, David Kurzweil, and Avi Sagi, eds., *Al ha-Emunah* (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 483–89.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 483.
 45. *Ibid.*, p. 489.
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 489.
 47. *Ibid.*
 48. 5 November 2005.

2

Nefesh ha-Hayyim and the Roots of the Musar Controversy

Elyakim Krumbein

BACKGROUND

The historic dispute over the Musar movement focused on issues not necessarily related to *musar*, but to the movement. In the heat of argument, the critics would find fault with the perceived sectarianism of the Musar practitioners, their alleged condescending attitude, self-righteous bearing, and so forth. Through the fog of vituperation then prevailing, I wish to try and retrospectively discern the more essential differences of opinion.

A famous exchange which took place in Volozhin has Reb Hayyim Brisker rejecting Reb Itzele Blazer's overtures to institute *musar* in the preeminent Lithuanian yeshiva. Castor oil is for sick people, said Reb Hayyim. *Musar* is castor oil for the spiritually sick, but we in Volozhin are, thank God, perfectly healthy. Learning Torah

itself promotes spiritual health and vigor, and is the natural and normally recommended preventive of ethical malaise. *Musar*, on the other hand, is like a medicine: unnecessary for healthy people, and worse, potentially hazardous to them.¹

Reb Hayyim's argument is open to various objections. One could question whether the self-confident assertion that "in Volozhin we are healthy" was true, by the standards of Reb Hayyim himself. But our focus is another issue: is *musar* really the religious equivalent of a barely palatable medicine? Reb Itzele, apparently taking Reb Hayyim's pointed metaphor to heart, later said: "For my part, *musar* isn't castor oil for the ill. It's the oxygen we breathe."² Similar sentiments surface in the words of a student at Slobodka, who recounts that *musar* study "aroused my youthful imagination and enchanted with the mysterious charm of transcendental sanctity. Hundreds of ecstatic youths with soulful enthusiasm chanting the *Mesilat Yesharim*...at these times the heart would swell with the wonderful sadness, and it was good to press oneself together with all those youths of fiery countenance and kindled souls."³ The writer obviously does not consider *musar* study a "castor oil" experience. Would Reb Hayyim dismiss him as an addict?

Clearly we are faced with a fundamental difference of opinion, as to what constitutes a healthy religious life. It is perhaps analogous to how people differ in their definition of a physically healthy lifestyle. One may think that a life lived normally by modern standards, is presumably healthy, as long as no unusual risks are incurred (no smoking, regular check-ups, etc.). Routine, worthwhile activity is by nature health-inducing, whereas constant attention to health is superfluous, and in fact, such attention is a sign of abnormality or obsession. People of the holistic turn, however, feel that attention to health is a major focus of salubrious living, and that watchfulness is not a foreign burden foisted on our routine, but an integral and integrating factor. This analogy may give us the feel of the argument, but faced with such a controversy between *gedolei Yisrael*, we are in need of further explication. In this connection, two major frames of reference suggest themselves: ideological and educational.

If the debate is ideological, then the obvious background would

be Rav Hayyim of Volozhin's doctrine of "Torah for Torah's sake," expounded in his classic *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*. According to this Volozhin theory, as interpreted in Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's landmark study,⁴ Torah learning is the supreme value of Judaism, the Divine service par excellence. Torah as a value is clearly differentiated from *yirat shamayim*, which enjoys secondary standing. The importance of *yirat shamayim* is defined by its status as a prerequisite for Torah. Specifically, personal piety was deemed to be the "storehouse" of Torah, a fact which dictates the time to be invested in it. One may actively engage in acquiring piety per se only insofar as necessary "for the preservation and survival of the grain of Torah." Practically speaking, this normally translates into five minutes of *musar* for an entire day of study.⁵ The position that *lomdei Torah* hardly need to pay attention to their piety was reaffirmed by that other great ideologue of Volozhin, the Netziv.⁶

But can a program of Talmudic exclusivity, particularly in our day, truly claim *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* as its foundation? The fascinating thing is that already in the nineteenth century, the Musarnikim saw their approach as stemming from *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*. The spiritual parentage of Rav Yisrael Salanter purportedly extended through Rav Zundel of Salant, to his mentor Rav Hayyim of Volozhin, and upward to the Vilna Gaon. But Rabbi Lamm critiques these claims, asserting that neither the Gaon nor Rav Hayyim can be seen as precursors of the Musar movement.⁷ In any event, an appreciation of the issue requires delving into the book's structure and content. This is one direction I will explore.

Of course, irrespective of *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*, the Musarnikim certainly had other sources for their approach, among the classical Jewish ethical writers. *Hovot ha-Levavot*, for example, dwelt on moral perfection as an independent, and even paramount, value. In the preface to his work, he tells of a sage who was asked about an unusual point of divorce law. The rabbi reacted with amazement that his questioner had time to "to think of unusual cases that do not elevate your observance and faith, and do not perfect your character traits." Six hundred years later the broadside was seconded by Ramhal in his introduction to *Mesilat Yesharim*. Ramhal put no stock in the

supposition that learning Torah is by definition a reliable and sufficient source of spiritual wellbeing: "From where will this wisdom [of moral perfection] come to a man's heart, if he doesn't seek it?" Indeed, it appears that since being advanced by Rabbenu Bahye, no one in the history of the traditional rabbinic literature ever rebutted this straightforward argument. No one, that is, until Rav Hayyim of Volozhin did so directly and in no uncertain terms. But we will return later to the nature of this rebuttal.⁸

Until here we have seen the Musar controversy as an ideological issue. But the sources seem to indicate that a major part of the debate lies outside of ideology. Unlike the luminaries of Volozhin, many of the first-rank rabbis of Lithuania that opposed the Musar movement, appeared to accept Ramhal's view on the importance of attention to piety in its own right, albeit without granting it primacy. It is likely that the Vilna Gaon's known reverence for *Mesilat Yesharim* and its author commanded their respect, and cast a shadow on his disciple's reservations regarding the use of *musar* literature.⁹ The protests of this group at times sound exaggerated and disproportionate, even confused.¹⁰ The impression is that their equilibrium was disturbed, that they were somehow caught off-balance, because the protagonists had defined the terms of the debate in a way that was unfamiliar. Ideological disputation was not the issue; education was.

In other words, the question was not the relative importance of various values and what one ought to do with one's time. For all agreed that the growth and shaping of the religious person is a critical issue. They disagreed, rather, about how to advance toward that goal. What is the educational *method* that promotes this growth? Can people shape themselves, and how? Traditional Lithuania preferred not to discuss this. It had heretofore scarcely probed its assumptions on the matter, but was now compelled by the Musar proponents to examine it in greater depth.

This traditional lack of probing had actually dovetailed and fostered an educational approach of sorts, an approach that held that people will grow as spiritual beings as a tree grows tall, quite naturally and automatically, thanks to the surroundings of home and community. This idea seems to be reflected in Reb Hayyim Brisker's

argument about “health.” Laissez-faire, as in the economic theory, works in education as well. How much more so in the environment of the yeshiva, saturated as it was with health-inducing Torah. The function of *musar*, when needed, is only to learn how to perform certain commandments (i.e., those of the heart). But as for the growth of the person, that is a natural process, not something that needs conscious intervention.

The claim of the Musar movement was that the method had crippled the product. The tyranny of the old approach resulted in inferior piety and ethics. Learning *musar* must be conceived not as an ordinary mitzvah, but as character-building. Spiritual growth is a spiritual obligation, and it requires direct and detailed strategy. It is not to be left to hopeful chance, or anticipated as a by-product of Halakha-oriented study. Nor is it sufficient to study books that will tell me what I ought to do, think, or feel; a person must develop his own personalized program. Original insight is to be encouraged, along with experiential techniques meant to bridge the gap between the text and the inner personality.¹¹

It would be fair to say that the idea of higher yeshiva education in our time more closely follows the ideal of Volozhin than Slobodka. Fundamentally, the study of Gemara and cognate sources is not only the main occupation, but our preoccupation. The learned *talmid hakham* is the object of our aspirations. Yeshivot may engage *Tanakh* and Jewish thought in an ancillary manner, but *tikkun* of the self as an art, or as an object of systematic study, remains foreign, and is left to the initiative of the student. This despite our adoption of certain external trappings which bear the stamp of the Musar movement: notably the widespread institution of *sihot* on various occasions, and the attempt to create emotional experiences of various kinds. The idea of a person “molding himself” in the course of his yeshiva career may be often touted, but this, too, tends to be little more than an external trapping. For aside from exhortations to invest maximal time and effort in learning Torah and prayer, the technique of this molding is hardly addressed. For all intents, as educators we are staunch believers in the magic of Torah.

I, too, believe in it. But at the same time, I recognize its

limitations. I suggest that we are wrong to put so many of our eggs in the Torah-study basket alone. The magic doesn't work for everyone in the same way, nor to the same extent.

The present study of *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim* is meant to raise the question: Assuming that Volozhin is our point of departure, and that we desire to speak from within that hoary tradition – what are the limits of Talmudic exclusivity?

Our inquiry will deal separately with the two aspects mentioned above: ideology and education. The role of *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim* (henceforth: NH) relates directly to the first of these, but it figures also in the second. For the book is, among other things, an educational effort. Therefore, after looking closely at the content, we will consider NH's historic impact. Was it really the credo on which generations of Lithuanian *talmidei hakhamim* were reared? I believe that the answer to this question may have something to say to us in the here and now.

Each of these two discussions will be followed by remarks, which will try to weave threads of application to the modern scene. The research as well as the remarks will be necessarily brief, and will not do justice to the subject. I do hope that my effort will catalyze further thinking.

IDENTIFYING THE STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE OF NEFESH HA-HAYYIM

Any proposal to examine the *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* must take Rabbi Lamm's definitive study as its starting-point. My modest treatment, offered here as by a *talmid ha-dan be-karka*, will variously either restate work already done by him, extrapolate from it, or pose alternative interpretations. In the interest of fluency, I will not always specify which of the three is happening, leaving that for the interested reader to determine.

We will start off with a seeming contradiction between Rav Hayyim's assertion, on the one hand, that more than a few minutes of *musar* and *yira* per day constitutes *bitul Torah*, and the very nature of his book on the other. How NH could be learned, or for

that matter written, on a budget of five minutes a day, is indeed a question which asks itself. If studying NH is a presumably legitimate occupation, are there grounds to discourage serious study of the Tanya?¹² Throughout the paper, I will continue to refer to this enigmatic stricture, if only to clarify that I am not trying to evade the issue. For unfortunately, I cannot here promise a good answer to these questions. But I raise them at the outset in order to broach a motif, namely, the presence of paradoxes and dialectical tensions in NH. I believe that awareness of this complexity is important for students, and certainly for educators, who see NH as a source of guidance. What is the book's essence? Rabbi Lamm¹³ writes that it is a "theological tract," and an "ethico-kabbalistic work." "The amount of ethical material in the book is, indeed, insufficient to qualify the *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* as a *musar* work." As for the book's purpose, this is revealed in the last part (part 4), which extols Torah study above all other values. The major purpose was to encourage students in the pursuit of scholarship, and "to structure the values of Judaism so that the study of the Torah is revealed as the highest and loftiest of all these values."

I suggest that a fuller evaluation of NH's essence and purpose may be somewhat more complex. In this regard, an important source is the book's introduction, written by the author's son Rav Yitzhak, who was entrusted with its publication. He repeatedly articulates his father's aims, in a way obviously inspired by Rav Hayyim's solemn admonitions. It is impossible to detect the primacy of Torah study in his words. Torah is surely there in its traditional centrality, but alongside other values, and not noticeably superior. In addition, the introduction most certainly does sound like the programmatic declaration of a *musar* work. "Perhaps I will merit by the grace of Heaven," prayed Rav Hayyim, "that my words in these *kuntresim* will be accepted, to root *yirat Hashem*, Torah and pure worship in the hearts of the straight of heart who seek the ways of God." The triad, Torah, *avoda*, and *yira* appears a second time in the introduction in a similar context, and a variation towards the end, Torah, *avoda*, and *tefila* – once again without establishing an order of priority. Reading

the son's introduction without foreknowledge sets up the unsuspecting reader for a surprising and unprecedented phenomenon: a *musar* book that polemicizes against *musar* books.

Further examination of the introduction yields additional evidence of complications in Rav Hayyim's ethical approach. The topics of discussion are briefly and accurately set out there as mentioned above: Torah, *avoda*, *yira*, and prayer. Where has *gemilut hasadim* – one of the three bastions of religious life according to the Rabbis – disappeared to? Does its absence indicate its de-emphasis in Rav Hayyim's educational theory? Judging from Rav Yitzhak's biographical statements, the answer is clearly negative. The son reports that Rav Hayyim habitually chastised him for his indifference to the suffering of others. "Thus did he always say to me: 'That man was not created for his own self at all, but only to benefit others as much as he has the power to do.'" Devotion to others is then crucially significant ("only"), even granting some hyperbole. Torah is of course centrally important; but the center appears to be a more crowded place than we might think. Or perhaps we should think in terms of congruent "centers" relating to different spheres of life or philosophy? Logical constructs don't alleviate our confusion as to the practical ramifications of all this. What are we now to make of Rav Hayyim's five-minute rule? Interestingly, Rav Yitzhak has an arresting definition of the yeshiva of Volozhin itself, the great institution whose banner was *Torah lishma*: "And he built a great house of learning on three pillars: Torah, *avoda*, and *gemilut hasadim*."

Another detail deserves attention. The title "*Nefesh ha-Hayyim*" was Rav Yitzhak's choice; Rav Hayyim himself did not name the book. This is of course highly irregular, and the probable explanation is that Rav Hayyim did not write it as a unified, integrated book to begin with, but as a collection of tracts, which Rav Hayyim called *kuntresim*, each having its own focus. Of course they are inter-related, and each is part of the author's over-all worldview. There is comprehensiveness in the *kuntresim*, when viewed together. I do not doubt for a moment that the author himself conceived their juxtaposition into a combined presentation. But if I am right about the primary integrity of each *kuntres* unto itself, then the perception that Rav

Hayyim is mainly structuring the values of Judaism so that Torah comes out on top, is less compelling, tempered by the individual focus of each *kuntres*. Prayer is not only a rung in the ladder whose summit is Torah, but first of all an end in itself.

The plausibility of Rav Yitzhak's programmatic definition of NH, as contained in his preface, is borne out at the beginning of the unnumbered part of the work. This added section, which is inserted between parts 3 and 4, opens thus: "Pleasant reader! Here I have guided you with God's help in the paths of truth, in order to show you the way to go assuredly, so that you may train yourself bit by bit by order of the aforementioned levels... You will see for yourself that the more you habituate yourself to each of these levels, your heart will increase in purity." For all appearances, Rav Hayyim is summarizing the bottom-line of all that has gone before. He does so in a way that confirms that didactic (*musar*!) aim which Rav Yitzhak articulated.

But the import of these lines goes further. The placement of this section between parts 3 and 4 is noteworthy. Rabbi Lamm understands the section as a preface to part 4,¹⁴ which is in keeping with his general viewpoint – that the whole book leads up to part 4. But my examination has found that only once, in passing, is the existence of part 4 indicated in the inserted section itself. Considering its content, it is at least as reasonable to see the section as a collection of admonitions needed by the reader who is serious about the program previously advanced. That is, as an afterword to parts 1 through 3. There is a sense of completeness after the first three parts. The feeling pervades that an integrated approach has been delineated, and now that the practitioners have been instructed in *asé tov*, it is time to add some words of caution. This sense of completeness is what renders Rav Hayyim's opening formulation of part 4 comprehensible: "I *also* would like to discuss, in writing, the greatness of the obligation of Torah study."

In other words, structurally speaking, part 4 is not the naturally anticipated apex of the work, as read consecutively. In retrospect, it is the *unanticipated* apex. It is by no means a separate, loosely-related appendage; but its appearance at a point where the reader feels that

all has been said, gives Rav Hayyim's claims for Torah the ironic power of paradox. You the reader must think that matters have come full circle, Rav Hayyim is saying, and how wrong you are. For the grand finale is still before us – the full weight of the truest expression of the whole world of Divine service. That I have left for last.

Now the primacy of Torah in NH is indisputable and unprecedented, and I do not claim to wholly understand its lack of mention in Rav Yitzhak's introduction, or in his citations of his father. But I believe that there is an inference to be drawn from this absence and from the other observations above: NH holds that *avodat Hashem*, in the broad sense, is the primary and all-encompassing value, not Torah. Torah indeed reigns supreme, because it is the *avodat Hashem* par excellence. Torah is paramount, for this is how God wants us to express our piety.

This premise impels us to ask again: what, in the final analysis, is the relationship between parts 1 through 3 and part 4? Surely, as stated before, the order of parts shows the supremacy of the last: as important as other values are, Torah is incomparably greater. Yet it is hard to deny that the structure does something else as well. The first three parts are there not only to be the foil of scholarship; they are obviously there to provide its necessary basis, in ethics, psychology, and mystical theology. Here is the philosophical infrastructure of which Rav Hayyim expects and assumes knowledge and understanding, and to which he posits the reader's sincere and firm commitment, so that there be a platform for his ultimate, most cherished aim.

It would have been possible to argue that Torah's supremacy is totally unconnected to a personal identification with the multi-faceted world of *avodat Hashem*, and that scholarship may be divorced from an understanding of that world which is detailed, systematic, existentially profound and deeply experienced. It is not possible to argue that such is the position of Rav Hayyim of Volozhin. To him, the presence of Divinity and its human impresses – awe, humility, responsibility, purification – are the atmosphere, the backdrop, and the axioms, without which the devotion to Torah would have been the sheer intellection which, according to Rav Hayyim (as Rabbi Lamm points out),¹⁵ it isn't. Rav Hayyim had to lay down – in the

first three parts – the basic and detailed apparatus that defines the religious aspirations of the Jew, before he could argue that Torah is their ultimate consummation. Indeed, these aspirations must be in place, before Torah can *be* their ultimate consummation.

Without the first three parts of NH, the fourth would have been inconceivable. The first parts present the domain over which Torah reigns. But this rulership is nurturing, not despotic. Torah cannot by its greatness claim the right to ignore all else, smugly invoking Rav Hayyim's assertion that the very learning is *deveikut* by definition, even when unaware of it.

The discussion in part 4 of the *deveikut* inherent in learning refers to King David's elation at the thought "that literally each word of Torah that I learn, it all came out of, and even now comes out of, Your mouth." Hence Rav Hayyim prescribes self-purification before learning, in order to achieve this cleaving to "His Word and Will." His assumption is that the reader seeks and values *deveikut*. He is not speaking to one who is experientially indifferent to *deveikut*, and would love to hear that learning supersedes it.

The ways used by Rav Hayyim to motivate his audience clearly assume that a person has an over-arching spiritual life and spiritual concerns, and that Torah ought to, and does, carry on a dialogue with these, in a manner that parallels Torah's dialogue with the cosmos. He tries to inculcate *Torah lishma* with a broad-canvassed panegyric on Torah's sanctity, mystical preeminence, its power to fantastically elevate the learner, and to maintain the cosmic effluence. He means to integrate these considerations into the motivation of the learner, cultivating his scholarship in quantity and quality. We conclude that the infrastructure laid in the first three parts is the indispensable foundation of the fourth.¹⁶

YIRA AND LISHMA: THEIR RELATIONSHIP IN NEFESH HA-HAYYIM

I wish to turn from structural interpretation of NH's purpose, and view the work's complexity through a different lens. We will consider two major concerns of Rav Hayyim of Volozhin, which are germane to the way and the spirit in which Torah should be learned. One is

yira, a general value that has a connection to Torah as NH discusses. The second issue is *lishma*, and its definition regarding learning. We will ask, what is the relationship between these two topics in NH?

We shall begin with *yira*. Rav Hayyim concedes, and insists, that *yira* is necessary for Torah. It is the storehouse, without which Torah has no place. The amount of Torah that may be learned is commensurate with the room one has prepared in advance.¹⁷ But what does this mean? Why can't one learn simply out of belief that this is the right thing to do, even without fear of God?

For one thing, there is a factual interdependence between Torah and awe. Torah is grasped intellectually, but in keeping with its celestial nature, it "refuses" to be learned, or retained, without *yira*. Indeed, God himself will not dispense Torah if the precondition has not been met. This exceeds rationality; *yira* and success in learning are connected here out of ethical considerations. God's Torah demands allegiance to God, and this translates into God-fearing.

Were we to restrict the association of Torah and *yira* to this conditional level, we could easily understand NH's five-minute rule. For defining their conjunction in this way, we basically leave the two distinct. It may be possible to satisfy the demand for homage to the Source of Torah with a telling, brief, preliminary gesture. In effect, Rav Hayyim would then be instituting what Rabbi Lamm calls a "Dissociation Principle" to govern the practical management of the two ideals. This requires that *yira* be tended within strict and defined limits, in no way intruding into the domain of Torah, which claims the lion's share of time. *Yira* is to be conceived merely as one *mitzvah* among many. True, it is distinguished by being a *me'akev* (impediment) of sorts vis-à-vis Torah; but its connection to Torah is non-essential, to the point which facilitates its practical "dissociation" from it.

At this stage we need to raise the second issue – *lishma*. This is because *lishma*, as the intention and motivation which ought to govern the act, reflects its essential nature. The Dissociation Principle would require that the *lishma* of Torah have nothing to do with fear. And indeed, NH's pivotal part 4, chapter 3, gives us the cognitive definition of *lishma*, which is a distinctive feature of Rav Hayyim's

approach. Had the *lishma* attending Torah been of a devotional-religious nature, we would have been hard-put to decouple Torah from *yira*.

Until this point all seems to fit nicely. The problem arises when NH teaches the student on what he ought to meditate, in order to express and arouse *yira*. Awe of the Divine can be aroused by different trains of thought – what will NH’s prescription be? For instance, the Rambam in the second chapter of *Yesodei ha-Torah* follows the path of contemplating God’s works, elaborating on this in the following chapters. Important *musar* works that, like NH, rely heavily on Kabbala, build on the Zohar’s formulation: fear based on God’s being “master and ruler, root of all the worlds, before Whom all is as naught.” Rav Eliyahu de Vidas in *Reshit Hokhma* (*Shaar ha-Yira*, chapter 1) starts from this point and elaborates at great length, eventually arriving at *yirat het* and *yirat ha-onesh*. These ideas and feelings are not related directly to the act of learning Torah. NH could well have used them, in view of the “dissociation” of Torah from *yira*.

But it appears that Rav Hayyim, who unlike the *musar* books puts Torah at the pinnacle of *avodat Hashem*, is neither able nor willing to dissociate study cleanly from *yira*. This is true, precisely and paradoxically, *because* of the preeminence of Torah. As Etkes noted, the preparatory stage creates a state of consciousness that must serve as a framework for study.¹⁸ How else can we understand the teaching (chapter 6) that in order to arouse *yirat shamayim* before learning, “he should intend to cleave to God in his learning of Torah, that is – cleaving with all his powers to the word of God in Halakha...for He and His Will are one?” The unsurpassed spirituality of Torah should be acknowledged before learning; and its awareness should be kept alive subliminally, *while* learning (see below). The content of this fear-contemplation is not mainly about God. It is about Torah, and about its learning, which is here presented as an awe-inspiring act.

Rabbi Lamm correctly observes that the above-quoted words of NH represent part of the definition of *lishma*. But textually, this wasn’t their aim; the context is God-fearing as a desired prologue to learning. The subtle shift from *yira* to *lishma* means that *yira*, rather than being a separate precondition, is part of the ideal intention,

motivation, and feeling that fuel the act itself. This is borne out also by NH's stated concern that "the *yira* not be extinguished from his heart during learning," a concern that sanctions short intermissions from study. To connect *yira* with *lishma* is tantamount to flouting the Dissociation Principle. Etkes, impressed by this aspect of Rav Hayyim's thought, seems to be oblivious of any tendency towards dissociation. He credits Rav Hayyim with the innovation of *integrating devekut* in Torah study, his "substantive discussion" of this point going well beyond the views attributed to the Vilna Gaon.¹⁹

And yet chapter 3 contrarily hammers away at the intellectual pole, repeatedly declaring that the *lishma* and "love of Torah itself" is reducible to cognition: *haino le-hosif lekah u-filpul* ("that is – to gain knowledge and dialectic understanding"). Each such statement is another tug at the seam which holds the soul of the pious learner together. This cognitive exclusivity indeed demands "dissociation" from *yira*. It ignores, as a matter of adamant principle, any connection to the learner's desire to "cleave to the word of God," or to commit himself to practically fulfill what he is studying (another intention which NH recommends to arouse *yira*).

In fact, the utter severance from devotional intentions is what saves the cognitive *lishma* of chapter 3 from a fatal flaw: triviality. After all, *lishma* is a spiritual challenge – one should not only perform, but also *intend*. But what is so difficult about study "for the sake of intellectual comprehension?" True, it may not be particularly challenging for us. But for the pious scholar Rav Hayyim is cultivating, it most certainly is. For in order to devote all his intellectual capacity to the task, he must surrender his religious passions, and confine himself to the *ratio*. He must humbly recognize that the "thing itself" is incomparably grander than the human capacity to touch that grandeur, let alone bask in it.

Lishma in NH is, then, a bi-polar affair. The tension between chapters 3 and 6 is unmistakable. Rav Hayyim, and the ideal student of Torah, must walk a tightrope, balancing the unobstructed intellectual act of cognition with the awareness of its mystical and religious moment.

Applying this tension practically requires a psychological move-

ment of oscillation, of *ratzo vashov*, between the attitude prior to and surrounding learning, and the mind-set adopted in the act of study itself. The first is devotional, the second cognitive. The stages are dissociated on the level of active consciousness, but nevertheless enmeshed. The awe and adulation are inspired first, by considering the significance of the cognition about to commence. Then, during the stage of intellectual study, the awe and adulation should persist subliminally, and study actually deepens them. This kind of *ratzo vashov* is a typical hallmark of NH.²⁰

TALMUDIC EXCLUSIVITY: A GENUINE IMPLEMENTATION OF NH?

Analyzing NH is intriguing to me, but I will have to desist, or else we won't get to deal with the ramifications. Recall our question: Is NH a reasonable authority for Talmudic exclusivity, particularly in modern education?

Assuming my analysis to be correct, then imputing Talmudic exclusivity to NH is simplistic. The core of the personality that Rav Hayyim envisioned is piety. This piety is no simple matter; it is intelligent, systematically well-informed, complex, and actively interested in its own further development. It is this piety that fuels the constant preoccupation with Torah study. Using NH to propagate Torah study while blithely side-stepping serious doubts as to whether the core is there is unfounded to say the least.

But forget the theory, the observer may say. When it comes to brass tacks, NH's overwhelming concern is that we sit and learn. Aren't the quantitative guidelines, the allotting of mere minutes to religious contemplation, evidence enough of that?

But this is misguided. I agree to set aside all the question marks we raised about these strictures, at least for argument's sake. Still, I believe that we should not be led astray. These limitations were intended for a particular, elitist group. Rabbi Lamm showed that NH in general was meant for *anshei ha-yeshiva*, and not for the general public, since only very sophisticated students could deal adequately with the book's difficult kabalistic concepts and theory.²¹ In light of our remarks we may add, that only a very special type could rise

to the finely-tuned ethical challenges posed by NH. Rav Hayyim declares at the beginning of part 4 that he will quote from the Zohar at length, even though “all these passages are widely known.” The group, to whom these esoteric citations were “widely known,” is certainly not the run-of-the-mill. What sufficed for students of this caliber to arouse and sustain the devotional mind-set is by no means a general model for us.

Something else should be kept in mind. All of Rav Hayyim’s discussion in part 4 has no bearing on prayer; limitation of this sphere is not mentioned (though we may safely assume that Rav Hayyim would oppose Hasidic extremism on this score). *Tefilah* in NH is a major avenue of spiritual growth, recommended for intensive attention and effort. The *lamdan* of part 4 has presumably assimilated the previous parts. If he is putting them into practice, profoundly turning towards the Divine thrice daily, then his conscious devotional life is strongly anchored. NH’s assertions that a few minutes of *yirat shamayim* suffice, and that learning Torah actually deepens it, were made in this context. The burden of proof is upon him who would extend these assumptions to other realities.

NEFESH HA-HAYYIM’S IMPACT AT VOLOZHIN

The Musar movement traced its lineage from the *Gra*, to Rav Hayyim of Volozhin, through Rav Zundel of Salant, to Rav Yisrael Salanter. Modern scholars take differing views of this claimed pedigree. We saw that Rabbi Lamm rejects the claim about the Gaon and Rav Hayyim. He believes that Rav Hayyim’s heritage was most exemplified by the Yeshiva of Volozhin itself, where *musar* was not studied. But Rabbi Lamm does not dispute Rav Zundel’s role in the creation of the Musar Movement, which is indeed hard to deny. Yet Rav Zundel was an eminent and devoted disciple of Rav Hayyim. According to Etkes, Rav Zundel personified “the educational ideal of the Volozhin Yeshiva.”²² Is it conceivable that his interest in *musar* is not grounded in the tradition received from his master? In any event, Etkes describes the Musar movement as issuing from the teachings of previous generations – the final stage in a line of incremental development. These conflicting opinions are of course a reflection

of the original paradox: great Talmudic scholars and men of truth, each claiming to be the genuine carriers of the tradition of Volozhin, while taking such opposing viewpoints. I wish to suggest a perspective on this paradox. The perspective is based on a consideration of the impact of NH on subsequent generations.

NH was very popular during the half-century after its appearance. The evidence for this is repeated publication, by the 1870s, seven editions had seen light.²³ How remarkable, therefore, is the ensuing precipitous decline. Sometime in the course of the 1870s, publication of NH ceased being worthwhile, and the work was never again printed in Europe. This, despite the fact that the Volozhin Yeshiva was at the height of its vitality under the leadership of the Netziv, and continued thus until the yeshiva was closed in 1892. Moreover, the yeshiva movement of which Volozhin was the engine flowered as never before, continuing to be the pride of East European Jewry, and maintaining its vigor for another fifty years after that. This whole institutional proliferation ignored its supposed charter and blueprint. The progeny showed no interest in the detailed, complex vision of the founding father. We possess a good number of detailed personal memoirs and chronicles of life in Volozhin during the 1880s and 1890s. *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* is nowhere to be found. To the observer, this is akin to imagining that *Orot* would become passé at *Merkaz ha-Rav*. No less an erudite and eclectic student of Volozhin than Rav Barukh Epstein, nephew of the Netziv, evinces a striking ignorance of the contents of NH, the alleged bible of *mitnagdut*.²⁴

Not only do the chronicles ignore NH itself, but their account of the existential posture at Volozhin is often at loggerheads with the work's spirit and message. There is no record of the general student body of Volozhin, during the period in question, devoting any fixed time at all to meditation on religious fear. In the reminiscences of Zalman Epstein, we learn that at Volozhin they "learned Torah, Gemara and *rishonim*, not out of *yirat shamayim*, and not because it is a *mitzvah*, but because it is a thing of substance, science, wisdom, a matter of great value...and the mind finds it so satisfying."²⁵ He further informs us that "our master Eliyahu of Vilna was renowned in Volozhin not as a *hasid*, as he was called in Vilna, but only as

Gaon...[The average Volozhiner] was no longer zealous, benighted, over-pious. This was now a strength that was revealed, open, alive and ready for growth and progress – no longer that petrified, stiff strength of the old Jewish quarter.”²⁶ Ephraim Movshitzki tells us that “our spiritual lives were democratic. We knew no voice of authority or command. We studied Torah, we studied wisdom, no one interfered with us and our growth was prodigious.”²⁷

The exciting spirit of intellectual freedom, along with the shedding of the pious pressure of the Gaon’s image as *hasid*,²⁸ were quite a way off from NH’s insistence on fear as the storehouse of Torah. Rav Hayyim’s disciples had conscientiously recorded his oral teachings on all the religious issues later discussed in the NH, and more – such as dealing with the yetzer hara of impure thoughts, of eating for satisfying the appetite, of conceit.²⁹ By the last quarter of the century, Volozhin had brushed these topics aside. The personal moral issues which concerned the students of Volozhin in Rav Hayyim’s day, largely due to the master’s influence, had vanished with hardly a trace. The aim of personal growth based purely on intellectual effort bred in Volozhin an atmosphere reminiscent in some ways of a university – a parallel which was not lost on the student body. The yeshiva-man was described as “esteeming his own value, the value of his name, and his learning, no less than did the European university student.”³⁰ The popularity of the Brisker method first taught at Volozhin was to no small extent related to its being perceived as measuring up favorably by modern scientific standards.³¹

The development of prayer at Volozhin is likewise instructive. Its importance in NH is mirrored in the disciples’ reports, as could be expected.³² Rav Zundel wrote out a summary of NH’s teachings on prayer for his own use.³³ But the later personal memoirs once again reflect the subsequent abandonment of nonintellectual endeavor in Volozhin. One student claimed that *shaharit* lasted no more than twenty minutes. This is contradicted by others, but in any event it appears that *tefila* was not accorded special importance.³⁴ Even the prayers on the High Holy Days left no impression on the chroniclers, and they were apparently of no special moment. The men of Volozhin were there to grow in learning, and for them there was no

other type of elitism. As Stampfer puts it, “the difference between the yeshiva and society at large was not in the intensity of religious life, but in the intensive Torah study.”³⁵

What emerges is a subtle but unmistakable shift in emphasis and educational attitude which took place in Volozhin in the course of its existence, and which is reflected in the virtual abandonment of NH and many of its teachings. Rav Hayyim envisioned his corps of scholars as an elite not only in their learning, but also in their religiosity. The development of their piety was important to him, perhaps centrally. Under the Netziv, hardly any attention was paid to this. It stands to reason that Rav Zundel of Salant, the “ethical ideal of Volozhin” in its earlier days, would have been somewhat uncomfortable there in the 1880s. In any event, one scholar who did cultivate his religiosity was subject to social strain during this period: “They couldn’t accept me completely, because in their view I behaved with excessive piety and abstinence.” The scholar’s name was Avraham Yitzhak Kook.³⁶

Rav Hayyim was able to speak to his audience in the language of piety and mysticism, because this was part of the discourse of the Lithuanian milieu, while it reverberated from the confrontation with Hasidism. Hasidism did not claim a mass following in Lithuania, but it had gained the attention of a thoughtful elite. It had succeeded in setting the agenda of the issues to be discussed: the relationship of piety and learning, the value of *devekut* and how it is achieved, the significance of religious practice in terms of the now-familiar kabbalistic lore and concepts.

But as the nineteenth century proceeded, the cultural climate was overtaken by the presence of Haskala, and this became the new context in which Volozhin continued to champion its devotion to Torah. Its student body was then challenged by new issues, whose relatedness to the world of divinity was more indirect: personal growth and creativity, free intellectual inquiry, Torah learning as an enlightened pursuit, the need to address the social needs of the time. Like the *maskilim*, the *talmidim* of Volozhin had discovered the potential of an inner life no longer ridden with contradictions, as the ethical literature had taught, and not rent by the opposition

of upper and lower worlds.³⁷ The soul was now the home of natural forces, “healthy” and innocent, that needed nurturing, guidance and development to the fullest. In Volozhin this discovery was all the more breathtaking, for it seemed to have the consent of the highest religious authority: the custodians of the tradition of the Gaon of Vilna himself, whose heritage had been appropriately refurbished, as we have seen. NH’s message had been reduced to the paramount importance of learning. Absorbing this idea alone did not require one to actually open the book.

Thus, when it came to pass that *musar* was rejected in Volozhin by leaders and student body alike, they based themselves on their claim to “health.” This had relatively little to do with NH. With its spiritual agenda now largely irrelevant, the components of NH’s complex outlook could no longer be held together. These elements dispersed almost centrifugally. Torah flourished in Volozhin; the Musar movement saw NH as an important *musar* source. Fractions of Rav Hayyim’s legacy were thus preserved. But NH’s role as a unique, ideological cornerstone, had become a thing of the past.

EMULATING VOLOZHIN?

We set out to discuss the limits of Talmudic exclusivity. But at the heart of this quest, our study points to a related, more fundamental issue – namely, what is the *meaning* of this exclusivity? I know that this formulation raises problems. First of all, the very question assumes the existence of such meaning. Secondly, it creates an internal contradiction. If exclusivity of Talmud study has meaning, then clearing a space for that meaning must mitigate the exclusivity. Many of our above observations are simply manifestations of this anomaly. They also demonstrate its reality, to my mind.

The rationale of Torah learning, certainly in its intensive form, is not transparent; it requires explanation. Whoever learns Torah with devotion and consistency will always ask himself why. His devotion will ultimately be a function of the soundness and the conviction of the personal answer that he gives himself. We have seen that at Volozhin, very different answers were given in the course of time. Since at all stages, it is the same Torah that was avidly studied, I think

it clear that the different answers were not directly derived from the four cubits of Halakha alone. They were born of different intellectual worldviews and different spiritual climates. The answers that learners supply themselves today will also be based on their experience. But in any case, the centrality and power of Torah requires an explanation that touches the depths of identity, personality and outlook.

How is the precise answer of concern to us as educators? Is it any of our business? Or have we done our job by seeing to it that learning goes on, whatever may lie behind it? The choice is ours. We can lunge into this issue with all seriousness, as did Rav Hayyim of Volozhin. Alternatively, we can opt to give it a light touch, as was apparently done in other periods. We would then be relying on the existential reality of the times. We would implicitly call upon the current climate of ideas to supply students with core values and character traits on which Torah learning will build. This may well have been done at one point in Volozhin; are we willing to sign on to this platform today?

We see someone using his impressive intellect for the sake of advanced Torah achievement. Do we need to ask what is going on inside him? Are we witnessing the healthy ambition of a century ago? Or perhaps a single-minded self-absorption, inspired by the utter totality of modern commercialism and consumerism? Can we today trust the facade of a happily learning yeshiva student, and assume that his inner reality is likewise unencumbered with emptiness, doubt, or repressed religious crisis? By any remote chance, is he essentially finding refuge in Talmud study, while his inner self is being gnawed away by the post-modernist obliteration of depth in all its forms? Can we today ignore the possibility that the Torah study is a compulsive immersion, which reflects a need – already noted in *Mesilat Yesharim* – to avoid confronting the self? Or may we safely assume that even if it is *hamaor she-ba* (“the light within”), Torah will straighten out everything? These queries are unavoidable. If we today adopt the approach of the Netziv and Reb Hayyim Brisker, it will have to be because we feel about our *zeitgeist* the way they felt about theirs; not only basically unthreatened by it, but by and large impressed by its positive potential for matters of the spirit.

But if we decide, as I believe we should, that the shaping of personality today needs to be addressed directly and with greater sophistication and seriousness, we will of course be faced with the tremendous problem of implementation. As sons of our tradition, we would naturally turn to its wellsprings. But having done so, we realize that from an overall perspective, the quality and quantity of traditional source material in this area compares poorly with the prodigious efforts of our most brilliant halakhic minds. Beyond this, the whole subject of spiritual development is intensely personal. Can today's student find common ground with materials that were created mostly before the advent of modernity?

Perhaps we can turn again to the author of *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* for some guidance. We may draw inspiration from his ability to recast traditional concerns in the language and style of thought of his contemporary readers. His use of dialectic tension in the realm of religious and ethical practice is also a valuable precedent, uniquely suited to modern needs. This feature of NH sets it apart from much of the output of other *musar* writers, who in their drive to inspire, are not infrequently monolithic and tend to oversimplification.

There is a great need for specific educational approaches, curricula and resources that can make the idea of guided spiritual growth, which develops the person's whole and not just his mind, palpable and accessible in our day. If the primary sources are to speak to us, we are in need of mediation. This is a truly daunting challenge, and in truth, only a concerted and collective effort will be equal to it.

TOWARD A CURRICULUM ABOUT GROWTH

This concluding section presents some thoughts on what the elements of a *musar* curriculum might be.³⁸ At the outset, I ought to re-emphasize something which is implicit in our above discussions. *Musar*, as is well known, has always been about *yirat shamayim*. But what is "fear?" Is it not an emotional contraction, or from the rational standpoint – a gesture of judicious withdrawal? And if so, what do *musar* and *yirat shamayim* have to do with the expansive and upward-reaching concept of "growth," touted in the title of this section? Nevertheless, as I wrote in the background section, and

as serious study of the literature (including NH) clarifies, *musar* conceives of *yira* in its broad sense as connected to the essential personality, Jewishly and humanly. Its most noble function is to be the leavening of meaningful intellectual search and existential ferment. It constantly reminds us that concern with growth is not a luxury-pastime for the bored and idle, but an ongoing spiritual obligation which compels and holds us to account.

I will open with some general considerations that may serve as guidelines for a *musar* curriculum. There must be pervasive openness and respect for the student's viewpoints and inclinations. *Musar* in our time is a call, not a rebuke. Responding to the call is a personal matter of individual choice. We must also be willing to introduce tension into the subject matter. Differences among various sources should be learned, in an atmosphere of free discussion. Conflicts within the ethical ideal, as for example, between different *middot* or deeper existential conflicts, should also be discussed. As in other areas of study, airing controversies is a catalyst for interest and a vehicle of personal identification.

What constitutes relevant source material? I advocate a broad approach. The three most classic *musar* sources – *Hovot Ha-Levavot*, *Mesilat Yesharim*, and *Sha'arei Teshuva* exist today in accessible translation, as does Rav Salanter's *Ohr Yisrael*.³⁹ The second-generation Musar movement writings, such as emanated from Slobodka and Telshe, represent a change of style which attempted to expand the range of approaches beyond the stern emphases of Rav Yisrael. But the purism that would confine *musar* study to the formulæ and texts that reigned in the classic Lithuanian Musar movement is today unwarranted. Habad, Breslav, and Hasidut in general should be accessed. The writings of Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik are also an important resource, though translating them into terms practically meaningful for young people is a challenging task.⁴⁰ Of the two, Rav Kook devoted much more attention to precise approaches to *musar* issues. Many of his ideas constitute a rebuttal of those of Rav Yisrael Salanter and his school. Exploration of such controversies is a fruitful topic in its own right, which broadens the range of options within the domain of spiritual growth.

Jewish ethics has a general, humanistic component, and therefore non-traditional texts – classical and modern-day writers, humanistic and cognitive psychologists, and so on – are relevant. In fact, when teaching a modern audience, I think it is crucial that issues of ethical growth be brought to bear on all the various types of intellectual encounter, and all the distinct languages of discourse, which inevitably confront and influence us. All of these are facets of the modern personality. Confining our consideration to the tongue of tradition is a prescription for lop-sided, unwholesome growth. Hence, the teacher and curriculum planner should selectively use his knowledge of relevant outside sources.

The curriculum itself must first have a clear idea of what it means by *musar*. I would favor a broad definition: the branch of Torah that teaches a person how to be and how to live, as opposed to how to behave in a given situation, which is the focus of Halakha.⁴¹ Behavior is only one aspect of life, and it doesn't necessarily involve the cultivation of religious imperatives such as faith and *yirat shamayim*. *Musar* concentrates on personal spiritual concerns such as emotional life, character traits, and the setting of goals. Teaching these areas is not only a matter of theory and concepts, but also practical skills.

The curriculum itself would have three parts. A prologue would clarify the idea of ethical and spiritual progress as a distinct religious desideratum. From there we arrive at the other two parts: *musar* as a field of study, and as a discipline. I will here briefly comment on each of the parts. Conveying the importance of working on the self requires thoughtful adaptation of classic sources and exploitation of more modern ones. The classic literature discusses this issue, but today we must deal with an inner resistance which asks, "I think I'm basically alright, why should I change?" or "What will I gain from change?" Countering this attitude requires working from a wide variety of perspectives. One could discuss the moral perils of ignoring personality development, or the halakhic obligation involved, or the idea that the aim is not to change but to grow and maximize potential. Other themes which belong in this grouping are (1) the massive

assault on man's moral self in our day,⁴² and (2) the relationship of work with the self to other elements of spiritual life.⁴³

The prologue is followed by the stage of study. The general objective of this stage is knowledge and understanding. I emphasize this aim, and distinguish it from the third element, which is practical. Practice without study risks slipping into the type of mindless emotionalism which is often popularly associated with *musar*, but which in the long run is likely to sabotage any meaningful effort. The objects of study are the issues, resources and techniques relevant to personal spiritual progress. Time should be devoted to discussion of the ethical ideal: to what ought one to aspire?⁴⁴ An objective examination or sampling of important writings could be used to demonstrate different concerns, definitions, and approaches. One may also consider using the historic framework as an organizing principle.⁴⁵

Lastly, we arrive at the discipline. Students should be practically exposed to a variety of techniques, with the aim that some should be habituated. Explication of the techniques may be found in works written to our own day.⁴⁶ It can be said that all *musar* practice consists of variations on the three elements of study, introspection, and resolution. The last two are the ones in which modern Orthodox Jews have little experience. This suggests the following formula as a goal and criterion for measuring our progress:

(1) The student should know how to engage in introspection, and how to use his introspection to undertake resolutions and to monitor his work, his difficulties and reactions.

(2) The student should feel at home with these practices, and be motivated to engage in them.

Lastly, despite having divided the elements of the curriculum schematically into three and despite the logical progression, it is not a good idea to leave the third practical component until having dealt adequately with the first two. Parts two and three should be done concurrently, either by alternating between them or by allotting time for both in a given session.

NOTES

1. The exchange has been often quoted, for example in *Seridei Eish* (below note 2). For a parallel usage of this metaphor by Reb Hayyim Brisker, see Shulamit Soloveitchik Meiselman, *The Soloveitchik Heritage* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1995), p.110.
2. Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg, "Reb Yitzhak Blazer," *Seridei Eish* part 4 (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1977), p. 309.
3. Quoted in Shaul Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva ha-Lita'it be-Hit'havuta* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2005), p. 285. The testimony's credibility is enhanced by its context (the author's clandestine "cutting" of the Musar session in favor of the local library).
4. Norman Lamm, *Torah for Torah's Sake* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1989)
5. *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*, part 4, chapters 7–9; *Ruah Hayyim* on *Avot*, 1:1. See Lamm, *Torah*, pp. 278–80, 290–93. I concur with Rabbi Lamm that Nefesh Ha-Hayyim's stated position differs from the program of the Musar movement. But his similar statement about the Vilna Gaon I find a bit too sweeping. See Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1993), pp. 17–29. The Gaon attached independent importance to ethical perfection, and its encouragement is a perennial topic of his. Furthermore, the Gaon appears not to have placed quantitative strictures on *musar* study. Finally, the Gaon recommended *musar* literature for this purpose, whereas his disciple is on record as discouraging such books, trying to restrict *musar* study to sources of Hazal. More on this see below (note 9).
6. Hanna Ketz (Kehat), *Mishnat ha-Netziv*, (Jerusalem, 1990), pp.129–33.
7. Lamm, *Torah*, pp.290–93.
8. Dov Katz in *Pulmus ha-Musar* (Jerusalem: Weiss, 1972), pp.317–57, has a different ideological picture of the debate. He thinks that the root is the ancient controversy whether *mitzvot* are meant to elevate man, or whether their only aim is fulfilling the Divine will (see *Guide to the Perplexed*, part III, chapter 26). I fail to see why this is necessarily so. Witness that some of Katz's illustrations of the latter viewpoint, such as *Yesod ve-Shores ha-Avoda* and *Reshit Hokhma*, are classic *musar* works.
9. On the Gaon see Betzalel Landau, *Ha-Gaon he-Hasid mi-Vilna* (Jerusalem: Sifriyati, 1967), p.122, p.179. Whereas the Gaon "admired" *Mesilat Yesharim* and studied it often, Rav Hayyim Volozhiner stated that the *musar* literature was more suited to "householders," and that scholars ought to turn to Hazal directly for edification (Etkes, Rabbi Israel Salanter, 52). But the evidence on Rav Hayyim's attitude is inconsistent. Compare Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, p. 56, note 106.
10. See some representative examples in Katz, *Pulmus*, pp.64–66, 104–12.
11. For further elucidation of this point see Elyakim Krumbein, *Musar for Moderns* (Hoboken: Ktav, 2005), pp.86–89.
12. (a) Rabbi Lamm writes about Rav Hayyim's attitude to *musar* texts, whose success is measured by their self-annihilation: once they have aroused the student to study Torah, they become superfluous (Lamm, *Torah*, p. 289). But I doubt that Rav Hayyim would apply this principle to his own NH. The matter of tension and paradox within

NH is addressed somewhat by Rabbi Lamm (p.307), but he basically attributes clear-cut consistency to the work. Here I will try to develop an alternate view.

(b) In his response to me, Rabbi Lamm writes that this paradox need not concern us. Writing a defense of Torah is part of Torah, and Rav Hayyim felt that Torah was under attack and had to be defended. Taking up his comment, it may be that when I grapple with this paradox, it is because I view the theology and piety that the work exudes not merely as a defense of pure Torah learning, but as a necessary component of the Torah personality that Rav Hayyim wanted to develop. The problematic would then hinge on how we read NH, which is the crux of the argument about to unfold.

13. Lamm, *Torah*, p.59.
14. Lamm, *Torah*, pp.61–62.
15. Lamm, *Torah*, pp.238–44.
16. Rabbi Lamm wrote to me that while Rav Hayyim's son revered his father tremendously, he may have consciously or unconsciously injected his own views into the introduction to the book. I would add, however, that Rav Yitzhak's portrait actually quotes his father's words, though one might still argue that his own inclinations dictated the weight he ascribed to those citations. Rabbi Lamm further adduced Rav Hayyim's assertion that *avoda* and *gemilut hasadim* must be done in accordance with Torah, which is a sign of the latter's relative superiority. This is elaborated further in *Torah* (pp. 164–65): Rav Hayyim says that since Revelation, Torah is the source of all religion, hence *avoda* and *hesed* derive their legitimacy from it alone. But this ideological statement on the source of their validity does not necessarily impact on the degree of *practical* exclusivity claimed by Torah itself at their expense. I emphasize again, that I seek to give the introduction its due, without denying the centrality of Torah in Rav Hayyim's worldview.
17. NH, part 4, chaps. 4–9.
18. Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter*, pp.40–41. Etkes also notes the instructive parallel between Rav Hayyim's instructions regarding learning, and the preparations for prayer as taught in Hasidism.
19. Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter*, p. 55.
20. I will mention one other case in point. As we have seen, the first three parts map out a program and a philosophy of extraordinary spirituality. The effort required in following this regimen can be warranted only on the supposition that success is important, and that the resulting achievement is enviable. Yet for fear that the practitioner become conceited, NH inserts the additional section, which proclaims that it is all just a "*mitzvah min ha-muvhar*." The main thing is the act itself, and Rav Hayyim even goes to the extreme of claiming that prayer is mainly an oral obligation, the inner correlate being a mere recommendation (a very extreme and unusual halakhic position). After this "put-down," who would bother working hard to increase his "purity of the heart?" Yet this is just what NH teaches: to prize excellence when it comes to working at it, and to belittle its luster after achieving it.
21. Lamm, *Torah*, p. 72.

22. Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter*, part one, chapter 4.
23. Rabbi Lamm (*Torah*, p. 60) enumerates the editions, reporting a Vilna printing in 1874; the next one of which he is aware took place in New York in 1944. Other sources (such as the Bibliography of the Hebrew Book CD and the Hebrew University Library catalog) record a New York edition from the 1920s. No source I consulted, including Winograd's *Otzar ha-Sefer ha-Ivri*, is aware of a European edition after 1874.
24. (a) See his memoirs, *Mekor Barukh*, part 4, chapter 39, section 3. The anecdote quoted there in the name of the Netziv is in fact one of the most memorable and pithy remarks to be found in NH, and is prominently situated there at the beginning of part 4 (chapter 2). It is unlikely that this is a mere accidental lapse, especially considering that the self-same ignorance is exhibited by the student Ephraim Movshitzki, as quoted in Immanuel Etkes and Shlomo Tikoczinski, eds., *Yeshivot Lita Pirkei Zikhronot* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shaza, 2004), p. 129. By the way, the anecdotal version does have a different nuance, not found in NH, it is used as a polemic against lengthy prayer. I believe that this change is in tune with the reappraisal of prayer at Volozhin, which I will mention shortly.
 (b) Prof. David Berger suggests that the decline in Kabbala study in Lithuania could underlie the decrease in NH's popularity. I agree, but in the course of history, Kabbala heavily influenced the lives of countless people who didn't learn it. To fully appreciate the development, we need to see the larger cultural context, as I will presently argue. The waning of Kabbala in Lithuania after 1850 has been noted by historians; see for example, A. Morgenstern, *Geulah be-Derekh ha-Teva* (Jerusalem, 5757), p. 26 (who has an explanation of his own for the phenomenon).
25. Etkes and Tikoczinski, *Yeshivot Lita*, p. 73.
26. Etkes and Tikoczinski, *Yeshivot Lita*, p. 77. The pious ideology of the "old Jewish quarter" was described expansively in Alan Nadler, *The Faith of the Mithnagdim* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). The contrast between the atmosphere in Volozhin at this time and the ascetic pessimism that permeates Nadler's portrayal is stark indeed. He briefly notes the intellectual snobbery of the yeshiva world beginning from the end of the nineteenth century (p. 164), but does not examine the cultural variation at the root of its appearance at this precise juncture. My thanks to Professor Shaul Stampfer for referring me to this source.
27. Etkes and Tikoczinski, *Yeshivot Lita*, p.125.
28. It is possible to observe a similar metamorphosis regarding Rav Hayyim of Volozhin himself. Virtually all of Rav Barukh Epstein's references to Rav Hayyim, listed in the biographical index of his *Mekor Barukh*, have to do with learning and halakhic decision-making. Compare this Torah-predominance to the picture Rav Yitzhak of Volozhin painted of his father in the preface to NH. On the *Gra* as Gaon and *hasid*, see Immanuel Etkes, *Yahid be-Doro* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1998), pp. 31–41; Nadler, *Faith*, pp. 88–90.
29. An instructive collection of these writings may be found in the edition of NH edited

- by Yissakhar Dov Rubin (Benei Berak, 5749 (1989), pp. 307–461. For a sampling of the kinds of topics mentioned herein, see pages 350–54, 362–66, 385, 432, 435, 440, 444 (paragraph 118).
30. Etkes and Tikoczinski, *Yeshivot Lita*, p. 72.
 31. Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, pp. 121–25.
 32. Rubin (ed.), NH, pp. 432–33.
 33. Eliezer Rivlin, *Ha-Tzadik Reb Yosef Zundel mi-Salant ve-Rabotav* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 54–58.
 34. Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, p. 145.
 35. Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, p. 165.
 36. Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, p. 99.
 37. Compare Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “*Ish ha-Halakha*,” ed. Pinhas Peli, *Be-Sod ha-Yahid veka-Yahad* (Jerusalem: Orot, 1976; translation mine, E.K.), p. 86: “Halakhic man draws himself a circle in this world and does not move from it. He wishes to purify this world of his, not to escape from it.” A fuller treatment of the Rav’s essay against the backdrop of the realities of Volozhin should be undertaken separately. All of this does not preclude the opposition of most Lithuanian rabbis to secular studies, and to other practical ramifications of Haskala. The new movement can still be credited with the establishment of the ground-rules of the debate, and of the criteria used by its very opponents to build their alternative.
 38. I attempted to deal with many of the following issues in *Musar for Moderns* (throughout), see above note 11. In addition, a teacher’s guide accompanying the book has been prepared by David Debow and is awaiting publication. My notes here will refer to other sources.
 39. Yaakov Feldman’s translations of the first three (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1996, 1996, 1999 respectively) are sensitive to the modern mind-set. (One could contest Rabbi Feldman’s position that the gap between today’s student and the *Mesilat Yesharim* is mainly a matter of how one translates. At any rate, his work is a significant contribution.) *Ohr Yisrael* was translated by Zvi Miller (Southfield: Targum, 2004). A useful and innovative commentary on *Hovot ha-Levavot* is Shlomo Toledano, *Dibbur u-Mahshava* (Jerusalem: Or ha-Ma’arav, 2004).
 40. ATID Foundation has started to develop materials for teachers using the thought of the Rav. These can be found at www.atid.org/journal/journal05/default.asp. In regard to Rav Kook, special mention should be made of David Avihayil, *Tikkun ha-Middot* (Mitzpe Ramon-Kfar Chabad, 5765), and David Samson and Tzvi Fishman, *The Art of T’shuva* (Jerusalem: Beit Orot, 5759).
 41. I believe this distinction is practically useful, even if conceding that theoretically, one could place “being” and “living” within the province of Halakha. Our definition of *musar* avoids direct connection with the Musar movement.
 42. An extensive treatment of this topic – Jewish and general – appears in Daniel Shalit, *Sefer ha-Kenyon* (Jerusalem, 2004).
 43. In the literature as well as in the Musar movement, there is a tendency to view all of religious life as a *tikkun* of the self. But more balanced or dialectic approaches

are or course tenable. The point is that *musar* can be recognized as vital even if it is one component in a comprehensive lifestyle. This connects with our discussion of NH. See also Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop, *Mei Marom* 1 (Jerusalem, 5732), pp. 64–66.

44. A modern orthodox perspective on this question can be gleaned from several chapters of Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *By His Light* (Jersey City: Ktav, 2003).
45. The teacher or planner would do well to be acquainted with Yosef Dan, *Safrut ha-Musar v'ha-Drush* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), which is an intellectual and historic treatment of the literature prior to the modern period.
46. For an effective introduction, Alan Morinis's first-person account in *Climbing Jacob's Ladder* (Canada: Broadway Books, 2002) is highly recommended.

3

Moving Beyond Lightness and Confronting Fears: Hasidic Thought on the Fear of Heaven

Alan Brill

In Rabbinic parlance, fear of heaven (*yirat shamayim*) means religion or a sense of one's obligation to religion. In medieval philosophic texts, fear of heaven is produced by the recognition of divine exaltedness. In Hasidic texts, fear becomes awe and a new emphasis is placed on the love of God over the fear of heaven. Yet the relationship to the divine that conditions Hasidic awe shares much with those discussed in early accounts of religious fear. Both the early modern and Hasidic texts emphasize the importance of making a continuous attempt to internally invoke the experience of God. The Besht, in

the late eighteenth century, expressed the practical meaning of this continuous experience:

In all that one sees or experiences, one should be remembering the blessed Divine Presence. In love, one remembers Divine Love, in fear, one remembers the Divine Awe of the Blessed Name. Even when one does bodily evacuations, one should consider it as discarding the bad from the good. (*Zavaat Harivash* 3b)

Clearly, the most important word here is “all.” Every perception and every experience, regardless of its positive or negative quality, should lead back to a thought of God.

Speaking to a twentieth-century audience, the Slonimer Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky, advocates the same focus on continuously relating to a living God by internalizing pietistic emotions.

A life filled with faith and trust, lucid and clear...A life filled with desire and yearning to experience *the light of the Living King*, to the point where his soul pines constantly. Even when he is involved in mundane matters...A life imbued with sanctity and purity through and through... He purifies and sanctifies himself to the point where even his physical activities become holy. (*Netivot Shalom*, Introduction)

We see that, both historically and presently, the Hasidic approach advocates reading pietistic works every day and teaches that the activity of the hasid is to keep the teachings of these works in mind. In all versions of Hasidism, there is an attempt to remember, reflect, internalize, engrave, and visualize the content of the prior classics. The Slonimer writes:

Now Israel, what does Hashem your God require of you. How is it possible to command an emotion? Since one cannot control one's emotions how can a commandment to fear be effective? The commandment concerns the obligation to reflect deeply in one's thoughts every day until

the matter becomes engraved upon his heart. Eventually the “thoughts of his heart” will become emotions. (*Nesivot Shalom, yesodei hatorah*, fear)

The innovation of Hasidism is not its description of piety, i.e., its nuanced articulation as fear or love, but rather its attempt to internalize piety. As part of his presentation, the Slonimer Rebbe quotes *Hovot Halevavot* on the subject of awareness of and dependence on God, *Zohar* on the need for knowledge of God, and early Hasidic texts on the alleviation of fear from sin. Two hundred years after the original Hasidic revival, many seekers find R. Berezovsky’s contemporary Hasidism appealing. They seek a living God, a life of fear integrated in love and faith, and an attempt to follow the classics of Jewish piety.

However, despite the rich and complicated tradition of the notion of *fear of God*, most modern Jewish formulations of fear of heaven borrow heavily from Rudolf Otto’s classic, *The Idea of the Holy*, which presents a romantic feeling of awe, the numinous, fear, and mystery as the Biblical concept of the holy. The experience of the holy is constructed as a private experience outside of prayer, study, punishment, or any conversionary experience. The paradigmatic example of this fear-as-awe, imagines the individual watching a thunderous storm and, inspired to awe by the destructive natural force, he reflects on his fleeting paradoxical relationship with transcendence. Otto’s “holy” is generalized throughout Jewish homiletics as a sense of the wondrousness of nature, the mystery of life, or peak experiences. While Otto’s approach is quite useful for teaching about fear as an entrance into the relationship with God, Hasidism’s articulation of fear should not be conflated with Otto’s.

The Hasidic tradition contains many subtly and not so subtly different forms of fear, of which there are several in pietistic works. Much of the fear is indebted to the fear of hell, visions of celestial realms, inner voices, and the awesome powers of the Divine name that gripped prior ages.¹ We have to understand the complex tradition of fear in the Hasidic record to understand the possible meanings and uses of *fear of God* in modern Hasidism and what they can contribute to our moral engagement with the modern world.

Furthermore, it is also important to distinguish Otto's approach from the approach of the nineteenth century theorist of religion Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917, *Primitive Culture*, 1871), who presented religion as a fear of God based on a desire to keep God out of one's life. In the later half of the twentieth century, following this approach Mary Douglas showed how a tight group identity uses fear of God to maintain the status quo and Nobert Elias showed how fear helps society create its norms and pass down traditions. They are certainly useful in looking at the Orthodox community, but they are not pietistic approaches.

One final important note, Hasidism is not just the late eighteenth century movement known from history books. Hasidism started as a revival moment in the mid-eighteenth century and has 260 years of changing history, with many diverse trends in many diverse contexts, culminating in contemporary Hasidism. Definitions of ecstatic prayer or of the zaddikim of 1760 are not the same as those of contemporary Hasidut. The very recent construct of Hasidism by Religious Zionists and Modern Orthodox as a tradition of emotionalism and singing adds further confusion. For this paper, Hasidism represents a number of trends in spirituality that make use of Safed piety, Maharal, and Eastern European discourses of fire and brimstone. In all these trends, pietistic works are applied to daily life. As I have suggested, the changing positions and trends of Hasidism throughout its 260-year history are the very things this paper will explore. The questions of fear that Hasidism continually revisits and revises still play a role in today's spirituality.²

HASIDISM AND ITS SOURCES

Hasidism contains much early modern thought on seeking one's personal sense of Divine command through applying prior pietistic works. The Hasidic works, however, were more explicitly concerned with prayer, enthusiasm, and love than with fear. Hence, much of this paper will deal with the antecedents of Hasidism in prior devotional approaches – dependence, knowledge, fear of punishment, and direct experience – in order to show how fear of heaven becomes rearticulated within the Hasidic tradition.

I will examine several unique approaches of the early modern period (roughly from 1520 to 1815) – those of the Maharal, R. Eliyahu De Vidas's *Reshit Hokhmah*, and R. Zvi Hirsch Kaidanover's *Kav Hayashar*. Maharal, like the pre-modern Ashkenaz, understood fear of heaven, characterized by a sense of dependence and recognition of one's contingency in the world, as a return to one's inner self. De Vidas's *Reshit Hokhmah*, an example of Safed piety, explains the relationship between the fear of heaven and the knowledge of the kabbalistic cosmology of the world. Kaidanover's *Kav Hayashar* understands religious fear, somewhat literally, as a fear of the demonic elements all around us. Finally, the *Shenai Luhot Habrit* of Isaiah Horowitz combined the last two modes of piety and was a major influence on Hasidism.

After exploring the early modern conceptions of fear of heaven, I will then show how these earlier ideas are manifest in a number of Hasidic contexts. First, I will explore Ukrainian Hasidism in which one learns to trust enthusiasm over fear. Then I will turn to the school of the Maggid of Mezeritch in which earlier texts are reread with mystical overtones. And finally, I will consider the learned urban Hasidism of the Kotzk school which considers the place of divine experience relative to Torah study. I will conclude this paper by opening a discussion on the role of Hasidism and the fear of heaven in our contemporary world conditioned by this particular understanding of the concept's history.

MAHARAL: CONVERSION AND DEPENDENCE

Rabbi Yehudah ben Betzalel Loewe (called by his acronym Maharal c.1525–1609) was an eclectic Renaissance Jewish thinker who served as rabbi in Posen and Prague.³ His writings were published in his lifetime, but were eclipsed by Safed piety for 130 years until they were republished at the beginning of the Hasidic movement to be used by Byelorussian Hasidism. Fear plays an important role in Maharal's thought and he presents fear in at least four different but related ways: as a sense of human contingency, as an offering of oneself before God, as a sense of human value and meaning, and as an understanding of the true sense of one's self as connected to God.

For Maharal, religious knowledge leads to fear and fear leads to higher knowledge. This dialectical relationship between fear and knowledge is derived from Proverbs 3:17, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God." This verse teaches us, according to Maharal, that God is the ultimate cause of everything in our lives and that, therefore, true wisdom teaches us to fear our ultimate cause. The fear produced by understanding God as the ultimate cause overcomes the limits of our human intellectual knowledge. It is through fear that we come to understand our position within a giving and receiving relationship (*mashbia/mekabel*) with God. Maharal considers these religious forms of knowledge, our contingency, our fear, our acknowledgment of our indebtedness to the Supreme Being as a higher form of knowledge than ordinary knowledge. (*Netivot Olam*, Yirat Hashem, ch. 1; *Derekh Hahayim* 3:11)

Since, for Maharal, God is the cause of everything, everything but God, including man, should be considered transitory and contingent. Proper fear is considering oneself as nothing before the divine and infinite. It is the daily consciousness of one's contingency and fleeting existence. Maharal paints an ideal of fear as offering in sacrifice our human souls to God. He specifically distinguishes the effects of *fear of God* from those of *love of God*. For Maharal, love of God is an acquisition that leads us to cleave to God and religious experience, while fear is a true letting go without any acquisition. (*Netivot Olam*, Yirat Hashem, ch. 4)

According to Maharal's logic, a person with fear of God is separated from ordinary existence since fear creates God's kingship and dominion. He suggests that this makes the God-fearing person into a king according to two principles. First, because fear is an ordering of our world, the fearful person, through his fear, becomes part of the ordered universe, the royal court, which is opposed to the randomness of ordinary peasant life. Second, the acceptance of God as King makes the intrinsically unworthy and insignificant human being worthy of the world as an effect of God.

In this way, Maharal treats Rabbinic Judaism as a separate world order (*nivdal*) and one's goal is to be part of the system. In order to have true fear one needs to fill oneself with the wisdom of the

Torah, which functions as a connection to God's world order. Fear, for Maharal, teaches us about the need for a Divine order, while sin, the opposite of fear and based on a forgetfulness of our contingency, leads to dispersion and nothingness. We have two choices: either to offer ourselves up to God, or to dissipate into purposelessness and nonbeing. For Maharal, there is no intrinsic value to life outside of one's relationship with God. (*Netivot Olam*, passim, especially *Teshuvah*, and *Bushah*)

Maharal's anthropology postulates that the *Image of God* and thereby the human connection to God (and Torah), exists in the womb. Birth and the human condition are falls from this natural primordial connection. The mission for Maharal is to attempt to return to this point rather than to attain any new perfection. This point separates Maharal from most other Jewish thinkers who are concerned about perfection. To return to this primordial state one needs to conduct one's actions on the straight path of the Torah.⁴ According to Maharal, scholars have greater problems with fear of God than do ordinary people who naturally know their maker. For the ordinary person, the physical is the primary separation between man and God. The Torah elides this separation. Yet the scholar replaces concern with the physical with concern for the self and for personal wisdom, which further separates him from God.

Maharal's philosophy can be characterized as anti-cultural, in the sense that according to Maharal one should relinquish the ordinary realm in a quest for meaning. Yet, Maharal's approach rings psychologically true for many within modern culture. Many of the commitments to God attained in outreach, in community, and in seeking meaning in life can best be conceptualized through using Maharal. Echoes of Maharal's thought can be found in the philosophies of twelve-step programs, which require members to give themselves up to a higher power. Many sing the song "In my heart I will built a tabernacle (*mishkan*)...to offer up my soul (*belevavi mishkan evneh*)," a close précis of a paragraph of Maharal (*Netiv Hateshuvah*, ch. 3), indicating an impulse toward the conversionary self-sacrifice of the soul. Therefore, Maharal's thought should be a recurring reference point for understanding a variety of forms of

fear of God for those seeking meaning in life, a moral order, or a conversionary experience.

RESHIT HOKHMAH: KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

R. Eliyahu De Vidas, a student of R. Moses Cordovero, imbibed heavily from various streams of Safed piety and Mediterranean lay devotions, both of which influenced his classic work *Reshit Hokhmah*. This work became one of the basic sources for Safed piety, both among the merchants of Western Europe and the isolated saints of Eastern Europe. It was frequently reprinted and available in several best-selling summaries.

Representing one of the fullest treatments of fear in Judaism, *Reshit Hokhmah*, places the need for fear of God at the very start of the book and defines fear as knowledge of God. For De Vidas, all of one's piety flows from the intellectual knowledge of God derived from the study of Kabbalah, one's contemplation of the implications of this knowledge, and the modeling of one's life accordingly. De Vidas offers a variety of approaches to this knowledge, each briefly stated since a pietistic book was to be read slowly and contemplatively. A single short paragraph becomes a spiritual practice.

Following the kabbalistic approach of Cordovero his teacher, De Vidas presents a synthesis of Maimonides, *Zohar*, and midrash in which each approach elucidates the meaning of the other. Maimonides's imperative to know God is defined using the interdivine structures of the *Zohar*, which in turn can be successfully used to explain mystical midrash. In this interpretive tradition, Maimonides, the Neo-Platonist with a need to contemplate celestial hierarchy, becomes identified with the great Chain of Being of the Kabbalah, and both can be used to explain the Midrashim that treat knowledge as participation in the Divine. R. De Vidas's themes and variations on knowing God include knowledge of the infinite aspects of the *eyn sof*, knowledge of the Tetragrammaton, and knowledge of the divine filling the world. Thus we can see that in contrast to Maharal's emphasis on conversion and dependence, R. Eliyahu De Vidas requires intellectual knowledge.

The most important kind of fear, according De Vidas, is the

inner awe of the infinite aspects of the Divine. One realizes the smallness of one's place in the chain of being. The infinite *eyn sof* causes, animates, and radiates into the entire chain of being. It is a divine chain of being, a Jacob's ladder in which we are to appreciate all the elements of creation and to partake of the *Zohar's* "river that flows from Eden." True inner fear is one's relationship to the *eyn sof*. (Ch. 1)

The realization that everything is connected to the infinite leads one to fear of God through six precepts. (1) To see that the Divine illuminates the world and without it all is dark. Light is one of the basic metaphors of sensing the divine in midrash and Kabbalah, and in fact in almost all mystical systems. Instructions for sensing the light range from pure Torah study to specific light meditations. (2) To gain a fleeting attempt to grasp infinity conceptually. This grasping gives one a sense of finitude and contingency before a great being. (3) To sense God's manifestation in the world. God is actively pulsating into the world and has presence in our realm. (4) To sense the Divine mercy (*hesed* or *caritas*) as it extends to us at every moment. (5) Practically, to live as if one sees that all of one's life is dependent on God. (6) To see all objects in this world corresponding to God as a vestige. (ch. 2) These six elements articulate a relationship to divinity that anticipates Otto's sense of the Holy, yet for De Vidas this relationship comes from a requisite study of Kabbalah rather than from a natural experience. In addition to the six elements that govern man's relationship to the infinite, De Vidas also emphasizes knowledge of the aspects of the Divine's relationship to the world such as the divine names, the throne, and the angelic realm.

Besides study, in order to purify one's mind, De Vidas teaches that one should contemplate these matters with visualizations. He advocates visualizing the divine name on each limb (66). He continues to follow the classical contemplations of Jewish piety known from Bahye's *Duties of the Heart* and onward. Among these are the precepts that one is nothing before the infinite creator, that he gives us goodness even though he does not need us, and that we can cease to be in an instant (50). Of the thirty meditations in Bahye's *Heshbon Hanefesh*, De Vidas selects one

in particular for special citation – the contemplation that everything is doing God’s will and to realize that since God fills the world then one needs shame before His ever-presence (Ch. 3, 75).

For De Vidas, one would be opting out of the glory of God by ignoring the study of Kabbalah. The failure to imagine God in the natural order leaves one without any real sense of God. If he is correct, then we moderns fundamentally deny ourselves a sense of the fear of God when we accept a secular natural order. Even modern kabbalistic approaches that do talk about creating a sense of the Divine in our lives tend to avoid specific cosmological details in order to evade difficult inconsistencies with our modern, secular cosmology. Despite the difficulties of coupling kabbalistic knowledge with a secular natural order, the Kabbalah must be integrated into the broad discussion of theology.

KAV HAYASHAR AND EARLY HASIDUT

R. Zvi Hirsch Kaidanover’s *Kav Hayashar* epitomizes the fearful world of the seventeenth century. It contains vivid descriptions of the hell fires awaiting the wicked (even hotter than those of *Reshit Hokhmah*), the dangers of succubæ created through nocturnal emissions, a multifarious demonology, and descriptions of the various dangers of incorrect ritual performance. For us, in the twenty-first century, this mode of fearing God is perhaps outdated, or perhaps not.⁵ It is, however, historically important to understanding Hasidism.

The Ukrainian disciples and colleagues of R. Israel the Baal Shem were anxious about the fearfulness of sin all around them in the physical world. As noted by many scholars, part of the attraction of early Hasidim was its easing of the burden of religious fears. As a popular revivalist movement, Hasidism taught that God is found in all activities and that one can relate to God in many direct ways. Love, prayer, and enthusiasm can ransom one from the grip of fire and brimstone.

R. Nahman of Bratzlav is famous today for his statement that “when a person has to cross a very narrow bridge, the principal thing

is not to fear anything (*Likkute Moharan* 11:48),” yet he retained a strong visceral fear of sin, physicality, heresy, and punishment.

It is man’s nature to be drawn to worldly temptations, and this can be overcome only through the fear of punishment ...Philosophy raises doubts and questions, strengthening one’s natural inclinations away from God.... Although the *Zohar* belittles the mere fear of punishment, our moral classics write that this is still the main gateway to true devotion. (*Sihot Haran*, 5)

While believing that fear was both rational and morally purposeful, he offered the individual ways to combat fear by suggesting various wondrous corrections: the recitation of psalms, mikvah immersion, clapping, dancing, enthusiastic prayer, and story telling. The shame of sin, he taught, could be mitigated through these actions.

Rav Nahman acknowledged a complicated relationship between practical fear of punishment and fear of God. He taught, “The quality of fear itself fears God.” Yet he also suggested that depression causes apathy, which in turn, lessens the fear of God. (*Likutey Moharan*, No. 148) Fear lessens apathy, but his active attitude toward alleviating the shame of sin guarded against the tendency toward depression inherent in an exclusively punitive world. Rav Nahman’s discussions of fear, depression, and apathy deeply resonate with modern psychological and ethical concerns. Rav Nahman connects that lack of fear to apathy and depression to a personified fear that itself is fearful, meaning that the world is a fearful place. The question resonates with modern senses of the self, yet his solution offers a personification of the problem.

We find a similar understanding of fear in the writings of R. Ephraim of Sladikov, (the *Degel Mahaneh Ephraim*), in which the world is depicted as a fearful pit and by grasping the presence of God as a lifeline one attains awe. We can see some distinction here between fear and the fear of God as awe that complicates earlier accounts and begins a logical progression from *fear of heaven* to

the *love of God* emphasis of Hasidism. Similarly, R. Yakov Yosef of Polyanje wrote in the name of the Baal Shem Tov, “I heard in the name of my teacher, where there is fear there is no pleasure and the place where there is pleasure there is no fear.” It is only in moving beyond the inherent fears of corporeality by cleaving to God that one comes to a proper fear of God. Statements like, “thereby human fear is transformed into the love of God,” of which we find many in early Hasidism, reflect a logic similar to those considered above which articulate *fear of God* as a sublimation of human fear. The difference here is that the human fear becomes not sublime fear, but sublime love.

Most texts suggest that one can sublimate fear into love of God on their own, but some need the Zaddik to do it for them. Menachem Nahum of Chernobyl comments that “zaddikim transform the source of fear and awe into love and desire.” (Green translation, p. 100)⁶ We have here the charismatic figure of the Zaddik to ease the burden of fear by offering his ability to bear responsibility and allowing the hasid to return home solely to focus on love. More importantly, we see in this statement a recognition that religious experiences or conversionary experiences that may start in fear actually need to be tempered with love to survive the long haul of life.

HASIDUT FROM THE SCHOOL OF THE MAGID OF MEZRITCH

The Hasidic texts from the school of the Maggid of Mezritch display a revivalist encouragement of the mystical nullification and divine immanence present in the early modern record. These texts contain varied revisions of early modern accounts providing new emphases and motivations for the fear of heaven. For example, the imperative, “When some fearful event happens that you hear about, know that from heaven they are hinting to you to cleave to the root of fear,” echoes the earlier suggestions to see God as personally involved in every moment. (*Besht al Hatorah Behukotai*, No. 7) The Hasidic claim that “fear of God automatically causes all adversaries to fall away,” (*Derekh Hasidim*, p. 282) adds to fear a magic potency. Statements like, “Continuously see in your mind’s eye that God

looks at you as another person looking at you,” (*Derekh Hasidim*, p. 142) suggest a watchful but humanized God intensifying both the motivation of fear, because God sees us, and motivation of a personal connection with God, because he sees us as another person does. Early Hasidic texts also remind us that in moments of corporeal affliction we should not forget God. “You should have continuous fear from God even at the time of affliction, conversely at the time of affliction, heaven forefend, that you do not have only fear from God.” (*Derekh Hasidim*, p. 131) The important points here are that the hasid has an individual relationship with a personified God and that, while the Neo-Hasid reads many of these texts as expressionistic, the early Hasid found magical thinking efficacious. Both of these attitudes reoriented the individual’s relationship to the divine and consequently reconfigured the notion of fear of God.

Mystical and ecstatic forms of fear represent a particularly significant revision that early Hasidic thought made upon earlier notions. For example, Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, the author of *Pri Ha-aretz*, expanded Maharal’s notion of fear into a mystical awe, an annihilation into the divine:

When he gazes intently at the root and source of his awareness of Him, blessed be He, he is unnerved in His blessed presence for the Blessed One is the giver and he the recipient. Every recipient is unnerved – that is they all become annihilated and absorbed into the giver. Awe is thus the ultimate in holding close.... The consciousness of the recipient is that it has no life or existence besides the giver.

In this revised account, fear becomes the ability to gaze into the divine and go into a state of annihilation that eventually reaches a state of rapture. The experience is the overwhelming sense of merging into the Divine; human concerns melt in the awe of His presence.

A more striking addition of the mystical account of fear is that in the ecstatic experience, one is possessed by a Pentecostal presence of God that speaks through the

pious. In the act of prayer, awe is both the initial rapture from God and the subsequent Divine gift.

True Awe, however, is experienced as being seized by a shuddered-trembling; and out of the awe of sudden realization, one loses orientation momentarily, and does not know where one is. Its result is experienced as one's awareness becoming purified. At times tears well up of themselves...One who does not know the likeness of this, is not even a servant of God...and does not render the service worthy of a Jew at all. (*Besht al Hatorah Noah*, No. 59)

When one begins to pray; immediately upon saying "O Lord, open my lips;" the *shekhinah* is en clothed in the person, and is speaking the words of prayer. And when the person shall have integrated the faith that the *Shekhinah* is speaking these words, certainly there will descend upon one the consciousness of the Awe and fear. (*Besht al Hatorah Noah*, No.96)

In these texts, awe is an experience of nullification and mystical union, a peak moment that entirely transcends ordinary life, rather than the continuous path as described by thinkers like Maharal. However, Hasidism, like modern American Pentecostalism, assumes that these pneumatic gifts are available to everyone who seeks them. Everyone can cultivate a presence of God speaking through him or her. *Zaddikim*, however, are those who are completely divested of corporeality and can maintain this continuous mystical life. Hasidism offers everyone a direct presence of God in every moment and, for some, a mystical ecstasy.

A major strength of Hasidism is its self-conscious reflection on the experience of fear. Hasidic texts acknowledge that sometimes what appears to be fear of God is, in fact, melancholia or depression. "There are those who pray in despondency, due to an excess of black bile overcoming them, and think that they are praying with great awe." Hasidism also considers not only the proper experience of fear, but the proper consequences of fear. "Upon concluding one's prayer,

one must be carefully observant of one's comportment, because if one prays with a fear of God one is able to easily fall into a state of anger." Thus Hasidism encourages both revision of and reflection on the nature of *fear of God*. (*Besht al Hatorah Noah*, No. 167; *Degel Mahanh Ephraim, Ki Tissa*)

RABBI ELIMELEKH OF LYZENSK

To achieve continuity in the practice of cultivating fear of God, Rabbi Elimelekh of Lyzensk wrote an ethical will to be read by his followers everyday that was included in many Eastern European prayer books. He advocates visualizing one's death as a martyr whenever one has free time.

At any time when one is free from learning Torah, especially when idly sitting alone in his room or lying on his bed unable to sleep, he should have in mind the mitzvah of "I shall be made holy among the children of Israel." He should feel and imagine as if a great fire was burning before him reaching until heaven. (*Tzetal katan*, No. 1)

The fear of death is a very human and very widespread phenomenon. This death meditation alleviates the anxieties by facing the fear directly. The recent resurgence of meditation practice in the modern West may have refamiliarized us enough with the practice to make this once again a useful resource for rehabilitating and channeling our contemporary fears.

A less frightful passage from Rabbi Elimelekh seeks to motivate the hasid by encouraging him to have in mind the image of a motivation coach

One should always imagine, and especially when he is reading this Ethical Will, that a person is standing before him. He is near him shouting at him to follow all of the words that are written in it...Once accustomed to this, it will cause him to have great inspiration, sparks of fire, and a holy divine flame. (*Tzetal katan*, No.5)

Motivation will encourage a continuous sense of the fear of God. Similar to motivational speakers in business, the results of this approach are positive. Piety is not about thinking about Hasidic homilies or kabbalistic symbolism but the change to one's daily schedule and one's ability to entrepreneur fear in one's life. This is especially applicable to moderns who are not connected to living exemplars which can create fear, the motivational imagination can serve in its place.

POLISH HASIDISM

The followers of R. Menahem Mendel of Kotzk (1787–1859), created an elite group of rabbinic scholars who encouraged his students to awaken and experience God directly. Many in the twentieth century were attracted to this approach because of its modern sense of the psyche. The school of Kotzk rejected Torah study without Hasidic experience. The Kotzker rebbe asked: "What is the difference between a Hasid and a Mitnaged? The Hasid has fear and trepidation before God and the Mitnaged has trepidation before the Shulkhan Arukh." Awe of God is greater than Torah, and furthermore, one needs to internalize this awe. Stories reflecting this attitude abound: The Kotzker was reported to have once asked a student, who wanted to know about fear of heaven, if a wolf ever frightened him. The student said yes. The Kotzker then said that one's fear of God should have the same immediacy without reflection. Reb Simhah Bunim once told of a student of R. Nathan of Chelm who was unable to pray on Rosh Hashanah due to his immense awe and trepidation about the presence of God on that day. The fear-inspiring presence of God is sought on holidays, on every Sabbath, and ultimately the goal is to live in the moment of continuous presence.

The possibility of living in the continuous presence of God could, by certain accounts, lead to a personal relationship with God that superseded even Torah study in moral efficacy. R. Menahem Mendel of Kotzk said, "Even one's Torah and mizvot may not be God's will." He taught his students to seek a personal calling and to continuously worry and fear what God wants. R. Menahem's student,

R. Mordekhai Yosef Leiner of Izbica (d. 1854), develops this theme of uncertainty in one's religious life.

Even if a person is careful to keep the entire *Shulkhan Arukh*, he is still in doubt if he intended to the depth of God's will because it is exceedingly deep. "Who can find it?" Furthermore, "if" is the language of prayer. God (as if it were possible) prays, "If when they follow my statutes, they would reach the depth of my will." (*Mei Ha-Shiloah* II: 27a–b).

Fear of God, for R. Leiner, requires the individual search for what God wants. R. Zadok of Lublin decreases some of the fear of God by returning to the *Shulkhan Arukh* as a source of God's light.

One might have thought that it would be better for a person to turn at every moment to God to enlighten his eyes, telling him what to perform and how to behave, instead of having a fixed statute like the *Shulkhan Arukh* as a path to follow without turning to God in all his paths. But in truth it is to his benefit that he has this brilliant illuminating light on which to lean for support. Without Torah he would be in continuous fear lest he err and not perform the true will of God. (*Zidkat Hazaddik*, No. 211)

R. Zadok mitigated the immense fear that stems from the uncertainty of God's will, but it is important to note that fear is not phrased as submission but as illumination. In these approaches, turning to the halakhah is itself a form of attaining an inner awe of God. Otto's numinousness is not supplemented by the halakhah, rather the experience itself generates the halakhah.

Proper fear of God according to R. Leiner is to accept our utter dependence upon God. Once again we have an idea of dependence similar to Otto's numinousness, yet R. Leiner preached the more radical view that "everything is in the hands of Heaven, even the

fear of Heaven.” This gives us a sense of a continuous connection to God so complete that everything is considered determined. This kind of connection is not a numinous moment but a continuous presence. The hasid becomes solely a passive tool in the hands of the Divine Will.⁷

Finally, Polish Hasidism offers us the writings of R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib of Gur, the *Sefat Emet*, who combined the immediacy of the school of Kotzk with Maharal’s explanation of the commandments. Whereas Maharal taught that divine order gives structure in a top-down manner, the *Sefat Emet* takes a bottom-up approach in which the hasid has a personal task of internalizing the exaltedness, awe, and power of renewal that God offers. To internalize the divine order and remove the other elements of human consciousness, one requires study, contemplation, silence, and purity.

A PERSONAL SENSE

Do I actually think that we can still use the traditional ideas of dependence on God, a kabbalistic worldview, magical techniques, mystical union, zaddikim, and personal illumination as an approach to halakhah? I think yes, but with significant qualifications. The question should be: how can these prior approaches be used to lead people to a personal sense of the divine? They cannot be accepted in their original cultural settings of Eastern Europe; they have to be cultivated to lead contemporary believers in America forward.

In the early twentieth century, with the discovery of the modern world by Eastern European Jews, Rav Kook grappled with the inherited fearful piety of his Eastern European education. He advocated seeking a more natural morality to overcome oppressive fear of sin. “The fear of Heaven must not suppress man’s natural morality for then the fear of heaven is no longer pure.” Rav Kook also offers an important observation about fear. Fear results when the soul does not match with general reality. We do not fear that which is normal and expected. One who is unburdened with sins and maintains a healthy connection to the social order will not suffer from excessive worries and fears. (*Ein Ayah*, Vol. 1, pp. 324–25)

Rav Kook considered a new era, one without fear, immanent since Judaism was going to match the new reality through the revival of Judaism in the land of Israel. He wanted to move beyond the reality of Eastern Europe and fully confront a modern era that would not need fear anymore. I am sorry to say that the new reality did not occur; fear and sin are still very much with us. Fear of God, in particular, is always and will always be with us, but our contemporary post-secular age brings religion into our lives in new ways. The central question of applying *fear of God* in America asks us how to make it an ennobling fear rather than a regressive one.

Robert Wuthnow, the leading sociologist of American religion, aptly described the changes in the American quest for spirituality in the last three decades. A large percentage of American religious believers now accept twelve-step religion as well as outreach and conversionary religion, and also seek direct voices from God. For many, small miracles, daily providence, and direct engagements are paramount in daily religious practice. Other scholars point out that currently twenty three percent of American Christians are pentecostal and accept speaking in tongues, exorcism, and gifts of the spirit. Following these trends Jews are looking for a spirituality that will reaffirm the real presence of the Divine in the world.⁸

Hasidism can be used to conceptualize various activities, including *musar* classes where one is taught to see God's hand in daily life, *tehillim* group discussions, and much of the devotion of our outreach and youth movements. Hasidic piety is even shown when a rosh yeshiva gives out *chulent*, in a preverbal act, to feed his students at a *tish*. Hasidic approaches have already been widely adapted in our era for America, especially those of Rabbi Abraham Twerski, as well as the popularizations of Chabad and Breslov. Rabbi Twerski's adaptation of the twelve-step program of giving oneself to God captures the ordinary person's sense that their inherent frailties make the ideal ever unattainable. Chabad teaches that we need to use all tools available to lead a more meaningful life and that moments of personal connection to the Divine can motivate that pursuit.

R. Menachem Mendel Schneersohn makes extensive use of

Maharal in advocating the extraordinary moments of connection and meaning in life. Breslov teaches how “we are all turkeys under the table,” insane, forgetful of God, and he urges us to put away the illusory thoughts and sinful desires of our suburban lives. All of them are directly confronting the problems of life in modern America.

Particularly revealing is the popularity of a Neo-Hasidic *musar* work rapidly devoured by those seeking a path to God in our communities – Rabbi Itamar Shwartz, *Belivavi Mishkan Evneh* (Jerusalem, 2003). Its basic message is that we must overcome our physical natures through submission, separation, and removal from the false physical world. Then, after separation through following hasidut, one learns to have fear of God through nullification of the self. For this author, every event in a person’s life is from God and every moment of every day is the location of our choosing to serve God. Since all events are from God, there is a complete relinquishing of the sense of autonomy, choice, and reflection. Why does this appeal to people with suburban lives? I submit that it provides a way to get outside of the physicality and vanity that characterize such lives. The constant white noise of contemporary life is the backdrop for this desire to call a halt to the sounds of consumerism, media overload, and even intellectual innovation. When the secular means we use to insulate ourselves and maintain security, despite our fears, fail, extreme fear of heaven serves as a replacement for the fears of contemporary life.

In the United States, fear has become a major aspect of our culture. The social construction of American fear in the last thirty years has shifted its terminology from internal anxiety to an ever-present free-floating vulnerability and sense of risk. Fear is constructed based on one’s sense of sin, failings, or addiction. There is the fear of failure and the overwhelming fear of the post-9/11 world and general vulnerability before larger forces.⁹ Fear of God sets in because people do indeed feel that their lives are out of order. Yet once it has, Hasidism, with its ability to first acknowledge and then work within the human condition gives the modern fearful the resources to be religious. Many today, as always, tend to seek religion when they do not feel that all is well. Contemporary Orthodox Jews seek to find

God in any way possible, but especially as a kitchen deity, near to one's own struggles with making kugel, catching the LIRR, or fixing the car – fighting for them in the daily choices of the supermarket, playground, and office. Others find comfort in the magical thinking that the performance of halakhah will set everything aright. Yet without instruction on the proper fear of God such religious expressions simply don the modern banality that religious feeling arises to confront. The complex Hasidic articulation of fear of heaven can teach us to go further and seek conviction, our own sense of dependence, our own sense of the presence of God, and our own sense of immediacy. Maharal taught that in finding the self we are finding God. Safed Kabbalists taught that the study of the nature of God and the soul could provide religious and moral certainty. Hasidism teaches one to find God in all moments, an approach which provides us with a way to confront the world with moral seriousness and religious confidence.

If the above discussion of fear of God was utterly foreign, it may be because certain centrist Orthodox institutions specifically attract those who are not interested in Hasidic views on the fear of God. Or it may be that they are addressing their fears elsewhere, especially in external battles. “Fear needs no definition. It is a primal, and so to speak, subpolitical emotion,” wrote the political scientist Raymond Aron. Yet fear is a poor adviser for the external social world, and we must fear those who live in fear since their judgment about the external world can be corrupted. We cannot judge the external world based on fear, or as Rashi taught “hatred destroys judgment (*sinah mikalkalet et hashurah*).” (Rashi Bereshit 22:3 based on Midrash).

What these early modern and early Hasidic accounts really provide are ways of converting destructive fear into useful fear. Fear can be a response to a personal anxiety, uncertainty, or vulnerability that arises from within. Such fear, as certain thinkers have acknowledged, can become destructive by resulting in depression and apathy. Fear can also come from without, from perceived uncontrollable forces beyond the self. This can lead to a demonizing of the other, the destructive consequences of which are obvious. Rav Nahman offers examples of both. He demonizes the modern world

and new challenges. He also deals with the fear of libidinal drives and weaknesses of mental health. But Rav Nahman could not stop the confrontation with modernity by recoiling in fear. Clearly the way we construct and use fear must be a central concern for a modern Orthodox audience that seeks neither depressive withdrawal nor sectarian isolationism. This paper suggests that *fear of God* can usefully govern our relationship and has sought to examine just what that term can and should mean for us.

CONCLUSION

The classics of early modern piety remain timeless for those seeking a personal sense of the Divine in their lives. As I mentioned at the outset, Hasidism is not about Zaddikim and the events of 250 years ago. Some seek an authentic Hasidic approach of continuously working on their faith, love, and fear of God using the writings of the Slonimer rebbe. They want the traditional. Others need an adaptation. Just as the Hasidic movement was a popularist adaptation of older pietistic works, so too we have a 150-year heritage of Neo-Hasidic works applying these texts to life in the Western world.

One example of a contemporary thinker using the Hasidic ideas of this paper is Rav Yehudah Amital, retired Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Har Etzion, who offers a paraphrase of the Kotzker rebbe he inherited from his grandmother. R. Amital distinguishes between “fear of God” and *frumkeit*; the former applies to one’s sense of doing the will of God at any given moment, while the latter describes one’s scrupulous performance of the *mitsvot*. As his grandmother taught him, *frum* is an anagram for “*fier rishus unvenig mizvos* – much wickedness and little action.” *Frumkeit* is not always a good thing and Rav Amital accepts this maternal critique of over-scrupulousness. Rather than taking an approach of *frumkeit* – habituation, external obedience, and scrupulousness – one should seek fear of God to reach one’s personal sense of divine command.¹⁰

How do we reach such fear today? R. Schneur Zalman of Liady (Tanya, ch. 41) discusses a lower fear of punishment and a higher fear of God’s grandeur as ever-present in God’s oneness. He prefers the latter and sees the former as only a step on the way. Rav Amital

argues that since today we no longer relate to the fear of punishment, we should return to the medieval ideas of God's exaltedness and grandeur. Since pietistic fear of God flows from the conception of God, to formulate a theology of God is essential, but alas I do not envision a return to either medieval or eighteenth century metaphysics. To be effective we need to creatively connect fear to a theology of God, mindful of both the need for theological continuity and the practical wane of medieval metaphysics. We need a standard by which to encourage ennobling theologies and to avoid the primitive, the kitchen deity, and the superstitious. Modern fears and these therapeutic practices, which it conditions, should not replace actual theologies of God based on the high theologies and philosophies of classic Jewish texts. If we cannot follow medieval Kavod theories, Aristotelian hierarchies, Maharal, and Cordovero, then we desperately need theologies of God for today. Also we cannot discuss fear without love. We have not had a conference on love of God, or on holiness, truth, integrity, dignity, or humility. Any discussion of the application of these Hasidic ideas of fear would need to discuss these broader religious issues.

In this paper, I offered several other models of fear that come from the pietistic works that influenced Hasidism and from Hasidism itself. Peter Berger argues that there are "signals of transcendence" as part of the human condition. Forty years ago to understand those signals, perhaps Otto was sufficient. But Otto's model of the fear of God encompasses neither the variety of models found in Hasidic texts, nor the variety of experiences in contemporary America. What I have tried to show is that recognizing the complexity of *fear of God* in early Hasidic texts offers us a richer set of tools for thinking about how to construct and position fear of God in our contemporary world than does Otto's overly-simple theory of the numinous. This paper seeks merely to open what must be a continual discussion keeping in mind that, as the Baal Shem Tov taught, "it is harder to become a God-fearing person than a scholar."

NOTES

1. A good place to enter these worldviews is Piero Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).
2. This paper will not deal, however, with the many medieval elements in Hasidut. Nor will it deal with the traditional non-textual and physical forms of Eastern European fear of heaven such as regular immersion in a mikvah, asceticism, and wearing a *yarmulke* (or *kapel*) or the social elements of fearing heaven through rejecting doctors, modern life, and secular studies. Also beyond the scope of this paper are the major twentieth century trajectories of Hasidism that incorporate twentieth century perspectives, such as R. Kalonomous Kalman Shapira, and the writings of the last three Lubavitcher Rebbes. These texts have more to do with modernity and justly deserve their own full discussion. Finally, I have left the resources offered by Ramhal, Vilna Gaon, and Musar to another presenter.
3. See Alan Brill, "Maharal as an Early Modern Thinker." *Kabbalah*, 17 (2007).
4. Yorem Jacobson, "The Image of God as the Source of Man's Evil According to the Maharal of Prague," ed. Joseph Dan, *Binah*, Vol. 3, pp. 135–58.
5. On the importance of demons in the seventeenth century, see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). One of the most thoughtful discussions of the role of demons in modern religion is found in Reginald A. Ray, *Indestructible Truth: The Living Spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2000).
6. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, *Upright Practices and Enlightenment of the Eyes*, ed. Arthur Green (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1982).
7. On the topic of Polish Hasidism, see Alan Brill, *Thinking God: The Mysticism of Rabbi Zadok HaKohen of Lublin* (New York: Yeshiva University Press/Ktav, 2002).
8. Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
9. Frank Furedi, *The Culture of Fear; Risk Taking And The Morality Of Low Expectations*, (London: Cassell, 1997); Frank Furedi, *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability In an Uncertain Age* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
10. Alan Brill, "Worlds Destroyed, Worlds Rebuilt: The Religious Thought of R. Yehudah Amital," *Edah Journal*, 5:2 (Sivan, 2006).

4

Between Heaven and Earth: Curricula, Pedagogical Choices, Methodologies and Values in The Study and Teaching of *Tanakh*: Where They Can and Should Lead Us

Nathaniel Helfgot

For the rational faculty (of the human being) is the foundation (of evaluating any interpretation) as the Torah was not given to one who is devoid of the rational faculty and the

angel that mediates between man and God is his reason.... The fifth approach, the foundation of my personal commentary, is the one which is correct in my eyes, standing before the Lord, from whom alone I shall fear, and thus will not show favoritism [to any previous views] in my interpretations of the Torah.

– R. Abraham Ibn Ezra¹

The greatest deficiency in the quality of yirat shamayim that is not well connected to the light of Torah is that fear of thought replaces fear of sin, and because a human being begins to be afraid of thinking, he goes and drowns in the morass of ignorance, which robs him of the light of soul, weakens his vigor, and casts a pall over his spirit.

– R. Abraham I. Kook²

Kayle veren! Einerken kayle veren sitzendig in kandy store!

(To go bad [religiously]! One can go bad sitting in a candy store!)

– R. Yitzhak Hutner³

INTRODUCTION

This session of the Orthodox Forum has been called to address the following issues:

Some of the modern approaches to the study of *Tanakh*, as well as Talmud and *teshuvot*, seem or have the potential to undermine *yirat shamayim*. This can be for a variety of reasons, all in some way stemming from a modernity or sophistication that distances us from a kind of *emunah peshuta* and continuity of interpretive tradition that was traditionally a basis for *yirat shamayim*. It also seems relevant that those who question the *yirat shamayim* of the modern Orthodox community point to these methods of Torah study as evidence.

The questions are: (1) What is the validity of the critique? (2) If it is not valid, then how should we engage in these new approaches to Torah study in ways that enhance *yirat shamayim*?⁴

In addressing this charge the essay will be structured as follows: The first section will present preliminary and general remarks to frame the discussion. Second, the bulk of the paper will focus on the areas of Bible study, areas in which the “new” or “modern” methods alluded to in the questions above have taken a firmer hold in modern Orthodox educational settings, both for children and adults.⁵ In addition, on a more personal note, Bible study is the area to which I have devoted a large amount of my intellectual efforts, including integrating both traditional and modern methods of learning. Thirdly, the issue of integrating new methods into the traditional study of Talmud and response literature requires its own full-length treatment far beyond the confines of the space limitations outlined for this essay. The essay will conclude with a small afterward containing a personal reflection. My impression from the initial conversations with the committee members was of a desire to see a passionate presentation of a point of view, an *apologia* of sorts, rather than a detached, academic recitation of the various positions in this debate. To that end, this paper is clearly not exhaustive or fully “even-handed” as I have attempted to fulfill the charge as presented to me.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

My preliminary remarks relate to definitions of the terms we are using, the scope of the issues under discussion, and pointing out those that are beyond the purview of this essay.

The meaning of the term *yirat shamayim* is elusive and often connotes different meanings, in different settings, to different people. To cite just one startling example from a contemporary rabbinic scholar, let me quote a few short lines from a responsum penned by Rabbi Yosef Gruenwald z”l, a leading *posek* in the Pupa Hasidic community who was asked if it was appropriate for a *shohet* to drive a car to work:

In the collection of responsum of his holiness, my father and teacher *zt"l* [R. Yaacov Gruenwald], there is a responsum regarding whether it is appropriate for a *shohet* to ride a bicycle, and he responded that it is proper to prevent him, because firstly, the hands become tired through this and moreover, this is not the appropriate action of a *talmid hakham*.... Now regarding the first issue it would appear that the first reason does not apply [in our case], for driving a car is not real work as in riding a bicycle... however, the second reason is applicable here.... In sum then, I am also of the opinion that one should prevent a *shohet yarei shamayim* from this act [of driving a car].⁶

These words certainly take us aback. It is highly unlikely, in fact, that anyone, layperson or rabbinic scholar, in the mainstream Yeshiva community, let alone the modern Orthodox community in America, would see driving one's car to work or school as somehow reflecting a lack of *yirat shamayim* or an evil that one should be working to prevent. Indeed, this very example simply highlights that one person's *yirat shamayim* may be another person's uniquely pietistic view of the world that has little in common with classical notions rooted in *Tanakh* and *Hazal*.⁷ And thus, the very term *yirat shamayim* is fraught with ambiguity and its precise definition is a task that has been left to other participants in this forum to address. For the purposes of this essay, I would define *yirat shamayim* narrowly as:

- (A) Commitment to and observance of *mitzvot*, coupled with a passion for that observance rather than a luke-warm perfunctory behaviorism. Observance of *mitzvot*, is a broad term that should encompass the wide range of practices and *pesakim* that exist within the world of *shomrei mitzvot* on issues of great and minor import.⁸
- (B) A particular attitude, reflecting a mixture of respect, awe, deference, and at times even self-negation to God and to the religious life through which we develop a relationship with Him. A derivative of this attitude reflects itself as well in the

profound respect and deference that one feels towards the *hakhmei ha-masorah*.

- (c) Acceptance and affirmation of basic core beliefs (*emunot ve-deot*) such as the existence of God, the divinity of the Torah, including the divinity of an Oral Law, and the binding nature of *Halakha* in all times and eras, recognizing of course, that there may be a range of legitimate interpretations on the exact definitions of the details of these beliefs within the broad framework of traditional Judaism.⁹

The topic under consideration should properly focus on the use of more “modern” methods of approaching classical Jewish texts in *the context and ambience of a religious educational setting*. We are discussing recourse to these methods in the learning experience that takes place in day school and yeshiva high schools, *Tanakh shiurim* in *yeshivot Hesder* such as Yeshivat Har Etzion and Yeshivat Maaleh Adumim and selected American Yeshiva or Women’s programs in Israel such as Eretz Hatzvi, Midreshet Lindenbaum, or Migdal Oz. In addition we are referring as well to settings where both *Tanakh* and Talmud *shuirim* incorporate these modern methods into their entire curriculum or in selected classes.¹⁰

We are *not* addressing the study of our sacred texts in the context of a secular university setting, either undergraduate or graduate, which is an entirely different phenomenon with its own set of issues, challenges and pitfalls as well as potential benefits for the religious individual. This crucial point is often lost in some of the over-heated rhetoric that is heard in discussing these issues with those opposed to engagement with “modern methodologies.” To put it in illustrative terms, if an Orthodox student’s commitment to observance of *Halakha* and to the tenets of classical Judaism wanes during his tenure at a hypothetical private liberal arts college in some pastoral New England setting, it is highly unlikely that it is primarily due to the interesting literary chiasmic structures of *Sefer Devarim* and/or comparisons and contrasts of the *Sefer Ha-Brit* of Exodus 20–23 to the Laws of Eshnuna or the Hittite Code that his YC/Revel-educated, *Megadim* subscribing, *Humash* teacher exposed

him to in the eleventh grade in Yeshiva High School. Factors such as the absence of a critical mass of fellow Orthodox students, the influence of the popular college culture and its aggressively secular ethos, professors who approach sacred texts in a detached or secular vein, and the decency/friendliness (or God forbid the lack thereof) of Orthodox role models, friends and members of the community encountered throughout high school and college are far more likely critical factors. In addition, a desire to explore and try out other identities, the highly sexualized and hedonistic popular culture that we are so engulfed in, as well as any philosophical or moral qualms that young adults struggle with in relation to classical Jewish thought and practice, coupled with the need to challenge authority as well as any past negative family dynamics or negative school experiences, would probably be more likely candidates as underlying causes for the erosion of *yirat shamayim*.¹¹

Yirat shamayim is an attitude and state of being that is usually cultivated and nurtured in an educational context infused with devotion to Torah and *mitzvot*, an all embracing religious culture and ethos and a deep experiential component of Torah living and ambience. Our discussion should rightly begin in such educational settings where so many other factors help preserve and enhance the religious commitments of our students and congregants and most importantly where the *Kitvei Ha-Kodesh* and *Torah She-Baal Peh* are studied for religious meaning, religious truth, and as part of our commitment to the primacy of Talmud Torah, and are themselves taught by *yirei shamayim* and in many instances by genuine *talmidei hakamim*.

Despite all the points enumerated above, there are students and adults who do suffer an erosion in their passion and commitments, possibly, in part, as result of exposure to some of the “modern” methodologies or disciplines in their study of Torah even in the context of the religiously friendly and nurturing environments of a yeshiva high school, religious university, or teachers seminary. The problem in attempting any sort of evaluation of this issue is that there is no empirical data to identify if this phenomenon is relatively insignificant or something of greater magnitude. We simply have no studies

or surveys to back up any meaningful argument as to the extent or lack thereof of this phenomenon.

We are thus left with, a primarily, impressionistic or anecdotal method with which we can approach our subject. Given this reality let me share my personal observations from the twenty years that I have been involved in informal and formal *hinnukh*. There is no doubt that there is the occasional student who, like a character in a Chaim Potok novel, will eventually become a full-blown devotee of academic Bible criticism and its attendant assumptions as a result of having read the essays in the classic Hertz *Humash* or the writings of Rabbi Mordechai Breuer who both engage it, albeit from different perspectives. For some, the questions and exposure to these methods and claims simply overwhelm any traditional response or the religious message in which it is couched. For individuals such as these, this can open a door to a path where the learning erodes rather than inspires religious commitment. In addition, there is a slightly larger group that while maintaining basic commitment and fealty to traditional Judaism experiences a waning of some of that passion and intense *yirat shamayim* as a result of their exposure to “modern” methods that throw their religious grounding off kilter, even in the context of religious instruction.

My sense though, from experience and discussions, is that it is a rather small piece of what is actually happening in the world of *hinnukh*, both on the adult and adolescent level. Given that reality, balanced against the positive benefits that can and have accrued from the use of the panoply of methodologies that have enriched our study of *Tanakh* and *Torah She-baal Peh* (some of which will be adumbrated in subsequent parts of this essay), as well as “turned on” many students in their love for learning, an excessive conservatism does not seem warranted.

First, many of the “new” literary methods or other disciplines brought into the traditional curriculum are ones that are not in and of themselves problematic and do not create any conflicts or crises. Indeed, many of them simply expand on traditional modes of *peshat* exegesis or attempts at getting to the best texts in the manuscripts following in the tradition of the *Rishonim* and significant *Ahronim*

such as the Gaon of Vilna. In those areas which are potentially more laden with ideological pitfalls, it is my sense that, by and large, the newer methods, content, and disciplines that our students are incorporating and integrating into their study of sacred texts, distilled through the prism of their observant and committed teachers and in the yeshiva setting, meet the standards of ultimately enriching faith, enhancing one's ability to address challenges from within and without, and provide profound and important insights both on the macro and micro level of understanding *devar Hashem*.

Turning to the more "problematic" areas of study such as encountering Bible criticism in the context of a traditional Yeshiva setting, coupled with traditional responses, I would like to cite some instructive comments of *mori v'rabi* Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein regarding a similar issue, the potential corrosive impact of the study of parts of general culture on religious faith and commitment. Toward the end of his magisterial essay, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict,"¹² he addresses the study of potential problematic areas of study. In that context he cites the oft-repeated anecdote of one of the students of the Rav *zt"l* from the 1950's approaching the Rav for counsel as to whether he should pursue graduate studies in philosophy given its potentially problematic nature for a religious worldview. The Rav famously replied that "airplanes are known to crash and yet people fly." On that vignette R. Lichtenstein writes:

The Rav's reply is nevertheless understandable, but only if we bear in mind (as he, of course, did) first, that very few repeatedly run even the minimal risks of flight for the sheer thrill of the adventure; and second, that the incidences of crashes be reasonably low (however, that is defined) so that the risk-benefit ratio is acceptable.... Only where the possibility of true spiritual benefit is perceived, tested faith being regarded as either sturdier or worthier, or if exposure is valued as enhancing the ability to cope with the *apikoros* within or without, or if in a more positive vein, the material itself or the encounter with it is deemed as stimulating meaningful insight into

Judaism, can the prospect of ideologically problematic pursuits be countenanced.¹³

It is my sense that the study of this material in religiously supportive frameworks does meet the standards that R. Lichtenstein sets out in this paragraph. In the overall calculus of benefit and loss, such study, I believe, often emerges as beneficial, enriching, and highlights the richness and depth of Torah.

The term *emunah temimah*, as used in the questions outlined above, can be taken in one of two ways. If the intent is to direct our students to foster a complete sense of devotion to, trust in, and commitment to the *Ribbono shel olam* in the primary biblical sense of the meaning of the word *emunah* – steadfastness, loyalty and trust, it is a value of supreme importance that I and all modern Orthodox educators, hopefully strive to inculcate in all our teaching.

As R. Lichtenstein has put it, this sense of *emunah* “expresses a steadfast commitment even if the outcome will be bad, we will remain reliant and connected to God... This approach does not claim that God will remain at our side (and that everything will always work out for the best), rather it asks us to remain at His side.”¹⁴ This sense of connectedness to God and devotion to and love for Him is the very bedrock which is at the core of any sensitive religious soul and one which we all hope to foster and enhance. To that end, Talmud Torah in all its manifestations should play a central role, regardless of the methodologies employed in our pursuit of understanding *devar Hashem*.

If, on the other hand, the intention of the query is that we should be educating to a simple faith, in the sense of *emunah temimah* as an assent to a set of propositions without any investigation, avoidance of any potential problems or questions, and a conscious shutting down of the intellectual struggle, this is a position that flies in the face of the whole essence of serious modern Orthodox thought and engagement in *Talmud Torah*. This perspective of “simple faith” has a long and distinguished pedigree in our tradition, from various statements extolling its virtues in selected passages in *Hazal* through similar formulations in the writings of medieval *Rishonim* to the

positions espoused by great Hasidic masters such as R. Nahman of Breslov. I, by no means come to belittle it, and certainly it was the substratum of faith for hundreds of thousands of pious and committed Jews throughout the ages.

The basic worldview, however, of the modern Orthodox community or in Israel in the modern Orthodox wing of the *dati leumi* community is rooted in the tradition of Maimonides and the whole host of *Rishonim* and *Aharonim* who took seriously the charge of *fides quarrens intellectum*, a life predicated on faith seeking understanding whether in the philosophical realm, halakhic realm, or in the world of *parshanut ha-Mikra*. This also dominates the intellectual discourse that has attempted to confront modernity head on, explore and benefit from the wisdom of secular studies, engage with the non-Jewish world and work intensively for the return of the Jewish people back into active history, i.e., religious Zionism.

In the last century, the two lodestars of our *hashkafat olam* (our world view), Rav Kook and the Rav, clearly were not advocates of a simple faith in the colloquial sense of the word but understood the complexity of the religious struggle and the need to make use of one's intellect, confront challenges, and live the life of the committed Jew in all situations and settings.¹⁵ To take one simple example, our educational system teaches our students evolution, history, literature, and the whole range of general studies that clearly underscore that we believe in engagement with the realities of the world, even if *prima facia* they raise questions as to what is often considered the "traditional" perspective.

How, when, and by whom all these subjects as well as the "problematic" issues, texts, methodologies in the realm of Torah study are taught is, of course, the critical educational issue that needs to be addressed. On the whole, however, our community has not opted for an educational philosophy rooted in a monochromatic vision of a hermetically sealed classroom. We strive to inculcate a *yirat shamayim* and *ahavat Torah* that is ultimately broad and complex in its understanding, full of scope, and depth. Again, to return to Rav Lichtenstein describing modern Orthodoxy: "Its very essence is to shy away from simplistic and one-sided approaches, of its very

fabric to strive to encompass and encounter reality in its complexity, and, with that encounter, to seek the unity that transcends the diversity.”¹⁶

Coupled with a *yirat shamayim* that integrates with *ahavat ha-Torah*, a critical component of any endeavor of Talmud Torah must be a rigorous search for truth. The myriad references in *Tanakh* and *Hazal* to the importance of the search for truth, that a central quality of the Almighty or in *Hazal*’s terms, that His very seal is truth, are too well known to need further elaboration.¹⁷ Suffice it to say that the part of the biblical conception of *emunah* also relates to the Hebrew word *emet*. The *Ribbono shel Olam* is the God of truth and justice, of *yosher* who does not abide falsehood and deception. In that context, our *yirat shamayim* and *Talmud Torah* ultimately must be one that is honest and true to the sources and one which seeks to truly understand and plumb the meaning of *devar Hashem*. This central principle of our tradition must certainly play a role in our desire to benefit from the use of various methodologies that cause us to look at texts in a new way or reevaluate previously held “truisms.”

Of course, truth in an abstract sense is not the only value in our arsenal. Its place in interaction with other values, the very question of determining truth, and the legitimate sources of truth are all issues requiring weighty and profound discussion. The simple point, however, is that to ignore truth entirely in our discussion of *yirat shamayim* and the quest for *emunah* is to distort our *mesorah*. Moreover, such an approach has the potential to leave us bereft of many of the insights that ultimately strengthen authentic *yirat shamayim* and foster real and lasting *ahavat Torah*.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TANAKH STUDY AND ITS REVIVAL IN THE MODERN ORTHODOX EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

In discussing the fostering of *yirat shamayim* and the role that “newer” methods of *Tanakh* play in that endeavor, one must place our discussion in a larger framework that raises the questions of alternatives and the situation in the more traditionally oriented classroom of the modern Orthodox world, broadly defined. From

anecdotal evidence and general impressions, both here and in Israel in the last thirty to forty years, it is not uncommon to hear that many students often experienced the “traditional” methods of studying and teaching Torah. That is, studying *Humash pasuk* by *pasuk* (verse by verse) with a panoply of classical commentaries or the presentation of selected *midrashim* and the text as a springboard for *musar* lessons or *vortlech*, or the classical teaching of Gemara and *Rishonim* without any attempt to see the literary structure of the *sugya*, nor an attempt to bridge the gap between the *midrash* Halakha and the text, nor any exploration of the values inherent in the *sugya* and its positions, a total obliviousness to the realia of the personalities and the world in which they lived, and for some even a pure focus on *hakirot* and analytical learning can be a “turn-off” and deeply “uninspiring.”

In some cases, the anecdotal evidence suggests that those very traditional methods, regarded by many as “part of the continuity of tradition,” often bred and continue to breed skepticism and cynicism among the more rationally or imaginatively inclined students as to the wisdom and beauty of Torah study and its interpreters. Instead of enhancing their sense of *ahavat Torah* and *yirat shamayim*, which in the *tefillah* of Rav we recite monthly in synagogue tellingly conjoin, the exact opposite happens, with Torah study becoming an object of, God forbid, boredom or scorn.

Indeed, *mi-besari eheze*, I can testify to my own personal experience with just such learning. In my high school years I was a good student at MTA and enjoyed my Gemara education, though I often found it wanting in terms of skills acquisition and discussion of important topics that were critical to us as thinking yeshiva high school students. What was almost unbearable, however, was our study of Torah and *Neve'im*. The clear message from the school in those years, (and in this regard it was representative of much of the traditional yeshivot, even those that were part of the modern Orthodox orbit) was that Torah and *Nakh* were not really very important both in terms of time devoted to the subject as well as the allocation of resources to its teaching, the lack of trained teachers in this field, and the utter lack of any conception of teaching the

kitvei ha-Kodesh with depth, sweep and vision. *Humash* and *Navi* class were dreaded parts of the week, rarely fostering any sense of *ahavat Torah ve-Notnah*.

My saving grace was that at about the same time in the late 1970s, Rabbi David Silber gave a weekly *Humash shiur* at the conclusion of the early *minyán* at Lincoln Square Synagogue on Manhattan's Upper West Side. It was in that weekly class where the characters of *Tanakh* came to life in their fullness of humanity and in their towering spirituality, the literary structure of various narratives began to make coherent sense, the exquisite patterning that occurs in *Sefer Bereishit*, the profound psychological insight, the understanding of the need to explore the literary and theological theme of an entire *sefer*, the richness and excitement of exploring *peshuto shel mikra*, truly working out how *Hazal* and the *midrashim* often were engaged in close reading and often achieved the *omek peshuto shel Mikra*. It was there, in those weekly *parsha* classes with their close readings, that my passion and inspiration for learning and engaging the *devar Hashem*, which is *Tanakh*, was kindled and nurtured.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the history and rationale for the fact that *Tanakh* study (as well as *Mahshevet Yisrael*), has played a continuously minor role in the educational curriculum of the Ashkenazic (Lithuanian/Polish/Russian) Yeshiva world of the last 750 years (the Hirschian school system of mid and late-nineteenth-century Frankfurt is of course a notable exception that proves the rule).¹⁸ This is a phenomenon that has wide implications and has deep roots, and even some justification.

With all my love of and for *Tanakh* and its study, I recognize the significance and need for the classical concentration that the yeshiva world has placed on the study of Talmud and Halakha. As I wrote a number of years back in a related discussion:

It is, of course, crucial that every student continue to have extensive exposure to Gemara-centric learning. Gemara and Halakha are the life force and spinal cord of our existence as Torah Jews. *Mori veRabi* Rav Aharon Lichtenstein has often noted that the first communication

from God to man in chapter 2 of *Bereishit*, the portrait of majestic or dignified man (in the categories of Rav *zt"l*), begins with the words, *Vayetzav Hashem Elokim al ha-adam*. This biblical axiom, which goes to the heart of the relationship between man and God writ large, is doubly true with regard to the Jewish people. As *avadei Hashem* our basic stance before the Creator is one of commanded beings – of *Metzuvim*. As Rav Lichtenstein has written, “The encounter with God as commander lies in the heart of Jewish existence; to the extent that it is realized through Talmud Torah, the legal corpus, as developed in the Oral tradition, is a prime vehicle for this encounter.”

These areas, by their nature and their significance, should properly take the lion’s share of our time and energy. Moreover, no serious study of other areas of Torah is really possible without solid grounding in the methodology and experience of learning *Gefat* [Acronym for Gemara, *Peirush* (=Rashi) and *Tosafot*]. This is a reason why young women who are educated in other areas of Torah and Jewish Studies should also be exposed to intensive study of *Torah sheBeal Peh*. This is certainly true if they would like to engage in the study of these areas intensively. For example, one cannot fully understand the *Parshanut* of basic *Rishonim* such as Rashi and Ramban on *Parashat Mishpatim* or do work in the history of Medieval *Ashkenaz* without being able to handle halakhic texts.

In centrist circles in particular, there is also a need to develop serious young *Talmidei Hakhamim* who will be the *poskim* of the future. The need for halakhic experts and *dayanim* who are at the same time sensitive and open to the modern world, Zionist in orientation, and articulate and sophisticated spokesmen for Torah is sorely felt. The training and emergence of such leaders requires, first and foremost, focus on the *Yam haTalmud*.¹⁹

I continue to abide by those sentiments and they clearly are impor-

tant directives for us to keep in mind in fashioning any educational system. At the same time, however, it should not blind us to the price that we have paid and continue to pay for a Gemara-centric focus in our curriculum, especially in the majority of settings where the training of a learned and committed laity should be the primary goal and not the production of the next cadre of the rabbinic elite. Moreover, as I argued in a subsequent part of the essay cited above, the rabbinic elite as well should, both based on traditional sources as well as the unique challenges faced by Jews in modernity, have profound and deep mastery of *Tanakh* and *Mahshevet Yisrael*. Throughout the ages many *gedolei yisrael* have bemoaned the lack of serious *Tanakh* study within the yeshiva curriculum and its dire consequences in achieving a proper understanding of Torah proper, a narrowing of religious vision and sweep, and a disjointed development of the rich Torah personality.

This sense has been especially highlighted in the last two hundred years as Orthodoxy became increasingly defensive in its posture and often rejected curricular suggestions that stemmed from non-traditional elements, even if they had clear antecedents in the tradition. Thus, in many circles of traditional Eastern European Jewry serious engagement with *Tanakh* study beyond superficial study of Humash and Rashi were perceived as *maskilic* and frowned upon. Indeed, Rav Avraham Elyahu Meir Bloch in a celebrated letter bemoaned that fact and spoke about Orthodoxy having abandoned *Tanakh* to the *maskilim*, *Eretz Yisrael* to the Zionists, and the Hebrew language to the modernists – to our great detriment and chagrin.²⁰

In the last century, our two great lights, Rav Kook *zt"l* and the Rav *zt"l*, while, of course, devoting so much of their time to the classical study and explication of Halakha and Talmud, were both personally and communally devoted to reaffirming the importance of *Tanakh* and *Mahshavah* study both for lay persons and in the training of a rabbinic elite. Indeed, it is commonplace in the writings of Rav Kook that the constriction of Talmud Torah to the four cubits of Halakha, while often for understandable reasons, was a negative phenomenon generated by the conditions of the exile. In the generation of the return to Zion and the full rebirth of the people, this

curricular imbalance needs to be adjusted and the study of *Tanakh*, *Mahshava*, *Aggada* and ultimately *Kabbalah* is a critical *desiratum*.

To take just one paradigmatic example, in commenting on the verse in the book of Amos (8:13), “In that day, the fair virgins shall faint from thirst,” R. Kook writes that, “Reliance on bread – this is halakhic study. Reliance on water – this is the study of Aggadata” (*Hagiga* 14). The younger generation does not faint from hunger. It is the lack of water that stunts the growth of their emotions and intellect. This need can not be filled unless the scholars open up the sealed wells of Bible, *Midrash*, and *Aggadata*.²¹

The Rav, while, of course devoting the bulk of his energies to unraveling the intricacies of *havayot de-Abaaye ve-Rava* devoted a substantial portion of both his intellectual creativity and teaching efforts to in-depth study of *Tanakh* and its characters. This becomes evident from any cursory reading of seminal essays such as “Confrontation,” “The Lonely Man of Faith,” “*U-vekashtem Mi-Sham*” as well as many of the manuscripts now being published in the various volumes of the *Meotzar HoRav* series such as *Family Redeemed or The Emergence of Ethical Man*. This sense is further reinforced by the unpublished manuscripts containing whole commentaries on various books of the Torah, the myriad of *derashot* on biblical episodes and figures the Rav delivered in various *fora*, as well as the great effort the Rav expanded in delivering his weekly *motzaei Shabbat shiurim* in Boston for over twenty-five years. In addition, we now have available to us the recently published 1955 letter of the Rav to Dr. Samuel Belkin *z”l* in which he argues strenuously for a revamping of the traditional *semiha* curriculum at RIETS. Among the many points the Rav articulates, regarding Bible study he writes emphatically that:

A thorough knowledge of the Pentateuch with its two basic commentaries is a must. The candidate for rabbinical degree ought to know not only the intricate laws of *migo*, but also the five books of Moses. The teaching of the Pentateuch must pursue a two-fold purpose. First, the knowledge of the halakhic components of the *Humash*

...Second the, profound understanding of the biblical narratives not only as historical records of a distant past but also as parts of the great historical drama of our people and as archetypes of the Jewish paradoxical destiny charged with powerful ethical motifs.”²²

Indeed what emerges is a perspective which recognizes that primacy of the study of *Torah she baal peh* should not be confused with exclusivity.

In the last fifty years, this perspective has slowly seeped into the *weltanschauung* and curricula of many (though by far not all) modern Orthodox schools, especially in Israel. In that sense it has often become part of the dividing markers between a more modern Orthodox high school and its Haredi counterpart where Gemara remains the exclusive focus. This phenomenon of reinvigorating *Tanakh* as a central area of study was brought about through the pioneering work of those early German Orthodox educators who emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* with their broader Jewish educations whether in the Hirschian or Hildesheimerian mode and began to staff the schools of the *yishuv ha-Hadash*, the influence of the teachings of R. Kook, both father and son, who raised students that saw the teaching of *Tanakh* and concurrently *Mahshevet Yisrael* as an important part of the renaissance of the Jewish people in its land.

Following on the heels of those efforts, the monumental educational enterprise of Professor Nehama Leibowitz *zt”l* and her students from the 1940s onward raised the study of Torah and its commentaries to a central place of pride in most of the *dati leumi* educational world in Israel. Her work, which by the 1950s and 1960s had such a major impact on Israeli circles, also began to influence the work of educators here a few decades later, as many of her *iyunim* were printed in book form for the first time and as more and more American students flocked to Israel and started to study with Nehama directly in the 1970s and 1980s.²³ Together with this work, the trailblazing efforts of modern Orthodox scholars such as Yehuda Elitzur *z”l*, and *yebadel lehayyim arukim*, Gabi Cohn, Amos Hakham and Yehuda Kil who began producing the *Daat Mikra* series

in the mid 1970s through the 1990s helped encourage sophisticated and direct *Tanakh* study to flourish and grow in *dati leumi* circles in Israel and then, by extension, modern Orthodox circles here in the United States.

In addition, the original work of Rabbi Mordechai Breuer presenting a sustained religious response to modern Biblical Criticism, the growing impact and ascendancy of the literary method in the study of *Tanakh* and its use by various religious academics, and the monumental work and approach of Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun in placing the sophisticated and rigorous study of *Tanakh* as a critical part of any high level modern Orthodox yeshiva curriculum influenced hundreds of students. The latter have spread this methodology throughout Israel, establishing the *Merkaz Le-Limudei Tanakh* at the Herzog Teacher's College and the publication of the Israeli Torah journal *Megadim*, all helped to shape the current climate of serious Bible study in Israeli *dati leumi* circles using many and sundry methodologies.

This phenomenon has also impacted the American modern Orthodox scene as so many students have spent time in Israel and became exposed to this high level discourse of *Tanakh* study and have desired to see it continued in their studies back at home. The excellent and impressive work of Rabbi Menachem Leibtag, one of Rabbi Bin Nun's premier students, using the Internet to disseminate the literary-theological method that is at the heart of the methodology cannot be underestimated. Hand in hand with this *Torat Eretz Yisrael* that has had such a great impact, the indigenous contributions of the Rav *zt"l* mentioned above as well as one of his most important students, Rabbi Shalom Carmy, and the thousands of students he has taught and influenced at Yeshiva College (many of whom have gone on into Jewish education), the work of other religious academics in similar settings at Yeshiva College, Stern, Touro, and BRGS and the thousands of students taught by Rabbi David Silber have all brought *Tanakh* study in the modern Orthodox world to new heights of engagement and interest.

So, first and foremost, it is critical to note that it is precisely

thanks to many of those “new” or “modern” methods, employed by these myriad of teachers, that *Tanakh* study has undergone such a renaissance and has once again taken such a crucial role in shaping our religious life of the heart and mind.²⁴ It is nothing short of astonishing to see over a thousand teachers and laypeople who flock annually to spend an entire week engaged in intensive study of *Tanakh* at the *yemei iyun* at Michlelet Herzog, the Yaacov Herzog teacher’s College, every summer or the more modest hundreds who attend the recently established *yemei iyun* in *Tanakh* sponsored by Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School in Teaneck every June. One is heartened to see the thousands of people who religiously study the Internet *shiurim* sent out weekly by R. Menachem Leibtag as well as Yeshivat Har Eztion in the length and breadth of synagogues throughout the country. *Ve-lav milta zutrata hee!* (This is no small matter!). The reinvigorated sophisticated study of *Tanakh* is critical to ensuring that our religious life is balanced and complete, as a welcome complement to the intense study of Talmud and living a life committed to Halakha. The study of *Tanakh* helps us refocus on central categories of our religious existence and national existence such as the meta-purposes of why we exist as a people, the national and not just personal or communal aspect of our divine mission and charge, the central role of *kavanat ha-leiv* (intention of the heart) and spirituality, of the vivifying presence of the Divine and the need to seek Him, the role of *Eretz Yisrael* in our history and destiny, the significance of avoiding religious hypocrisy, and the supreme significance of creating a society and world of *tzedakah* and *mishpat*.²⁵

Tanakh properly studied helps us see the meta-purposes of Halakha and not view it as a type of obstacle course to overcome or complete. The sophisticated study of *Tanakh* can help us not become lost in the trees and miss the forest of *devar Hashem*. The study of *Tanakh* puts the notion of seeking direct communication with God, the covenantal relationship with God, God as involved in history and the importance of sincerity in the worship of God, as well as a whole host of central religious categories at the very center of our religious consciousness.²⁶ And thus *Tanakh* study, in its variegated

forms, enhances, ennobles and expands one's *yirat shamayim* and fills it with content and meaning far beyond the narrow confines of what it usually means to entail.

Truth be told, though, not all segments in our religious community share the sentiments outlined above. Moreover, many who, may in fact, share the overarching sentiments and goals, take issue with the specific methods that are employed in the current modern Orthodox study of *Tanakh*. It thus behooves us to turn to a more a detailed description of the unique elements that make up much of the modern Orthodox approach to the study of *Tanakh* and the critiques that are sometimes leveled against these methods, especially as relates to questions of enhancing or detracting from *yirat shamayim*.

ISSUES IN CONTENTION

1. Peshuto Shel Mikra – The Study of the Plain Sense of the Text

One of the hallmarks of the “modern” study of *Tanakh* in many of the modern Orthodox settings is the focus firstly on the plain sense of the text, using the best internal biblical, linguistic, historical, and philological tools at our disposal to get at the meaning of the text. It is only then that one can move to reading the text through the eyes of others, whether the readings of *Hazal* or the *Netziv*. To cite the famous quip of Nehama *zt”l*, “One must first study *Humash* just as Rashi did, without any Rashi on the bottom!”

In this enterprise, we are simply continuing the mainstream tradition of the major *Rishonim* such as Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and Bekhor Shor as well as the major *Ahronim* such as Abravanel, the GRA, *Netziv*, Rav David Tzvi Hoffman, R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, and the Rav who often attempted to get to the plain sense of the text (of course, with significant methodological differences as to what each thinker allowed to pass muster as a “*peshat*” interpretation). This mainstream tradition saw the pursuit of *peshuto shel mikra* as a religiously significant and legitimate pursuit of understanding *devar Hashem*. New and creative readings of the text often emerged through this enterprise in the spirit of Rashbam’s

celebrated pursuit of *peshatim ha-mithadshim be-khol yom*. Rabbi Yuval Cherlow has eloquently expressed the point, “A direct, unmediated reading of *Tanakh*, prior to turning to the commentaries, also allows for a unique encounter of each individual with the word of God. Every human being encounters the Torah in a unique fashion appropriate to his unique soul, and this profound internal encounter between the soul of the individual and the Torah reveals to him new insights.”²⁷ This concern for *peshuto shel mikra* can often reveal to us significant educational messages often glossed over in our rush to *parshanut*²⁸ and, even on occasion, important insights that take on a normative character.²⁹

The legitimacy of this relative freedom to explore the meaning of the text has a long and distinguished history. Starting with the various statements in *Hazal* that *ein Mikra y otzei midei peshuto* through the Geonic tradition (subsequently adopted by many major *Rishonim* and *Ahronim* who commented on *kitvei ha-Kodesh*) that the traditions of the rabbis in the narrative sections of *Tanakh* did not trace back to Sinai, but were rather the learned suggestions of those rabbinic figures and thus one was not bound to accept them as binding, freedom of interpretation reigned supreme.

In the halakhic sections of *Humash*, *Hazal*’s dictum mentioned above was taken as license by many major *Rishonim* and *Ahronim* such as Rashbam, Ramban and the GRA to suggest alternate readings to halakhic portions of *Humash* that sometimes stood in conflict with the *midrash Halakha* and accepted law derived from that text. In our era, this pursuit of *peshat* has also been fueled by an unspoken reaction to what often was the more the traditional mode of teaching *Humash* with commentators reading every midrash into the text as fact, oblivious to its potentially disastrous educational results.

The simple presentations to middle school or high school students as “facts” that Rivka was three years old when she married Yitzhak or that each Jewish woman in Egypt gave birth to twelve children at once or that *ve-avado le-olam* means the Jubilee year without any discussion of the exegetical underpinnings of what might have led the midrash to suggest these readings was not productive. The cost-benefit ratios of such readings in relation to

other sections of *Humash*, such as what was *Hazal* really driving at, can often undermine respect for the *mesorah* and personal *yirat shamayim* exponentially more than any *peshat* oriented suggestion raised in that very classroom!

At the same time it is to be emphasized, however, that such an approach should not in any way cause us to abandon the intense study of *midrash* and classical and modern *parshanut*. First, even in our pursuit of the plain sense of the text, the insights, comments, solutions and directions that have been developed by our great ancestors often help us get to the heart of the matter of *peshat* itself, or as Nehama would term it *omek peshuto shel Mikra*. Second, even in those areas where the exegetical tradition does not meet the test of what might be considered *peshat*, *derash*, and subsequently *parshanut* itself, will take on a life of their own to be explored, understood, and embraced. We read and live the *Tanakh* as Jews, with its rich, exegetical, and in halakhic sections, normative tradition, as a part of the very essence of our embrace of the *Tanakh*.³⁰ Indeed, we are not Karaites. As Ramban perceptively noted, *Hazal* did not state *ein Ba-Mikra eleh peshuto* meaning that *peshat* alone is the only meaning, but rather that *ein Mikra yotzei midei peshuto*, that is, “We have the *midrash* alongside the *pasha*...and the text can countenance all [of the meanings], and both are true.”³¹

Ramban’s comment leads directly to the timeless question of the relationship and interaction between the *peshat* and the *derash*, and which of them is the “correct” interpretation. It is beyond the scope of this essay to review the vast literature that has addressed this topic both in academic circles and in more traditional *fora*, as well as the important educational literature on this topic.³² In the course of Jewish history there have been numerous viewpoints as to this seminal question, including the central question of whether the *derash* is the source and genesis of the Halakha in question or is more of an exegetical marker of an established Halakha that is simply the product of oral tradition.³³

These issues, however, have taken an even more central role in the ongoing polemical battles of the last two hundred years that Orthodoxy has waged with the worlds of Reform and *wissenschaft*

des judentums and their heterodox approaches to the nature of Torah *she-baal peh* and its normative truth.³⁴ Let me briefly offer the perspective that personally resonates with me and one which I believe holds the greatest potential educationally.³⁵ Ramban in the comment cited above (and with his own nuances, Rashbam, as well) stated time after time that *peshat* and *derash* are two distinct methodologies, both of which are “true” and “correct” in their own way in interpreting this multivalent text that is the Torah. The willingness to offer interpretation that conflicted with the accepted halakhic interpretation on a *peshat* level never impacted on the fidelity of figures such as Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra and the GRA to punctilious and passionate observance of accepted halakhic practice, as rooted in the truth of *midrash Halakha*. And it is in this very multi-dimensional meaning of the text, whether in areas of Halakha or narrative, which our tradition saw as part of its divine origin *Ahat diber Elokim shtayim zu shamati/Ke-patish yefotzeit selah*.³⁶

Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein has nicely summarized and expanded on this theme:

The distinction between *peshat* and *derash* is not necessarily one of probability, of one which prefers the logical and more likely simple sense of the text over the far-fetched *derash*. It is rather a distinction between two legitimate approaches that are divided by methodological distinctions...*Peshat* attempts to explain the text and the narrative that appears before us in the text, while the goal of *midrash* is not the explanation of the biblical narrative itself, but rather the attempt to develop the text and add to it additional layers of meaning beyond what is written in them...If we would formulate this in philosophical language, we would say that the litmus test criterion for *peshat* would be its *correspondence to the text*, the criterion for the *derash* is the internal logic, *the coherence* of the proposed rendering of the drama, and its likelihood... In other words it is even possible to state that *peshuto shel mikra* presents and clarifies to us the legal and historical

content written in the text – whether the topic under discussion is analyzing the commandments given at Sinai or clarifying the narrative dramas of the heroes and heroines of *Tanakh* – while the *Midrash* creates literature, for what took place or was said is in the category of history. (Let there be no misunderstanding, it is important to emphasize that the term “history” does not come to state that the biblical text is primarily a historical document and not *devar Hashem*, rather it is noting that the object of the commentary is the words of the text that were actually spoken to Moshe, and are interpreted by the commentator through his exegetical principles compatible with its status as *devar Hashem* without an attempt to recreate an event that does not appear in the text), while the attempt to understand the meaning of the text from the context of what should have been or what one may guess did happen is in the category of literature.³⁷

2. The Literary-Theological Approach to *Tanakh*

One of the results of the return to a focus on the study of the plain sense of the text has been the development and flowering of the literary-theological approach to the study of *Tanakh*. This approach makes systematic use of all the literary tools and methods that have come to the fore in the last hundred years together with a firm control of classical exegetical literature in trying to tease out the profound religious meaning of the text. It builds upon the insights of *midrash* and classical *parshanut*, but strives to engage the text directly as well. It makes consistent use of techniques such as close reading, patterning, intertextuality and self-reference in the text, literary echoes, enveloping, development of character, word-plays, parallelism and chiasmic structure, plot development, and a whole host of other literary tools that can be brought to bear on the text of the *Tanakh*. Moreover, this approach has moved *Tanakh* study from a primarily atomistic focus on the individual verse and commentary to identifying entire literary units and narratives.

The structure of entire episodes, and in legal sections, whole

legal units, has become a major sub-field in the study of *Tanakh*, an enterprise that was by and large not undertaken by the classical *parshanim*. In addition, this has led to appreciating the structure and order of entire *sefarim*, yielding wonderful insights relating to both form, content, and their interdependence. Moreover, through this methodology recurring themes, motifs and over-arching patterns that underlie *Tanakh* as a whole have been fruitfully uncovered. While each and every one of the literary methods and techniques, including the “overview” approach to biblical books, have some precedents in various *Rishonim*, the systematic use of the entire phalanx of techniques and methods is a direct byproduct of integrating many of the best and most sophisticated literary readings and sensibilities in approaching *devar Hashem*.

This methodology, which has sparked such wide interest in and excitement for the study of *Tanakh* in many of our circles is unapologetically predicated on the perspective of *dibra Torah be-leshon bnai adam*, the Bible speaks in the language of human beings. This perspective, fiercely held to by a wide swath of classical *Rishonim* and *Ahronim*, who fully committed to Torah as the word of the living God, understood that He, in his infinite wisdom, chose to make known his will to mankind within a specific historical context in terms understandable to the human ear and heart. He chose to make His will known in the form of the written word, in the form of literature, in its broadest meaning.³⁸ In this perspective, the Torah, while *sui generis* in its unique content and message as *devar ha-Shem*, is encased in the clothes of a literary work that can be fully accessed by the human mind and heart.

Finally, it should be noted that the results of the literary-theological method highlighting interconnected patterns of various parts of the Bible also has the potential to undercut much of the force of the conventional documentary hypothesis of multiple authorship spread over hundreds of years. As David Berger has written, “You can allow the ‘redactor’ just so much freedom of action before he turns into an author using various traditions as ‘raw material.’ Such an approach must ultimately shake the foundations of the regnant critical theory, not merely tinker with its periphery.”³⁹ In that vein it

can certainly help enhance and strengthen individuals' commitment to the traditional view of *kitvei ha-Kodesh* and their commitment to their message.

3. Presentation of and Engagement with *Parshanut*

A number of years back I was invited to sit on a panel with a prominent Haredi educator at a *Yom Iyun* at a major Manhattan synagogue. Our charge was to teach Genesis 1, highlighting our different approaches to the text in the context of teaching an eleventh grade high school class. I presented my mini-lesson highlighting the overall structure of Genesis 1, the key words, the relationship between the pairs of days, the literary envelope of verse 1 and the first verses of Chapter 2. I then mentioned that I might discuss some of the direct polemic that Genesis 1 is highlighting in relation to the prevalent Babylonian creation myths à la the work of U. Cassuto and many others. I concluded with a few words outlining *parshanut* issues that might come up such as the meaning of the first verse, *Bereishit Barah Elokim*. In that context, I mentioned in passing that I would divide the class into groups, look at various translations and then have the students explore various *mefarshim*, argue it out and present to the class the position each group felt was correct and why they felt that way from the text and context.

Of all the methodologies and techniques I presented, the only thing that really got my interlocutor's dander up was this last piece. She took great umbrage to the notion that students should be given an assignment to determine which approach they felt was convincing. In her estimation, we should simply present the approaches and not in any way have students (or adults for that matter) evaluate or express their opinion as to which was more cogent. The educator in question did not fully develop her opposition to this educational approach, but lurking behind it, I suspect, was probably a form of belief that the classical *parshanim* wrote with some form of *ruah ha-Kodesh*, Divine inspiration, and who are we lowly human beings to evaluate and voice an opinion on the cogency of this or that *peirush*.

The modern Orthodox approach to *Tanakh* study rooted in all the precedents already cited above relating to freedom of interpreta-

tion, the non-binding nature of this or that *parshanut*, suggesting as well the fact that the *parshanim* themselves constantly critiqued each other strongly and never claimed for themselves the mantle of *ruah ha-Kodesh* approaches the study of *parshanut* differently. First and foremost, we are trying to understand the text and not simply recite a laundry list of previous suggestions. Second, the very essence of *Talmud Torah* is an intense struggle with the words and ideas of the sages and medieval commentaries to try to understand them and appreciate their meaning and cogency. Finally, this type of *lim-mud ha-Torah*, done within the proper atmosphere of respect and appreciation for our greatest thinkers and minds, has the potential to energize a class and engage it in active learning, where students are passionately involved and care about the learning. It is one more vehicle where it can become, to use *Hazal's* famous imagery, *Torah de-lei*.

As Prof. Nehama Leibowitz *zt"l* has written:

Finally, a reply to the critics who complain that encouraging students to argue over and select commentaries does not educate them to maintain a correct attitude towards our teachers and masters who wrote such commentaries, such as Rashi, Nahmanides, etc. and that further, it is disrespectful for 15–16 years olds to judge them, accepting one and rejecting the other. It seems to me, however, that if all this is done in the proper spirit, the spirit of serious in-depth analysis of the commentaries – and the purpose of the method is to train the student to analyze and to deter him from haste and superficiality – there is no disrespect. On the contrary, proper regard for scholars consists of studying in depth what they have written.⁴⁰ Rashi, who was modest enough to say, “I don’t know” would certainly have approved if through studying and analyzing his words students might, at times, come to prefer the explanation of his grandson (Rashbam) or even to agree with his critic, Ramban.

If granting students “the right to vote” vis-à-vis the

commentators strengthens their degree of attachment to *Tanakh*, which I am certain it will, the scholars receive no greater respect than to have the Torah brought closer to its students as a direct result of what they wrote.

The essential thing is that they should study Torah from all angles, search it out, choose interpretations and reject interpretations – provided that they engage in Torah out of love.⁴¹

4. Use of Sources Written by Non-Observant Jewish or Non-Jewish Scholars

One of the sharp dividing lines between the methodology used by the Haredi, semi-Haredi, and religious-Zionist Haredi (popularly referred to in Israel as *Hardal*) worlds on the one hand and the modern Orthodox world on the other is the willingness to make use of non-Orthodox and non-Jewish scholarship in the study and teaching of *Tanakh*. The “traditional” position articulated by leading thinkers of that camp such as Rabbi Yehuda Cooperman argues that our belief in *Torah Min Ha-shamayim* precludes citation of any comments or suggestions, even in neutral matters, from the pens of those not committed to that tenet.⁴² They assert that in citing the comments of writers such as Shadal, Y. Kaufman, M. Buber, U. Cassutto, B. Jacob, M. Greenberg or ideas derived from the Anchor Bible or ICC series together with the comments of the *parshanim*, one is blurring the distinctions between *gedolei olam* and secular scholars and unwittingly setting up an equivalence between them that may lead students to adopt their lifestyles or attitudes in other, more controversial, areas.

This debate in our tradition goes back to antiquity, with the *locus classicus* being the famous episode of R. Meir’s continued study with R. Elisha ben Aviyah after the latter’s abandonment of traditional life and dogma. The famous question of the legitimacy and applicability of “eating the fruit and discarding the peel” is the formulation used by the Talmud to discuss this dilemma. Our discussion is somewhat different, in that in religious settings we are not discussing direct contact with non-observant or non-Jewish

scholars, but rather exposure to their written works and ideas. This issue has agitated various rabbinic writers throughout the ages and continues to be a fault line till today.⁴³ Embedded in the notion of *dibrah Torah be-lishon bnei adam*, is of course, the result that insight into the text can be fathomed not just by observant Jews but by any and all human beings who seriously study the text.

In general terms, the modern Orthodox world and its leading lights of *Tanakh* study such as Professor Nehama Leibowitz, the authors of the *Daat Mikra* series, R. Yoel Bin Nun, R. Shalom Carmy and many others have generally adopted the approach articulated most forcefully by Maimonides in *Shemoneh Perakim* in his defense of citation of Aristotle and others in his commentaries: "Accept the truth from wherever it originates."

That this was not simply a Maimonidean innovation is evident from the fascinating tradition cited by R. Yosef Ibn Aknin in his commentary to *Shir Ha-Shirim*:

We find in the books of R. Hai Gaon that he made recourse to the words of the Arabic scholars...and made use of the Quran...and such was the custom of R. Saadyah before him in his Arabic commentaries...and in this regard the Nagid describes in his book...after citing many comments of the Christian scholars that R. Matzliach b. Albazek...told him upon his arrival in Bagdad...that one day they were discussing the verse "*Shemen Rosh el Yani Rosh*" [Ps. 141:6] in the Yeshiva and a debate ensued as to its meaning and R. Hai directed R. Matzliach to go to the Catholic [priest] of the Christians and ask him what does he know about the meaning of the verse, and it was evil in his eye, and when R. Hai *z"l* saw that R. Matzliach was distraught over this, he reprimanded him and said that the forefathers and the early pious ones who are for us exemplars would inquire members of other faiths about the meaning of words and interpretations.⁴⁴

From anecdotal evidence as to what actually goes on in the world

of the religious frameworks in which recourse is made to non-Orthodox sources, I have rarely seen this issue be one that causes a diminution of *yirat shamayim* or *ahavat Torah*. Just the opposite, the ability to integrate the best and most insightful comments to achieve a richer more profound understanding of the text is often appreciated and helps solidify the notion that one is really seeking truth and honesty in their intellectual pursuit. At the same time, I do appreciate the concern that we should not inadvertently give our students, high school or college age, the sense that the Ramban and M. Segal are on equal footing in our eyes as religious role models. The best way to ensure that is through two simple moves, both of which I believe are generally employed. First, it is important that the use of these materials be integrated into a holistic context of careful study of the text, extensive use of *Hazal* and *parshanim*, then supplemented by other resources. Indeed a *Bereishit* class where the only positions quoted were those of M. Buber and F. Rosensweig or H. Gunkel and Y. Kaufman would present a skewed focus and have some potentially troubling results. But that is not what actually happens on the ground. For opponents of the use of this material, even one citation, however, of a non-Orthodox source in a book of 600 pages is enough for censure and calumny.

Second, it is important to maintain some distinctiveness between the *parshanim* who we see as reflecting our ultimate religious commitments and those who do not, especially in teaching younger adults by either the classical *le-havdil* formulations or noting biographical and ideological information about the scholar cited can avoid any issue in this regard. An example that I have used in my own teaching from time to time is: "The following solution to our problem is suggested by Benno Jacob, a modern bible scholar, who was a Reform rabbi, many of whose beliefs and practices are, of course, in sharp conflict with our *hashkafat olam*. At the same time, it must be noted that he waged a fierce battle with the bible critics in his day, was a close and excellent reader of the *Humash* and often has very important comments that help us understand the Torah more profoundly."

5. Perspectives on Biblical Heroes

A major fault line within the Orthodox world today revolves around the “proper” perspective on the study and teaching of the narratives related to the Biblical heroes. The Haredi and *Hardal* world, by and large, has adopted the view that not only is teaching about the mistakes or critiquing the actions of figures such as Abraham, Moses, or David beyond the pale but attribution of any human emotions, feelings or instincts to these figures is scandalous and worthy of condemnation.⁴⁵ This position was most forcefully articulated in a famous lecture in the early 1960s by Rabbi Aharon Kotler *zt”l* where he stated, “When one teaches students a section dealing with the actions of the *Avot*, one must explain to them that we are not speaking about regular human beings who have character traits and desires, rather we are discussing individuals of whom we cannot in any way understand their level, people devoid of all human desire and internal will, and, just as we have no criteria by which to evaluate angels, so, we have no way of evaluating and appreciating the level of the forefathers.”⁴⁶

It is not my intention here to present the arguments and sources for the alternative perspective that dominates the modern Orthodox approach to *Tanakh*, given the extensive literature already devoted to the task.⁴⁷ Moreover, in this instance, it is actually the Haredi approach that is the “modern” or “new” one as it turns a blind eye to the text of *Tanakh* itself, and so much of our *mesorah*. As R. Aharon Lichtenstein noted: “Advocates of hagiographic *parshanut*, which portrays the central heroic figures of scriptural history as virtually devoid of emotion, can only regard the sharpening of psychological awareness with reference to *Tanakh* with a jaundiced eye. But for those of us who have been steeped in *midrashim*, the Ramban⁴⁸ and the *Ha’ameik Davar*,⁴⁹ in a tradition which regards our patriarchal *avot* and their successors as very great people indeed, but as people nonetheless, and which moreover sees their greatness as related to their humanity – enhanced literary sensitivity can be viewed as a significant boon.”⁵⁰

It is clear to modern Orthodox educators that both the truth

of the text and the *mesorah* lies in an honest and full reading of the narratives in all their complexity. Beyond that, it is clear that we posit and the anecdotal evidence bears out that a rich, sophisticated reading of *Tanakh* and its heroes, appreciating their humanity and psychological complexities, even failings and flaws, makes those characters more meaningful and able to serve as lodestars for our young adults and for ourselves. It is these figures struggling to achieve holiness and fulfill the divine mandate who in their humanity and complexity speak to us. This perspective argues that they serve as role models of authentic piety, a connection to the *Ribbono shel olam* and spiritual growth, guiding us even in their moments of weakness. Indeed, placing biblical figures beyond our grasp makes them so inaccessible as they fail to retain any impact on our daily lives and struggles. In that sense a student can become jaded to the point where *Tanakh* and its heroes can become less meaningful and less real and relevant than so many other influences in life. Moreover, as R. Samson Raphael Hirsch and others argued so strenuously, we deify no man, great as he or she may have been. Our ultimate reverence is reserved only upwards, towards God himself, and thus even the greatest of the great cannot be placed in that unique category of demanding total trust, fealty, and reverence.

R. Shalom Carmy in an essay touching on many facets of the discussion here cites a discussion he had with a young teacher who was troubled by the negative impression his students had of King Saul from their study of *Shmuel*. The teacher had previously rejected R. Carmy's suggestion to explore with his students parallel stories in general literature. R. Carmy had advised examining stories of gifted individuals destined for roles they never sought and the subsequent unraveling of their lives. The teacher rejected this advice as irrelevant because, "How can one compare *Tanakh* to literature?" and upon being prompted for his solution he "intoned ceremoniously" that, "I say he's *Shaul Melekh Yisrael*" (an approach that clearly hadn't worked with his students). Commenting on that incident, R. Carmy notes:

Meanwhile something else disturbed me about the proclamation *Shaul Melekh Yisrael* – His majesty the King – in

that particular intonation. As much as the speaker wished to avoid the slightest tinge of alien accent, he had failed. It sounded like a cartoon notion of medieval pageantry. And attentive teenagers, whether or not they could put their finger on it, may well have heard a message antithetical to that so sincerely intended by the teacher. There is a reality we encounter in high political and personal drama, then again there's a sense of the world one gets by watching the "Adventures of Crusader Rabbit." What we learn in *Tanakh* is more like what you get in cartoons than what is found in Shakespeare. If that is the impression students carry away with them, their study of *Tanakh* is not contributing to *yirat shamayim*. Quite the contrary.⁵¹

At the same time we must be on guard against a shallow misapplication of this approach where the genuine awe and respect that we feel toward the *avot ha-umah* is compromised by cheap psychobabble or tendentious readings. Striking this optimum balance between honesty to the text, the sources, and the very religious message of the text and maintaining an appropriate sense of reverence and respect for biblical heroes is no easy task. There are, however, three principles that can help us in achieving that equilibrium in our own learning and the educational message that we pass on to our children and students.

First, the language we choose to use, the tone we take, and the perspectives we bring to bear in discussing the very real human dimension of great biblical figures must not be flippant or, worse, vulgar. Our formulations should be thoughtful and accurate, not sensational or immature, in their attempts to engage students or the general public. Furthermore, we should be wary of facile and unsubstantiated suggestions that are careless in their readings and shallow in their message. Again turning to R. Carmy:

One reason that people shrink the larger than life personalities of *Tanakh* to pop-psychology size is that they are accustomed to treating themselves the same way. What

characterizes pop-psychology? Casual deterministic assumptions, clichéd depictions of emotion, a philosophy that cannot grasp the dramatic, absolute, momentous solemnity of the moral-religious life. This is not the way I think of myself; it is not the way I think of you. It is not the way one should think about any human being created uniquely in the image of God. Once people see nothing wrong in entertaining secular conceptions of themselves, once they take for moral and psychological insight the tired idiom of the therapeutic, it's no wonder that they are tone-deaf to the grandeur of the *Avot* and *Immahot*.

How can we retrieve an appropriate reverence for the *Avot* and, in the process, enhance our own stature as spiritual beings? One crucial step is to take responsibility for our language. Rather than accept our language and habits of thought off the rack, so to speak, we must struggle to create the authentic words adequate to the depths and sublimity and uniqueness of our experience. The outbursts against modern culture indulged in so many *musar schmuzen*, and then laid aside until the next occasion, will not suffice. It requires a perpetual effort "to get the better of words," to say what we really feel and get a grip on what we want to feel. As you know, I value the study of literature and philosophy to a large degree because they help to emancipate us from the tyranny of shallow, received ideas.⁵²

Second, we need to emphasize to our students the notion of development of characters, the ups and downs and challenges of spiritual life as well as the real-life trajectory that great people evolve to their final form and stature, they do not simply emerge uni-dimensionally perfect from the womb. R. Yitzhak Hutner *zt"l* in a celebrated letter to a young man who had expressed his despair at the spiritual missteps he had taken and his religious failings wrote him back words of encouragement by noting:

It is an evil malady in our circles that when we discuss aspects of perfection of our spiritual giants that we deal with the final summary of their stature. We speak of their paths to perfection, while at the same time skipping over the internal struggle that took place in their souls. The impression conveyed by our discussion about our spiritual giants is that they emerged from the hand of the craftsman in their (ultimate) stature and character (fully formed). Everyone discusses, reacts with astonishment and holds up on a pedestal the purity of speech of the author of the *Hafetz Hayyim* ז"ל. However, who is aware of all the struggles, obstacles, stumbles and retreats that the Hafetz Hayim experienced in his battle with the evil inclination...? The result is that when a young person of spirituality, ambition and drive and energy encounters obstacles, missteps or stumbles he imagines himself removed from being "planted in the house of the Lord."⁵³

Finally, it would appear that another critical educational piece here is a sense of proportion and focus. If, for example, one's perspective of King David is wholly taken up with his encounter with Bat-Sheva, and eighty percent of one's class time is devoted to discussion of that episode alone, without engaging with the *David ha-Melekh* of the rest of the book of Samuel or the David that emerges from the rest of the biblical corpus including the portrait that emerges from the book of Chronicles, the book of Psalms, the latter books of Kings, and the prophetic books, one has misread the *peshat* of the biblical text and failed educationally in conveying the biblical truth in its full complexity, scope and depth.

6. Using Insights of and Methodologies from the World of Biblical Criticism and Use of R. Mordechai Breuer's Theory of Aspects

The most contentious issue in the world of modern Orthodox *Tanakh* study is exposure to the dilemmas raised by and use of the fruits and

insights of higher Biblical Criticism as well as the adoption of any methodology that seems to mimic its literary analysis and approach. Here too our focus will be on the use of this material and approach in the context of a religious setting.

It is clear that adoption of the *theological underpinnings* of classical Biblical Criticism, i.e., the notion of the Torah as a composite work written by various human authors in different historical time periods and locales with differing theologies and perspectives, without divine inspiration, is clearly outside the pale of any Orthodox notion of *Torah Min Hashamayim*. Adoption of such a worldview has no place in an Orthodox religious framework. The adherents of such a position, their personal commitment to observance of *mitzvot* notwithstanding, cannot honestly lay claim to any mantle of traditional justification.⁵⁴

Given, however, a rock solid commitment to *Torah Min Hashamayim*, the question arises as to the use of materials or methods that seem to be rooted in those very literary techniques and approaches. It is unfortunate that some of the attacks on those who use this material or the methodology of R. Mordechai Breuer often distort this basic fact and accuse them of adopting Biblical Criticism and its theological assumptions, a truly dishonest critique that has no place in the discussion. Any serious study of *Tanakh* at the advanced high school, college and *yeshiva gedola* level and beyond cannot long ignore the many real problems that have been highlighted by the world of historical-critical scholarship in the last two hundred years. (Many of the redundancies, couplets, contradictions and other phenomena were already noted by *Hazal* and various *Rishonim*, but not all were, and not all were addressed in a systematic fashion.) What does an honest student of *Tanakh* do with the myriad of contradictions that exist between various books of the Torah, within a book itself or those that seem to be interwoven into one chapter itself? Should we simply turn a blind eye to these problems and denounce any question emanating from those quarters as “higher anti-Semitism” as Professor Solomon Schechter termed the critical enterprise?

One approach, adopted by scholars such as B. Jacob, U. Cassutto,

and R. David Zvi Hoffman was to engage the critics on their own terms and show that their literary assumptions and conclusions were incorrect. The driving goal of these writers was to show the ultimate unity that emerges from a careful reading of the stories and a recognition of the immediate reasons for any distinctions or repetitions. In many instances these heroic efforts were extremely productive and the results can be used productively by students and teachers of *Tanakh*. (In some instances, such as the case of the two sacrifice sections, Lev. 1–5 and Lev. 6–7, even many in the source-critical world have abandoned the “traditional” documentary explanation of the repetition for a more integrated reading.) It is clear that using such insights which are regularly noted in Modern Orthodox commentaries such as *Daat Mikra* on the Torah and the various workbooks of Michlelet Herzog enhance our understanding of Torah. They offer insightful readings of the text and in passing produce powerful defenses of traditional assumptions potentially strengthening commitment and *emunah* in the process. Exploring these questions and their traditional and contemporary solutions, can thus yield both deeper Torah insight and deeper *yirat shamayim*.

There are times when the solutions offered by the scholars listed above do not yield satisfactory solutions and the questions remain unresolved. It is here that the revolutionary approach of R. Mordechai Breuer has much to contribute in our understanding of *devar Hashem*. R. Carmy nicely summarized the method as follows: “The Torah must speak in the language of men. But the wisdom that God would bestow upon us cannot be disclosed in a straightforward manner. The Torah therefore resorts to a technique of multivocal communication. Each strand in the text, standing on its own, reveals one aspect of the truth, and each aspect of the truth appears to contradict the other accounts. An insensitive reader, noticing the tension between the versions, imagines himself assaulted by a cacophony of conflicting voices. The perceptive student, however, experiences the magnificent counter-point in all its power.”⁵⁵ I would add that the method R. Breuer explicates often yields profound insights into what the hermeneutics of *midrash Halakha* in the reading of the conflicting passages and how the resolution of the conflicting

passages makes its way into the reality of normative Halakha. This is no small feat, as the creative and sometimes bewildering hermeneutical moves of *Hazal* often trouble thoughtful students (and their teachers) and have the potential to undermine both *emunat hakhamim* and commitment to its teachings.

All this is not to say that R. Breuer's method and individual analyses are not open to challenge. They certainly are. Many of the substantive critiques of his method and his conclusions have substantial force. Many have noted the weakness of his literary assumptions about how a "human" author would write, his uncritical adoption of the divisions of various portions of the *Humash* posited by the source-critical world, his total lack of engagement with any historical, archeological or anthropological elements that have been raised by modern Bible scholarship, and his exclusive concentration on literary issues.⁵⁶

Notwithstanding these criticisms, R. Breuer's methods and many of his readings have added immeasurably to our appreciation of the *devar Hashem* and are an invaluable weapon in our arsenal to read the *Tanakh* honestly and with integrity while retaining the age-old commitment to the divine authorship of the text. In this it, as part of the panoply of strategies and exegetical materials brought to bear in a class, can and is a significant element in enhancing *yirat shamayim* and love of Torah.⁵⁷

7. Use of Archeological, Geographical, Historical, Ethnographic, Linguistic Data of the Ancient Near East

The last area of contention revolves around the use of the complex of disciplines and materials that have been unearthed and refined by the academic world in its study of the Ancient Near East. These fields include the findings of comparative Semitics, archeology of the Ancient Near East, and other relevant disciplines. In broad strokes, many in the modern Orthodox educational world of sophisticated *Tanakh* study in the context of the *beit midrash* have in the last three decades moved to make selective but sustained use of this material. The pioneering commentary of *Daat Mikra*, and the groundbreak-

ing essays of R. Yoel Bin Nun are two of the seminal examples of this phenomenon. On one level this type of linguistic, philological, and archeological study simply continues the use of these methods by *Rishonim* such as Rambam, Ramban, Ibn Ezra and Radak albeit with a much greater wealth of material, languages, artifacts, and historical records available to the scholar and student. As R. Carmy has written:

Furthermore, even where the exegesis is thick on the ground, each generation has its own questions. Sometimes we benefit from new data about the historical and linguistic background of *Tanakh*. What truth-seeking person would close his, or her, eyes to a newly discovered inscription clarifying the geography or vocabulary of a pasuk that baffled the *Rishonim*? The Ramban's delight when, upon his arrival in *Eretz Israel*, he was able to revise some of his *perushim* in the light of the realia, should put to shame the kind of piety that disdains such knowledge.⁵⁸

I will not here rehearse the myriad of examples where our understanding of the biblical text has been enriched by these disciplines or where entire enigmatic portions of *Tanakh* have been illuminated by the use of these more modern methods. A number of authors have already provided the interested reader with numerous case studies and they could easily be exponentially multiplied.⁵⁹ In some instances, the insights derived are no less satisfying and important than those of emerging from the writings of Rabbi Hayyim Soloveitchik *zt"l* on *Shetarot* or his fine distinctions between *daat* and *kavvanah* in breaking open the issue at hand and resolving the issue with brilliance and simplicity.⁶⁰ The primary element of course, is that today such insights and methodologies can systematically and comprehensively be employed rather than accessed only on the rare occasion. The assumption behind the use of such disciplines and data lies in the notion that *Tanakh* is a tome that reflects the concrete

historical and sociological reality into which God chose to reveal his eternal will to mankind. As R. Yuval Cherlow has described the methodology of his mentor R. Yoel Bin Nun:

The *Tanakh* took place in a concrete reality. The position of “accursed philosophy” that events described in *Tanakh* did not occur, and that it is entirely a symbolic work were entirely rejected by *gedolei yisrael*. The *Tanakh* is not only ensconced in the heavens but is rather a ladder rooted in the ground whose top reaches the firmament. Therefore, understanding the reality in which the events of *Tanakh* took place enables one to understand the Torah itself. The concrete reality is an indispensable part of the Torah and it is not for naught that the sages stated that *diber hakatuv behoveh* – “the text speaks in the present reality”... This is all done with a clear distinction between the holy and secular, and a profound understanding that the Torah is not chained to a specific [historical] reality. The purpose of engaging in understanding the concrete reality of the biblical stories is not to transform the *Avot* into simple merchants or the divine laws as parallel to human legislation, but rather to serve as comparative soil upon which to uncover the foundation of *devar Hashem* and his Torah and understand the divine revelation in its profundity.⁶¹

If this idyllic picture were the entire story, I imagine that there would be little opposition to the use of these disciplines in the *beit midrash*. The broader picture is of course more complicated. First, there is the matter of conflicts between the academic or scientific evidence/theories and the history laid out in the biblical narrative. This is a subset, of course, of the millennia-old tension between “scientific” truth and “revealed” truth that has agitated thinkers and theologians across a variety of faith traditions.

In general terms, the same strategies with which we deal with conflicts between the physical sciences and the truths of tradition should be utilized here as well. In some instances we will have to ex-

plore whether what we consider a “revealed” truth is really no more than an interpretation that can be reevaluated in light of compelling scientific evidence, that is to say, have we truly understood what *devar Hashem* is really saying, and is the conflict indeed so direct? A good example of this is the Ramban’s revaluation of the location of Rachel’s tomb after he reached *Eretz Yisrael* and saw the geography of the biblical sites themselves. In other instances we will note the distinction between scientific facts and the scientific interpretation of those facts or conjectures/theories as to the meaning of those facts. While actual facts must always be assimilated and interpreted, the recognition that interpretation of archeological finds is often “more art than science...and that new discoveries and new perceptions are constantly forcing reevaluations of currently held positions. It is this state of flux which helps alleviate such tensions to a certain degree by allowing discrepancies and contradictions to stand while awaiting further clarification.”⁶² We will also highlight distinctions between positive evidence and arguments from silence, i.e., the lack of historical or archeological finds to buttress a particular biblical narrative. Given the fact that so much about the Ancient Near East is not known, many important sites have not been excavated, many important finds have been discovered by chance, and that in the estimate of some scholars less than ten percent of the material and documentary culture of the Ancient Near East has been discovered, arguments from silence (e.g., no material evidence of the conquest of the Land of Israel by Joshua) are rather tenuous in establishing the lack of historicity of this or that biblical episode.

On the other hand in more extreme situations we may have to follow in the footsteps of Rambam in *The Guide for the Perplexed* (11:25), who articulated the position that if indeed a scientific theory that conflicts with the plain sense of the biblical text is unassailable, and there exists no other tenable scientific theory conforming with the biblical text, we are obligated to accept the scientific theory and reinterpret, even metaphorically, the biblical passage under question. Rambam notes, however, that in the particular issue he was dealing with (the eternity of the universe), the alternate theory of Plato is also logically cogent and it can co-exist with a belief in the Creation

of the World and the possibility of miracles and we are entitled to adopt that theory. Rambam factors in the theological cost of metaphorizing a significant part of *Tanakh* and given that two equally possible theories exist, we are entitled to privilege the one that fits in with the plain understanding of the biblical text.

Applying this to our context, Uriel Simon has noted that, “Metaphorizing large sections of biblical historiography [as would emerge from the conclusions of certain radical Israeli archeologists] would demand of us a high theological cost...and [yet] one cannot ignore that factual truth has a unique persuasive power...In the dilemma we confront, it is appropriate, in my opinion, that we struggle for the maximum historicity of the Bible, with a careful watch on maintaining our intellectual and scientific honesty, as if indeed the historicity [of a particular episode] is debunked, we have a sort of safety net [in the use]of legitimate metaphorization.”⁶³

Finally, when push comes to shove, there may be instances where even this method will not yield a satisfactory resolution. In those cases, we will humbly take our cue from *Avraham Avinu* and the message of the *akeidah* recognizing the limits of our human comprehension and accepting the divine call and message that emerges from the text, though it flies in the face of the “scientific” data before us. We will humbly wait for resolution, accepting with faith the divine imperative as we continue with our *tzarikh iyun*.

Beyond direct conflict, however, for many the challenge primarily relates to the “undeniable commonality of cultural and literary motifs that the Bible shares with the civilizations and literatures of the ancient Near East.”⁶⁴ This tension is predicated on the expansive assumption of the uniqueness of the divine norms as *sui generis* not only in content and message but in form and formulation, language and structure. This formulation assumes that *Tanakh* as a divine text is removed from the category of the canons of literary and historical categories of other texts. The notion, so dominant in the writings of medieval commentators, that *dibra Torah be-leshon bnei adam* yields a differing conception of the uniqueness of the divine nature of the biblical text. In addition, the reality that God revealed his Torah into the concrete world of frail and flawed human beings,

who lived in concrete culture, social structure, set of theological assumptions, and ways of experiencing the world directs us toward the “need to define the uniqueness of the Torah in more subtle yet possibly more profound ways.”⁶⁵

The uniqueness of the Torah lies ultimately not in the form, in the shell, but primarily in the content, in the essence of its theological, spiritual and normative message. Thus, to take one example, whatever similarities exists in language and form of many of the laws of *Mishpatim* to the Hittite or Eshnuna codes pale in comparison to the profound theological differences that emerge from careful study. The profound differences between our monotheistic theology of an omnipotent, free-willed Creator versus the paganistic, mechanistic worldview yields sharp differences reflected in the content of the civil laws, including the invaluable worth of every human life created in the image of God, whether rich or poor, the issue of ransom for life and a whole host of issues touching on the very core of our religious sensibility.⁶⁶

To take a second example the same holds true in studying the biblical conceptions of *mishkan* and *korbanot*. Archeological and historical research has found significant parallels in Temple architecture, sacrificial nomenclature, assorted sacrificial rites, and various sacred liturgies of ancient Near Eastern societies and those depicted in Exodus and Leviticus. Careful study of those books and the entire corpus of *Tanakh*, however, often teaches us that external parallels of form and language are entirely overshadowed by the radically differing conceptions of the entire meaning, function and purpose of the “cult.” In sharp contrast to the paganistic conception that viewed sacrifices as part of the magical machinations of appeasing the gods or accessing the meta-Divine realm, in the Torah the entire corpus of *Torat Kohanim* plays an entirely different role where the demonic and mythological has been totally eradicated in line with the ethos of monotheism. The magisterial works of Jacob Milgrom on Leviticus that explore and meticulously document this line of thought in great detail, are a wonderful example of the kind of contribution that Ancient Near Eastern scholarship can contribute to our understanding of the *devar Hashem*.

Finally, there maybe some laws or institutions found in the Torah that are not only parallel in form or nomenclature but whose very content seems to be undistinguishable from those of its surrounding societies. Here too, it is hard to understand the “horror” that this should cause in a thinking *ben-Torah*. *Hazal* in a number of places asserted that there are basic civil laws that had they not been revealed could have been derived from observation of the natural order, i.e., in a sense some conception of natural law. Moreover, the concept of seven Noahide laws revealed to mankind, especially as understood expansively by Ramban, or R. Saadyah Gaon’s affirmation that many of the rational laws of the Torah can be derived through reason, given time and effort, should certainly attenuate the seriousness of any challenge arising from the existence of explicitly parallel laws, whose parallels extend to their very content.

CONCLUSION

This paper was predicated on an expansive definition of *yirat shamayim*, rooted at the same time in passionate commitment to punctilious observance of *mitzvot* and adherence to basic dogmatic beliefs. In that context it both defended the legitimacy of integrating “modern” methods together with classical modes of *Talmud Torah*, often noting the well-worn precedents for these methodologies in our traditional sources. In addition it pointed to the benefits that can be accrued from such study in the right ambience. These benefits include a greater, more sophisticated understanding of *devar Hashem*, the inculcation of greater *ahavat Torah* and ensuring that our Torah study remains infused with a desire to arrive at truth, which is the seal of the *Ribbono shel Olam*. The existence of these elements in the ideal educational frameworks we seek to maintain in our world all contribute to fostering greater *yirat shamayim* in our young (and not so young) modern Orthodox students. These are the same young adults who are so heavily involved in many aspects of popular culture that do not foster *yirah* or *ahavah*. Elements that help enhance Torah study, help students see its beauty, and open their eyes to its glory should be welcomed and embraced. The keys, of course, are ensuring that this *limmud ha-Torah* occurs in an atmosphere where

the experiential and affective elements, as well as the home and synagogue, contribute to heightening the individual's spirituality, God consciousness and commitment to Halakha and its *telos*. And finally it must be remembered that a central element in that endeavor is choosing the right role models as educators and *rebbeim*. These "text-people" rather than textbooks, as Heschel termed them, and the fire, enthusiasm, devotion to God and his Torah that they convey to their students are ultimately far more important than whether an idea from the works of Cassutto crosses their lips or they teach students *vortelch* from *Iturei Torah*. In that enterprise all of us need to devote our maximum effort, as well as hope to receive a measure of divine grace, in achieving our lofty aims of educating a generation of committed modern Orthodox *avdei Hashem*.

AFTERWORD: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Since at least the time of the Rambam, the charge of insufficient *yirat shamayim* has often been hurled at those within the traditional orbit who apply "new" techniques or perspectives to canonical texts, render halakhic decisions slightly out of the previous consensus, or who have a more positive attitude to engaging with their contemporary ambience and the best of its culture. These and other charges, of course, were directed at the Rambam and his followers and yielded a ferocious controversy in the middle ages. This phenomenon became especially pronounced in the decades following the onset of the European enlightenment which transformed the Jewish people's self-identity. It was during this critical juncture that a self-defined and self-aware Orthodox community emerged who saw their mission as a defense of tradition, as they were being buffeted by the hostile winds of change. In this atmosphere tensions between various sectors of the Orthodox community were an inevitable byproduct of the differing perspectives that rabbinic leaders and traditional communities brought to the question of engaging the modern world and specifically the emergence of modern scientific studies. The proto-Haredi camps associated with some of the more extreme students of the *Hatam Sofer* often saw their more modernist Orthodox colleagues as the true threat to tradition. In that vein they

viciously attacked, denigrating them and their approach as lacking in *yirat shamayim* and worse. For example, R. Hillel Lichtenstein⁶⁷ in a “responsum” wrote of the sainted, R. Azriel Hildesheimer *zt”l* when he was still rabbi of Halberstadt, Hungary as the de-facto leader of Hungarian Neo-Orthodoxy that: “[Hildesheimer] is a man of deceit, a liar, out only for monetary gain, wrapped, so to speak in a garb of righteousness which outwardly justifies his deed, like a pig that stretches forth its hoofs...so that many are caught in his net...His every tendency is to uproot Torah and the fear of God and plant in their stead apostasy and heresy in Israel.”⁶⁸

Attacks such as these continued into the twentieth century and were directed at *gedolei yisrael* such as Rav Avraham Yitzhak ha-Kohen Kook *zt”l*, R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zt”l*,⁶⁹ R. Shlomo Goren *zt”l*, and in the last few decades as well as prominent Orthodox rabbis, educators, and *marbeitzei Torah* such as Dr. Samuel Belkin *z”l* and *yebadlu le-hayyim arukim*, R. Saul Berman, R. Simcha Krauss, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin, R. Adin Steinsaltz, R. Avi Weiss and many other rabbis and communal leaders who toil in the vineyard of the Almighty for the cause of Torah and the Jewish people. In more recent years we have also been witness to broad brush attacks towards modern Orthodox organizations and institutions in both Israel and the United States, the banning of the books authored by fine and devout Orthodox educators and *rashei yeshiva* such as, R. Yoel Bin Nun, R. Natan Kaminetsky, R. Yuval Cherlow and R. Natan Slifkin. Last, but unfortunately not the least, we have been witness to an all out attack on the religious teachers seminaries affiliated with a number of the *yeshivot Hesder* such as Yeshivat Har Etzion by the previously highly regarded Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har ha-Mor, R. Tzvi Tau. In his pamphlet *Tzaddik Be-Emunato Yihyeh*,⁷⁰ he has stated that teachers and administrators in institutions such as the Herzog Teacher’s College are “poisoned and poison others” and that they are “lacking in *yirat shamayim* and their knowledge is dry, outside of the soul, as they are studied in the University.” Others have responded appropriately in other forums to these calumnies⁷¹ but the phenomenon of using the *yirat shamayim* card as a blunt instrument to beat one’s more “modern-

ist” opponent (competitor?) continues to the great detriment of the Orthodox community. In the process many of the real challenges that we confront as a community and the real questions that are faced by our youth and adults as they struggle to understand *devar Hashem* are pushed aside. In the process, *yirat shamayim* and the striving to achieve it have been devalued. It is long past time for the redemption of this central category of religious existence from its continued abuse as a weapon of attack. No one has expressed this sentiment more eloquently than R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (*Netziv*) in his celebrated introduction to *Sefer Bereishit*. Commenting on the rabbinic appellation of *Sefer ha-Yashar* to *Bereishit* he writes of the generation that lived during the year of the destruction of the Second Temple as being:

righteous and pious and diligent Torah scholars, but they were not upright in the ways of the world. And therefore because of the baseless hatred in their hearts towards one another they suspected whoever did not behave in accordance with their view of *yirat hashem* of being a heretic and sectarian. And this led them to murder...and God does not countenance such *tzadikim*.

NOTES

1. Introduction to the Standard Commentary on the Torah.
2. Opening to *Orot ha-Kodesh*, Vol. 3, p. 26. The translated word “drowns” conforms to the actual word R. Kook used *toveiah* as found in the original manuscript published in *Shemonah Kevatzim – Kovetz 1:267* (Jerusalem, 2004). The printed text in *Orot ha-Kodesh*, edited by R. David ha-Kohen, ז”ל popularly known as the Nazir, softens the idea slightly by changing it to *tovel*, “dips or immerses.”
3. Cited in R. Aharon Lichtenstein, “The Ideology of Hesder,” *Leaves of Faith*, Vol. 1 (Jersey City, 2003), p. 156, ft. 9.
4. From the e-mail letter invitation to submit this paper.
5. In this I believe I am following the schema set out in a previous conclave of the Orthodox Forum on the theme of *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah*. Fully two-thirds of the presentations focused on Bible study while Talmud study received the last third of time and attention.
6. *Shut Va-Yaan Yose, Yoreh Deah*, 5 (Brooklyn, 1992).
7. This phenomenon is not simply a uniquely Hasidic one. I recall, close to twenty

years ago, R. Aharon Lichtenstein recounted that R. Yaakov Kaminetsky zt"l was still upset decades later recalling that when he had been in the Slobodka Yeshiva in his youth the administration had looked askance at Rav Yaakov having taken out a boat on a lake to relax during a break period as inappropriate behavior for a *ben Torah*.

8. Note for example the diversity of practice within the halakhic community on issues such as halakhic criteria for determination of death, use of the *heter mekhi-rah*, shaving on *hol ha-moed*, use of exclusively *yashan* products in the Diaspora, changing the text of *naheim* on *Tisha be-Av*, legitimacy of women's Talmud study, proper methods for reheating food on Shabbat, *metzizah be-feh* in circumcision, validity of women's prayer groups, etc.
9. This formulation would recognize that a wide range exists on fundamental questions of Jewish thought and dogma. For a full exposition of this thesis see the richly researched volume of M. Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology* (London, 2003).
10. Examples of the first category include Yeshivat Kibbutz Ha-Dati, Maaleh Gilboa, and Otniel. Examples that fall into the second category would be Yeshiva and Stern Colleges and Bar Ilan University, post-collegiate institutes such as Beit Morasha and MATAN, teachers seminaries such as Herzog Teacher's College or Efrata Teacher's Seminary, graduate programs such as BRGS and Touro College Graduate School of Jewish Studies, rabbinical programs such as RIETS and YCT Rabbinical School, yeshiva high schools as well as adult-education programs under the aegis of synagogues and community *kollelim*.
11. For some exploration on the reasons for the fall-off rate in observance or total abandonment of religious life by a significant percentage of young adults raised in the modern Orthodox community see S. Fisherman, "Noar Ha-Kipot Ha-Zerukot" (Elkanah, 1998); the widely discussed Internet essay, Gil Perl and Yaakov Weinstein, *A Parent's Guide to Orthodox Assimilation on University Campuses*, as well as selected chapters of the recently published F. Margolese, *Off the Derech* (Jerusalem, 2005). For a focus on diminution of religious commitment and fervor, as well as full blown defection from Orthodoxy in the more Haredi sectors of Orthodox society, see S. Barzilai, *Lifrotz Meah Shearim* (Tel Aviv, 2004) and the recently published H. Winston, *Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels* (Boston, 2005). In general terms, the entire role of the classical intellectual challenges to Judaism emerges a limited factor in the abandonment of faith, with other elements such as the cultural, sociological, experiential, family life and a whole host of other factors playing a much more dominant role. "Modern" modes of *Talmud Torah* and exposure to them are almost entirely absent as a factor in individuals' decision to abandon commitment or weakening their standards of observance.
12. Printed in *Judaism's Encounter With Other Cultures*, ed., J.J. Schachter (New Jersey, 1997).
13. P. 284.
14. Cited in *By His Light*, ed. R. Ziegler (Jersey City, 2003), p. 143.

15. This is not meant to claim that the Rav or Rav Kook adopted the Maimonidean conception of the meaning of *emunah* and viewed it in those terms. In fact, both the Rav and Rav Kook, living in a post-Kantian and Copernican world, were far from the rationalistic enterprise and belief that one could prove God through a series of rational proofs. A cursory reading of the first pages of *The Lonely Man of Faith* or the first of Rav Kook's *Shemoneh Kevatzim* highlights that faith for the both the Rav and Rav Kook is conceived in terms much closer to the intense, passionate experiential notions rooted in the biblical vision and the writings of Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi rather than the abstract rationalism of the *Rambam*. On this see the excellent essay recently published by my dear friend and teacher, Rav Yoel Bin Nun, "*Emunah ve-Hafakheha*" in *Al ha-Emunah*, eds. M. Halbertal, D. Kurzweil, A. Sagi (Jerusalem, 2005).
16. *By His Light* (Jersey City, 2003) p. 223.
17. For a detailed summary of the sources and their relationship to our topic, see U. Simon, *Ha-Mikra ve-Anahnu* (Tel Aviv, 1979), pp. 13–41.
18. On this see Mordechai Breuer, "*Ha-Tanakh Be-Tokhnit ha-Limudim*" in *Studies in Bible and Education Presented to Professor Moshe Arend* (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 223–235, as well as his recently published *Ohalei Torah: The History and Structure of the Yeshiva* (Jerusalem, 2004) pp. 118–123; Ya'akov Beasley, "Of Fainting Maidens and Wells: Bible Study in the Yeshiva Curriculum: A Halachic, Historical, and Ideological Overview" (Jerusalem, 1999) in the *Atid Journal* on line at www.atid.org; R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "Study" in *Contemporary Jewish Thought*, eds. Arthur Cohen and Paul Mendes Flohr (New York, 1988) pp. 933–34.
19. N. Helfgot, "The Broad Torah," *Ten-Daat* 8, 1, p. 31.
20. Printed in J.D. Epstein, *Mitzvat ha-Shalom* (New York, 1969), pp. 605–7. In subsequent published editions this letter was omitted.
21. *Be-Ikkvei ha-Tzon*, p. 144.
22. *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot (New York, 2005), pp. 104–5.
23. Indeed it is interesting to note that in the last fifteen years of her life, Nehama zt"l was teaching more classes to American students, American *Tanakh* teachers on sabbatical or on teacher-training seminars, as well as visiting principals, than to native Israeli teachers. For various and sundry reasons beyond the scope of this footnote, while her methodology and *iyunim* had achieved almost canonical status, many Israeli students and teachers were exploring other avenues of *Tanakh* study.
24. In teaching *Neveim Aharonim* and integrating traditional and modern methodologies over the last fifteen years to both teenagers, college students, and adults at least once a semester a student will have an "aha" moment and say something to the effect that, "I always was bored by Navi and thought that they were simply repeating the same thing over and over. The methods you employed showed me how to understand the unique message of each Navi and each specific chapter in its historical context and how each fits into the overall structure of the book and its themes."

25. For an expanded discussion on the foundational role *Tanakh* should have in creating an authentic religious personality and society, see the stimulating essay by R. Yuval Cherlow, "*Ha-Im Ha-Tanakh Haya?*" *Megadim*, 33, pp. 75–122.
26. It is extremely telling that many of the philosophical writings relating to issues of faith, nationhood, as well as man's place in the world, written by three of the leading American Orthodox theologians of the second half of the twentieth century, The Rav *zt"l*, Dr. Eliezer Berkovitz *z"l* and *yebadel le-hayyim arukim*, Dr. Michael Wyschograd are almost exclusively biblically based with citations from halakhic literature playing a minor role. For example *Confrontation, The Lonely Man of Faith, and U-vekashtem M-isham*, as well as *God, History and Man*, or *The Body of Faith* are fundamentally rooted in a return to a direct and intense encounter with biblical theology and the exegesis of that theology through the prism of the theologian and his concerns.
27. *Pirkei ha-Avot* (Alon Shvut, 2005) p. 13, (my translation).
28. See the important essay by U. Simon, "*Mashmoutam Ha-Datit Shel Ha-Peshatim Hamithadshim Be-Khol Yom*" in *Ha-Mikra ve-Anahnu* (Tel Aviv, 1979), pp. 133–52.
29. Numerous examples of this phenomenon can be found in the exegetical work of R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk *zt"l*, author of *Meshekh Hokhmah*.
30. Professor James Kugel has argued strenuously in his various writings that not only Jews read the Bible through the eyes of its interpreters, but that it is impossible for anyone to read and understand the Bible, with a capital B, as the foundational religious text of western civilization in a vacuum, bereft of how it was read in antiquity: "We like to think that the Bible, or any other text means "just what it says." And we act on that assumption: we simply open a book – including the Bible – and try to make sense of it on our own. In ancient Israel and for centuries afterward, on the contrary, people looked to special interpreters to explain the meaning of the Biblical text. For that reason, the explanations quickly acquired an authority of their own...And so it was this *interpreted* Bible, not just the stories, prophecies, and laws themselves, but these texts as they had, by now been interpreted and explained for centuries that came to stand at the very center of Judaism and Christianity." James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge, 1998) pp. 2–3.
31. Glosses to *Sefer ha-Mitzvo*, Shores 2.
32. See for example the essay of U. Simon cited above, Y. Maori, "*Keitzad Nityaheis le-Midrshaei Hazal be-Horaat ha-Mikra be-veit Ha-Seifer ha-Dati?*" in *Ha-Mikra ve-Anahnu* (Tel Aviv, 1979) pp. 209–19; M. Ahrend, *Yesodot be-Horaat ha-Mikra* (Jerusalem, 1987) pp. 19–69; S. Carmy, "A Room with A View, but a Room of Our Own," in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah* (New Jersey, 1996) pp. 1–39.
33. To just cite a few of the myriad of sources see Rambam, Introduction to the Commentary on the Mishnah, *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, Shores 2, Ramban's glosses on that section, Ibn Ezra's Introduction to his Bible Commentary, Malbim's introduction to *Sefer Vayikra*, and the summary found in Menachem Elon, *Jewish Law*, Vol. 1.
34. See e.g., Jay Harris, *How Do We Know This* (Albany, 1995).

35. See especially Ahrend, pp. 35–37 and Maori, pp. 213–19
36. See BT *Sanhedrin* 34a.
37. *Tzir Va-Tzon* (Alon Shvut, 2002), pp. 215–16, 219–20.
38. For an excellent detailed discussion of this exegetical perspective and its roots see Mordechai Cohen, “The Best of Poetry: Literary Approaches to the Bible in the Spanish *Peshat* Tradition,” *The Torah U-Maddah Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 15–57.
39. *Commentary*, 61:3, p. 16.
40. See a similar sentiment expressed by R. Moshe Feinstein in a responsum penned to a young scholar residing in Bnei Brak who was concerned that in the course of his *shiurim* he sometimes takes issue with the positions of the Hazon Ish *zt”l*.
41. *Torah Insights*, (Jerusalem, 1995) p. 161.
42. See his pamphlet *Sugyot ba-Torah ve-Talmudan al pi ha-Mekorot*, 18 (Jerusalem, 1966).
43. For a thorough review of the rabbinic and educational literature on this topic, see N. Gutel, “*Bein Kabalat Ha-Emet M-Mi She-Amarah le-vein Kabalatah-Mi-Malakh Hashem Tzva-ot*” in *Havnat Hamikra Be-Yameinu* (Jerusalem, 2004), pp. 129–58.
44. A.S. Halkin, *Hitgalut Ha-Sodot ve-Hofaat Hameorot-Peirush Shir Hashirim* (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 493–95.
45. The very public and concerted attacks on the writings of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, R. Shlomo Riskin, R. Yuval Sherlow, R. Yoel Bin Nun, R. Avi Weiss and many others in the last two decades are just some of the more famous cases of this phenomenon.
46. In *Mishnat Rebbi Aharon*, Vol. 3 (Lakewood, 1988). Similar sentiments, with individual nuances, have been expressed in various *fora* by R. Shlomo Aviner and R. Yisrael Tau, major leaders of the *Hardal* stream in Israel.
47. See for example, A. David “Perspectives on the Avot and Imahot” in *Ten-Daat* 5:1; Z. Grumet “Another Perspective on the Avot and Imahot,” *Ten-Daat*, 6:1; S. Riskin, *Heiruto Shel Parshan ha-Mikra, Akdamot*, 3; M. Lichtenstein, *Tzir ve-Tzon* (Alon Shvut, 2002) pp. 235–57; H. Dietcher, “*Bein Malakhim le-Venei Adam*” in *Havanat Ha-Mikra be-Yameinu* (Jerusalem, 2004) pp. 193–212, and the discussion on the pages of *Hatzofeh* in the spring of 2002 on the topic of *Tanakh be-Govah Einayim* accessible at www.hatzofeh.co.il.
48. One could add Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, Hizkuni, Seforno and Abravanel among others.
49. And one could add the writings of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, R. Avaraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook and the Rav among others.
50. “Torah and General Culture: Congruence and Conflict” in *Judaism’s Encounter with Other Cultures*, ed. J.J. Schachter (New Jersey, 1997) p. 227. On a number of occasions in the mid 1980s, R. Lichtenstein was even more sharp in his formulation arguing that the Haredi approach often turns the Avot into “ossified figures of petrified *tzidkut*” from whom we can learn precious little in the real world we inhabit and the spiritual challenges that we confront.
51. “To Get the Better of Words: An Apology For *Yirat Shamayim* in Academic Jewish Studies” in *The Torah U Maddah Journal*, Vol. 2, pp. 11–12.

52. *amevaser 2000*, "Imitate the Ramban, Not the Professors." Interview with Asher Friedman, accessible at www.atid.org in the resources link under the "Writings of Rabbi Shalom Carmy: The On-Line Library."
53. *Igrot U-Ketavim*, Letter #128 (*Brooklyn*, 5758).
54. The more complex issue relates to persons who maintain that the Torah is a composite work from the hand of various human authors in different historical settings, but that these authors were divinely inspired. That is, people who see the Torah as equivalent to the writings of the Prophets. This perspective, while arguably not technically rendering one as "Denying the Divine origin of the Torah" as articulated in the *mishna* in *Sanhedrin* 90a undermines the uniqueness of the Torah in contrast to the rest of the Bible, as well as the uniqueness of Mosaic prophecy which for some of *Hazal* and some of the *Rishonim* is an article of faith, potentially shattering the foundation of the whole structure of the binding nature of Torah. While there clearly were *Rishonim* who maintained that an isolated section of the Torah here or there was post-Mosaic, a gloss from the pen of a subsequent prophet, the notion of the wholly composite makeup of the entirety of the Torah is one that has no precedent in classical Jewish sources. Thus it is impossible to term such a theological understanding as Orthodox in any meaningful sense. On this see M. Breuer, "The Study of Bible and the Fear of Heaven" in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah* (New Jersey, 1997) pp. 163–70 and *Megadim*, 30, pp. 97–107.
55. "Introducing R. Breuer" in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah* pp. 148–49.
56. See Carmy, pp. 153–55; S. Leiman, "Response to Rabbi Breuer" in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah*, p. 181; M. Lichtenstein, "Ahat Dibber Elokim Shtayim Zu Shamati?" in *Alon Shvut Bogrim*, 17, pp. 32–35.
57. On an educational note it is important that irrespective of the use of the R. Breuer methodology or exposure to the questions of Bible Criticism in the context of a *shiur*, it is critical that our older high school students and our young adults simply be made aware of the phenomenon of bible criticism. The basic counters of this field and its suppositions and beliefs as preparation for the "outside world" and engagement with it. Students graduating a modern Orthodox yeshiva high school should at least take a short seminar (two to three periods) which exposes them to the rudimentary aspects of what bible criticism is, its history and genesis, some examples of the phenomenon and traditional responses to its claims. Bible criticism remains the regnant theory in all secular higher academic settings and it is simply irresponsible to have students walk into a class on the first day of their Lit-Hum course at Columbia or SUNY-Binghamton and be shocked that intelligent, thoughtful people actually believe that the Torah is not a divine document. One certainly does not want a student overwhelmed by such an experience or feel that serious issues or information was hidden from her during her yeshiva high school educational experience. I am happy to note that a good number of Yeshiva High Schools in the New York area already do this and there are a small number of Yeshiva programs in Israel who feel that this is part of their educational mandate as well.

58. *Hamevaser* Interview cited above.
59. See for example B. Eichler, "The Study of Bible in Light of Our Knowledge of the Ancient Near East" in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah*; L. Schiffman, "Making the Bible Come to Life: Biblical Archeology and the Teaching of *Tanakh* in Jewish Schools," *Tradition* 37:4, pp. 38–49.
60. A good example is R. Yoel Bin Nun's brilliant reading of the beginning of *Parashat Beshalakh* in light of the Tel-Amarna letters and other historical finds of that era.
61. From the introduction to Y. Bin Nun, *Pirkei Ha-Avot* (Alon Shvut, 2003) pp. 17–18.
62. *Study of the Bible*, p. 89.
63. "Arkheologiyah Post-Mikra'it U-Post-Tziyonit" in *Ha-Polmus Al ha-Emet ba-Mikra*, eds. Y. Levin and A. Mazar (Jerusalem, 2001), pp. 136–37.
64. *Study of the Bible*, p. 89.
65. *Study of the Bible*, p. 98.
66. See of course the monumental works of Moshe Greenberg, Nahum Sarna, Barry Eichler and others in this area.
67. Born in 1814 in Vesht, Hungary he studied under the *Hatam Sofer* in Pressburg from 1832–1837. He later served as rabbi of a number of towns including Klausenberg and Szikszó. He was the prime mover behind the "*psak din*" of Michlavitch (1866) that forbade, without any halakhic documentation, the use of the vernacular in synagogue sermons, the existence of a choir in the service or the wearing of clerical robes by rabbis among other strictures. The late Professor Jacob Katz *z"l* argued in a number of essays and, in greatest depth, in his book *A House Divided: Orthodoxy and Schism in Nineteenth-Century European Jewry* that this is the first formal instance of the use of the modern tool of "*Daas Torah*" in the sense of ex-cathedra pronouncements that do not see the need to justify their arguments with halakhic citations or arguments.
68. Cited in D. Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of A Modern Jewish Orthodoxy* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1990) p. 43. Similar examples of such language and attitudes directed towards R. Hildesheimer abound in R. Lichtenstein's response collection *Shut Beit Hillel* (Satmar, 1908).
69. This past November (2005), R. Shlomo Riskin spoke to a conclave of educators gathered at Manhattan Day School. He mentioned that in 1982 he traveled to Boston to personally deliver a copy of his first published work, a haggadah with a commentary and to inform his teacher, the Rav *z"l*, of his decision to move to Israel. The Rav attempted to dissuade him from making *aliyah* by telling him: "Riskin, you have your own ideas about things, and the religious establishment will not like them, *zei velen dich tzukeyyan und dernuch velen zei dich os'shpeiyan*." (Literally, "they will chew you up and spit you out.") At that point the Rav proceeded to take out a file folder with yellowed press clippings from 1935 reporting on his trip to *Eretz Yisrael* to vie for the Chief Rabbinate of Tel Aviv. The Rav showed R. Riskin many of the printed attacks on his personal *yirat shamayim* as a result of the fact that he had earned a doctorate, as well as the fact that his wife had ridden

on horses and did not cover her hair. It was clear that these attacks had hurt the Rav and affected his view on the desirability of moving to Israel.

70. (Eli, 2003)

71. See Amnon Bazak, “*Yesharim Darkei Hashem-Ve-Tzadikim Yeilkhu Bam*,” *Alon Shvut Bogrim*, 17, pp. 9–21.

5

Fear of God: The Beginning of Wisdom and the End of *Tanakh* Study

Mosheh Lichtenstein

יראת ד' ראשית דעת² – 'ראשית חכמה יראת ד'¹

A

A few years ago, a friend of ours was in *miluim* (reserve duty in the IDF) in early December. We invited his wife and children to eat with us on Shabbos morning, which was *parshat Vayishlach*. During the meal, the mother requested that I discuss the *parsha* with her girls, since her husband usually did so. I obviously obliged and began telling the story of the meeting between Yaakov and Esav in a manner that seemed to me most appropriate for a second grader. As I was reaching the climax and began to dramatically recount the story of Esav breaking his teeth as he attempted to sink them into

Yaakov's neck, I noticed the look of shock on the mother's face. Upon inquiring whether I had committed any grave error, I received the following reply: "*Anachnu*," she sternly told me, "*lomdim peshuto shel mikra!*" (We learn the simple meaning of the text!)

The story of the broken teeth is, of course, a famous midrash that features prominently in *Chazal's* interpretation of this episode. Coupled with the opposing opinion recorded alongside it that Esav kissed Yakov wholeheartedly, it is also an important debate regarding the ambivalent relationship underlying the meeting of the two brothers. As the issue at hand is *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim* and not *pshat* vs. *drash* (the literal meaning vs. homeletics), let us set aside the (narrow-minded) assumption that such a midrash does not contribute to our understanding of the *pshat* and the interpersonal dynamics at work in this charged narrative and dwell upon the implications of the story from the *yirat shamayim* perspective.

Broadly speaking, Rashi's interpretation of the *Chumash*, with its integration of much *Aggadic* material, is much more colorful than the commentaries of Ramban, Ibn Ezra and others who focused upon the plain meaning of the text. Teeth fall out, lions take swipes at a *tzaddik* who doesn't deliver their food on time, princesses' arms are extended into the middle of the river, dreams are swapped by cellmates, giants survive the deluge by wrapping themselves around the ark and many other vivid details are integrated by Rashi into his commentary. Conversely, it is also true that Ramban offers a more sophisticated and nuanced reading of the human relationships under consideration that contrasts sharply with Rashi's schematic and two dimensional approach. To put it differently, Ramban's protagonists are much more "round" and dynamic as opposed to those of Rashi who are considerably more "flat" and fixed in their characters.

What, then, should we teach our children – Rashi or Ramban? Needless to say, any answer to the question of Rashi vs. Ramban must take into account various considerations, exegetical, didactic, philosophical and others as to their relative merit as commentaries that are not of our concern in this paper. However, it seems to me that there is a very basic truth in our preference for Rashi in the early grades, even if one accepts the premise that Ramban's commentary

has a depth and richness that are unique to it, since it is Rashi who captivates and appeals to a child's imagination. Ramban may be sophisticated, but Rashi is vivid.

The rationale behind the choice of the more colorful commentary is that our aim in teaching *Chumash* is first and foremost the achievement of a religious goal. Not a biographical analysis of its protagonists, but the fostering of a sense of identification with those whom we see as our forefathers is our primary concern. It is a living dynamic that we are seeking, in which the *Avot* and *Imahot* – not the Patriarchs and Matriarchs³ – are part of our family tradition, and the establishment of a collective family memory is an integral part of our goals in relating their stories to our children. Needless to say, there is much that we should learn from the episodes themselves; they enlighten our lives, enrich our experiences, and provide perspectives on life and our relationship to God, but these are not our only goals. Love of the text and childhood excitement in regard to the story are crucial to our endeavor.

The enlightening role of literature as representing and enhancing human experience, along with the transmission of ideas and values to the reader, is indeed a major goal of *Tanakh*; nevertheless, we do not read *Tanakh* as great literature *per se*, but as a text with which we are emotionally engaged. In other words, there is a basic contrast between our approach to *Tanakh* and to literature that goes beyond the disparity of authorship and sanctity. Whereas great literature exists solely for its aesthetic and moral purposes, *Tanakh* expects us to identify with its protagonists and their experiences as relating to us existentially.

Thus, although there is much to be learned from *King Lear* or *Hamlet* as works of art, we do not attempt to identify with the personæ of Lear or Hamlet as people with whom we have established relationships. They are fully realized characters on stage but abstract figures in our lives. The same holds true of people whose existence is rooted in a firm historical setting that is not part of our heritage. In *Tanakh*, though, we do care about the people as people since their biographies are our history. To put it differently, *Tanakh* is not only literature but also history – not knowledge and analysis

of the past for the sake of the historical record but rather a family history of our own.⁴

Judged from this perspective of identification, there is much to recommend the world of the Midrash – on its own or as filtered through Rashi – as the entry point of a child into the world of the *Chumash*. The sense of wonder and excitement that it elicits serves the purpose of identifying with *Tanakh* better than other approaches. *Pshuto shel mikra*, despite its importance, may have to wait for a later stage of intellectual development.

Thus, purpose dictates choice of method in regard to *Tanakh* study. Needless to say, this is predicated upon the premise of *Ailu Va'ailu* that grants legitimacy to a variety of methods and recognizes them as expressing a possible and plausible reading of the text. There is an inner logic to the Midrash's reading of the text that we accept as imaginatively expressing a valid interpretation, without which we would not teach it to our children. Our preference, though, for this method and mode of expression is our understanding that the primary need of the child is an interpretation suited to his imaginative needs. The rationale for this is not only didactic but is also rooted in the priority of the religious need that the young soul connect with the world of *Tanakh*.

The price for such a strategy is that first perceptions (*girsā dey-ankuta*) are often very difficult to modify. When the child develops and is capable of appreciating other approaches,⁵ much work will be required to expose him receptively to differing interpretations. Indeed, there are many who remain throughout life with their first reading of *Tanakh* as their primary (or only) knowledge of it. The major impact of the kindergarten teacher's exposition of the *Chumash* on our perceptions of its narrative, even in adulthood, is legendary. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, since the goal of identifying with *Tanakh* is paramount.⁶

B

The mitzvah of talmud Torah mandates a dual obligation – intellectual and experiential. The former is rooted in the imperative of

veshinnantam levaneichah which emphasizes the element of knowledge (*veshinnantam*), while the latter is derived from *velimadetem otam et bneichem* which is a more general directive to learn that lacks the focus upon the intellectual achievement. This idea, which is the basic concept that informs most of the details of *hilkhot talmud torah*, was established by Ba'al HaTanya in his *hilkhot talmud Torah*⁷ and elaborated upon by Rabbi S.Y. Zevin in a wonderful essay on the topic. Both prove conclusively that there is an obligation to learn Torah, even when such study does not contribute to knowledge and that such an act qualifies as *talmud torah* (e.g., repetition of the same text daily, learning without any comprehension, studying a familiar text), but that there is also an imperative to increase Torah knowledge that requires the attainment of broader and deeper Torah knowledge.⁸

Thus, our remarks are predicated upon the experiential goal of establishing *ahavat torah* (love of Torah) and *yirat shamayim* through the medium of *talmud Torah* and do not relate to the pursuit of knowledge that is also included in the *mitzvah*. Clearly, this too is a component of the *mitzvah* that any worthy educational program will seek to realize but the issue at hand is prioritization. Which of these two elements is the primary value that must be granted precedence and that all other considerations must be subordinated to its needs? It is in this regard that we claim preference for the existential goal of the learner's relationships and identity over the attainment of knowledge. Simply put, *Ahavat Torah* is indeed religiously more important than Torah knowledge, and, therefore, its needs must be taken into account as a major factor in choice of curriculum.

C

Having utilized the example of childhood *Tanakh* study, let us now address the broader issue of *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim* in contemporary society. It, too, must be viewed from a similar perspective. Essentially, the relationship of *Tanakh* and modernity confronts us in a dual manner. The first is our ability to relate to *Tanakh* as a relevant text that we can enter into an existential dialogue with, while the second is the intellectual threat posed by the findings of Biblical

Criticism and/or archæology to our conception of *Tanakh*, and their challenge to the unity and divine origin of the biblical narrative.⁹

As stated above, our relationship to the entire Torah, and not only its narrative portions, should be predicated upon the premise that existential involvement with *Tanakh* as a living text, and not knowledge of *Tanakh* for its own sake, is our crucial concern. *Ahavat Torah veYirat Shamayim* is the bedrock upon which interpretations, exegetical approaches and commentaries are to be founded and their implications for these concepts must be constantly evaluated.

Therefore, for example, a literary approach to *Tanakh* is a valid and fruitful method of interpretation, predicated on the assumption that *Tanakh* is a work of art from the stylistic perspective. However, any consideration of a literary analysis must always keep in mind that the detachment and lack of existential involvement with the protagonists as living figures that characterizes the study of literature is foreign to *Tanakh*; therefore, it can serve as a valuable interpretive tool that allows us to fathom the meaning of the text and to understand the methods and techniques that are employed to convey these ideas. However, this cannot and should not transform our approach to the text as a living text that engages us as the record of our legacy and is thereby unlike a literary work of art that deals with the fortunes of real or fictitious characters whose actual – and not literary – fate is of no concern to us.

The claim that *Tanakh* should be a text that we enter into a relationship and dialogue with rather than analyze for the sake of intellectual knowledge need not imply that we approach it with a simplistic and naïve perspective. On the contrary, after early childhood, a sophisticated approach that will bring about a deeper and more meaningful understanding will provide a much better basis for integrating the *Tanakh* into our existential world. This, in turn, will contribute to an enhanced *yirat shamayim*.

The outline of my topic that was distributed to members of the forum questions this premise. After stating that “some of the modern approaches to the study of *Tanakh*...seem to have the potential to undermine *yirat shamayim*,” it attributes this to a “sophistication that can distance us from a kind of *emunah peshutah* and continuity of in-

terpretive tradition that was traditionally a basis for *yirat shamayim*.” Therefore, we must address the subject in greater detail.

To a large degree, the issue is analogous to the more general question of whether naïve innocent faith is preferable to a philosophically oriented belief or not. The best way to illustrate this dilemma is by means of a metaphorical question: which father-son relationship is better – that of the four-year-old who can unhesitatingly approach the father, fall upon his lap, hug and kiss him without any qualms or that of a thirty-four year old son who cannot do any of the above, but, unlike the toddler, is fully aware of his father’s inner life? The adult relates to his parents’ spiritual goals and personal aspirations, identifies with the family system of values, understands their economic situation and its impact upon them, and is aware of the pressures at work as well as the sense of achievement and frustration that accompanies his parents’ life. In a word, the child has the ability to express himself naturally and unreservedly, effortlessly pouring forth his love while the adult must overcome deeply rooted inhibitions to do so, yet on the other hand, the adult has the advantage of perceiving the inner being of the parent to which the child is oblivious.

Obviously, the desirable solution would be to have the best of both worlds by trying to retain the spontaneity of the youngster and coupling it with the comprehension of the grown-up. Unfortunately, this is possible only to a degree. The dialectical tension that exists between the two attitudes is such that each compromises the other, so that a true harmony is unrealizable. Therefore, like it or not, we must strike a personal balance between the conflicting needs that the relationship requires.

Moreover, it is not really a matter of choice, since there is an age-appropriate response that dictates the proper course of action. A mature adult cannot remain with a child’s emotions nor can the child act like a grown up. Just like there is something very wrong with a four-year-old behaving like a thirty-four-year-old, so, too, it is equally incongruous for a thirty-four-year-old to express himself like a four-year-old. Thus, although we hopefully retain the ability as adults to express ourselves spontaneously and without

emotional inhibitions when necessary, we nevertheless are subject to the reservations and sophistication that are a direct result of the self-awareness and differentiation that accompanies adulthood.

The same dilemma that the child-parent metaphor illustrated presents itself in regard to our relationship with God, our Father in Heaven, and the preferred mode of man's contact with the Almighty. However, it is important to note that the theoretical preference of naïve vs. sophisticated faith that is rooted in philosophic debate regarding basic issues of man's spirituality, his place in the world and the role of intellect and emotion in his being, is not the only determining factor. As the Kuzari long ago pointed out,¹⁰ there is an additional element which must be taken into account. This is not the desirability of innocent faith, but the possibility of it. Thus, even though R. Yehuda Halevi strongly advocates innocent faith as the preferred alternative, he clearly recognizes that those who have been exposed to philosophical or critical thought have long ago lost their innocence and must, therefore, establish a spirituality that is rooted in rational thought and convictions. This is not necessarily the better option – it is simply the only one.

Let us now return to *Tanakh* and utilize these metaphors and analogies as a guide to assist us in determining our approach to *Tanakh*. The first conclusion to be drawn is that there must be age differentiation. The child should receive a version of the Torah that appeals to his imagination and understanding, even at the expense of depth and sophistication; it will, therefore, be a more vivid and less introspective approach that may often be two dimensional and schematic with the emphasis upon action rather than reflection. In addition, it will prefer amplification over ambiguity and literal comprehension over textual analysis. Thus, Rashi who is a quintessential “amplifier” will consistently portray the “heroes” in a more positive light than the *psukim* (verses) themselves, thereby making the good guys better, while the villains are usually cast in a more negative light that will always make the bad guys seem worse. It is a didactic world of black and white that does its best to eliminate gray from its universe and, therefore, most appropriate for the child's needs.¹¹

At a later stage, though – both in the context of schools, Ye-

shivot and Midrashot, as well as adult education – skilled textual analysis and/or nuanced psychological treatment will reveal subtle tensions and ambivalences that will enhance rather than detract from our *yirat shamayim*. The deeper we delve into Torah, the better we understand it and the issues that it is presenting to us. The more we understand it, the more it will engage us; the more it engages us, the more we will learn it; the more we learn, the more we identify with it. In short, as Rambam put it (Hilchot Teshuva, chapter 10), על פי הדעה, תהיה האהבה. (The love will be in proportion to the knowledge.)

In-depth analysis will provide us with an appreciation for many of the issues that lie beneath the surface of the narrative which, deep down, are the real issues that motivate the text and determine its message. The very act of analysis creates a bond to the text and the world of *Tanakh*. Thus, it is not only better intellectual understanding and the fulfillment of the knowledge component of the mitzvah that is achieved by in-depth analysis, but also a deeper emotional attachment will be established by dealing with the issues that *Tanakh* is concerned with. Although not without the danger of developing a critical faculty that fosters a posture of intellectual detachment, the benefits outweigh the pitfalls, and, therefore, the preferred course of action to achieve the goal of connecting to the *Tanakh* and enhancing our relationship with God should be sophisticated analysis.

A final point is worth noting in this context. The upshot of advocating an innocent and naïve approach to *Tanakh* as spiritually preferable for all would be that many great commentaries would never (or should never) have been written, unless deemed necessary for apologetic purposes. Can we really imagine a Yiddishkeit that would have willingly forfeited works that have illuminated *Tanakh* for the past hundreds of years?

The case for knowledge and analysis as the most desirable approach is true, regardless of the cultural context. However, it is undoubtedly the only avenue open to Modern Orthodox society that has integrated a modern sensibility into its worldview and experiences. The attempt to turn the clock back and return to a pre-modern outlook is like trying to recapture a lost innocence – appealing but impossible. As the Kuzari noted, once the exposure to rationalistic

and critical thought has occurred, the remedy is to harness the forces of reason and utilize them for an analysis that will foster and enhance *yirat shamayim* rather than bemoan the inability to experience a simpler and more direct approach.

Both sophistication and naiveté have their respective advantages and disadvantages. Modern Orthodox society has opted for the advantages of analytical knowledge in all other spheres of activity – it must, therefore remain faithful to its basic approach to life and cannot adopt an opposite approach in its religious mindset. Doing otherwise would produce the worst of both worlds, as all the advantages of knowledge and understanding would be forfeited without receiving any of the benefits of innocence. Having tasted the fruits of modernity and chosen sophistication and analysis as the proper approach to the world, it cannot belittle the religious sphere by depriving it of these achievements; to do so would be to short-change our religious awareness by providing it with lesser and more superficial tools than we grant other areas of knowledge. Medieval Spanish Jewry recognized the need for a society exposed to general culture to produce sophisticated commentaries – we would be well advised to follow in their footsteps.

D

In this regard, I would like to emphasize that the goal of identifying with *Tanakh* as a component of *yirat shamayim* and a major goal in our quest for *yirat shamayim* doesn't only mean that one should have respectful feelings towards the biblical text and assume that it is an important and holy book; rather, it is being engaged by the Torah and its words as a meaningful message that confronts a person existentially. This means that (1) it should be part of our lives and (2) that we involve ourselves in its life, i.e., the lives of its protagonists. Thus, the ethos of the *neviim* (prophets) should challenge us to live according to their charge, and we should turn to them in times of tragedy and triumph as a source of inspiration and direction.

For instance, the chapter in *Yirmiyahu* that serves as the Haftora of the second day of Rosh Hashanah, whose opening statement relates to עַם שְׂרִידֵי חֶרֶב הַלּוֹךְ לְהַרְגִיעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל (a nation of survivors that

escaped the sword, is being calmed down) and describes the people's return to Zion in terms of *בכי יבואו ובתחנונים אויבילם* (they will come with tears, and with prayers I will transport them) should be part of any response regarding the religious value of the state of Israel after the Holocaust, while *Kohelet* should be taken into account as part of our perspective on life just as one should constantly ask himself whether he has lived up to *Yeshayahu's* demands of social justice and so on and so forth. To put it simply, we should dialogue with *Tanakh* in the sense that one dialogues with great literature and relies upon it for guidance and spiritual sustenance. In essence, this is what the Torah itself instructs us when it defines its role for future generations: *ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת ולמדה את בני ישראל שימה בפיהם למען תהיה לי השירה הזאת לעד בבני ישראל*. (And now write for yourselves this song and teach it to the children of Israel, place it in their mouths so that this song will be a testimony to the children of Israel.) The text is designated as the spiritual framework of reference for the predicaments that shall befall us throughout history and we are instructed to refer to it for such purposes. The flip side of this is that we should involve ourselves in the *Tanakh's* narratives and view them as relevant to us. Thus, problematic episodes should disturb us, arouse our interest and cause intense debate at the family Shabbat table, the study group and the public sphere. The inner life of its characters as they cope with their crises should concern us as the life of those who are close to us, and not only as instructive material.

I have focused upon the human element in *Tanakh*, since it is the most significant aspect that should concern us, both regarding life and *Tanakh*, but the underlying concept relates to the historical and geographical elements as well. The "*Tanakh* in hand" tiyulim (walking tours) that are popular in Israel are an excellent example of relating to *Tanakh* as a contiguous historical reality that connects us with the past. The sense of walking down the same paths that Eliyahu and Elisha used or retracing the steps of David Hamelech on location is exhilarating. If driving down the Yerushaliyim–Tel Aviv highway, one realizes that he is in Emek Ayalon where the moon stood for Yehoshua and ponders that fact rather than the onrushing traffic or Israeli cabdrivers, then he is able to leave behind him the mundane

existence of his locale as he transcends the present and is transported to the realm of Jewish historical destiny. All these experiences inject the *Tanakh* and its vision of Jewish destiny into our daily lives, as they juxtapose our past and present and weave them together into a live and dynamic presence within our current existence. Such an attachment to the text as the living record of Jewish existence is a direct contribution to *yirat shamayim* since we exist throughout history as people and it is through the medium of history that the relationship is enacted and realized.

II

Two controversies that revolved around the relationship between *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim* engulfed the Religious Zionist–Modern Orthodox world in *Eretz Yisroel* in recent years and exposed basic disagreements upon fundamental issues. Although the two debates were lumped together by most participants and treated as one issue of contention, they are two distinct arguments that must be treated as such and not be intertwined into a single debate. The first, the code named *Tanakh begovah ha' eynayim* was the question of evaluating biblical figures through the prism of our experience and the willingness to criticize various actions that they performed. The second, a debate addressed the legitimacy of utilizing the findings of Biblical Criticism within an Orthodox framework. In both cases, it was alleged that a lack of *yirat shamayim* is at the root of both approaches and that the use of these methods has the potential to diminish *yirat shamayim* in the students that are exposed to it.

Actually, there are two separate threats that exist to *yirat shamayim* in both of these cases. The first, and obvious, factor is the substance of the critiques that are considered by opponents of these approaches to undermine *yirat shamayim*, due to content that in their opinion belittles holy figures or rejects basic tenets of Judaism regarding the text of the Torah. However, a second, and no less important problem is not the content but the posture of the critic. Criticism, by its very definition, implies a perspective that sets the critic above and outside the matter under scrutiny. The relationship assumes impartiality and judgment and precludes empathy and

identification. A good deal of the animosity that exists between the subject of a review and its writer, be it in art, literature or sports, is rooted in the Olympian aloofness that the critic adopts as his posture. He is not a participant seeking to better understand or a sympathizer trying to help, but a judge who assumes superiority. Were he to express feelings of a common endeavor and phrase his remarks as a friend's constructive criticism, or in another words, if the relationship was perceived as an I-thou relationship, the angry and insulted responses of those being criticized would be substantially different.

The same holds true regarding *Tanakh*. It makes all the difference in the world from the perspective of *yirat shamayim* if we approach the stories of Mosheh Rabeinu and David Hamelech with the sense of empathy that we exhibit towards immediate family and with the feelings that close disciples feel to their masters, or if we judge the relevant episodes from the objective viewpoint of the unengaged critic. In the former case, the student views them as figures with whom he can identify and admire; the narrative and analysis serve to reveal the inner workings of great souls whose challenges and struggles we are interested in experiencing. We are not engaged in a critique of the event but in reliving it. In the latter event, the supremacy of the critic – inherent by the very nature of the critical act – detaches him from any emotional attachment to the text and transforms him from a participant into an observer and from a sympathizer into an authority.

Thus, although the two issues are unrelated from the substantive point of view, there exists a common denominator of perspective that is no less crucial than the actual content in terms of respect and *yirat shamayim*. Let us now turn to the issues themselves. The debate regarding the legitimacy of criticizing towering biblical figures revolves around two poles. The first is whether their actions and motives can be judged through insights based upon our knowledge of human nature or do we view their stature as so unique and exalted that we cannot begin to approximate their level of existence? The second dilemma is the justification of criticizing the actions of the great figures of *Tanakh* as being wrong or sinful. Is it reasonable that they

too may have erred and sinned, or must we axiomatically assume that their righteousness is such that the offenses of mere mortals are not committed by them, and therefore that their transgressions must be understood in an entirely different light than persons more familiar to us? The common denominator of both issues is whether we view them as essentially human or as grand heroic figures who tower above us. Since the topic of this paper is *yirat shamayim* and not the study of *Tanakh* per se, the question that we must address is not the issue itself but the possibility of harmonizing *yirat shamayim* with the humanizing tendency of interpretation. Thus, it is one thing to suppose that an attempt to make Avraham Avinu more human and similar to us is misguided – it is something totally different to claim that this reflects a flawed *yirat shamayim* or that it will diminish *yirat shamayim*.

The claim that *yirat shamayim* dictates a superhuman perception of biblical protagonists is totally unwarranted, as long as we maintain proper respect for their achievements and personalities. The recognition of humanity in great figures does not necessarily result in a flippant and irreverent reading of *Tanakh* or need it detract from our appreciation of their greatness. Thus, a reading of *Sefer Breishit* that views the lives of the *Avot* through the prism of our human experience need not belittle their accomplishments or their *yirat shamayim*; on the contrary, it emphasizes their achievements. If Avraham Avinu was able to reach the spiritual peaks that he scaled from a starting point of plain humanity similar to that of common man and if his relationship with God was realized as a person who interacts with others in the same manner as we do, faces our dilemmas and is prone to the frailty of human judgment, it only makes him greater and his achievement more impressive. Even if they exhibit weakness or err, the problems and failures of the *Avot* serve to highlight the human condition and the complexity of life rather than cause us to deny their greatness.

To take another example, David Hamelech's greatness is not lessened but heightened by the fact he had strong desires and that he was able to overcome his failures. The perek in *Tehillim* (51) that

details his state of mind after the sin is a shining example of *yirat shamayim* that is so powerful because of its recognition of the human element involved. The statement that he was conceived in sin – הֵן בְּעוֹן חוֹלַלְתִּי וּבְחֶטְא יָהֲמַתְנִי אִמִּי (lo, in sin I was conceived, and with transgression did my mother incubate me) – explicitly defines his state of existence as human and exposed to desire and impulse. The clash between ingrained human frailty and the obligations thrust upon a human being because of his fear of God, the tension between the inner humiliation of failure, and the justification of sin as a human characteristic directly address the basic issues of *yirat shamayim* that concern us all. Lest we think that the above claim was only uttered from the depths of despair after the sin but does not represent a more basic truth, David himself returned to the same theme on another occasion (103:14) and reiterated the very same sentiment as a general comment on the state of man: כִּי הוּא יָדַע יִצְרָנוּ זָכוֹר כִּי עָפָר אֲנָחְנוּ (For He knows our desires, remembers that we are dust).

In essence, the argument regarding the human element is a question of defining spiritual achievement. If we are to consider spiritual greatness from the perspective of absolute accomplishment, there is a case to be made that the greater and more removed from normal existence biblical figures are and the less their lives resemble those of mere mortals, the grander their achievement is, regardless of circumstance. However, if we focus upon subjective personal growth and commitment to God, the greatness of the *Avot* and others is precisely in their rising above the limitations of normal human beings to devote their lives to God. In the context of the topic of *yirat shamayim* and *Tanakh*, the religious commitment, not the metaphysical resolution, is what concerns us. Thus, paradoxically, if we view the personal element as paramount, the human perspective applied to biblical heroes serves to enhance their spiritual stature and to emphasize their *yirat shamayim* as the hallmark of their greatness. Suffice to mention the *Akeidah* in this context to illustrate that the more human we consider the relationships and emotions involved, the more impressive is the religious commitment. Moreover, to the extent that we view Avraham as a role model and a beacon to follow

in his footsteps, the more his struggles resemble our dilemmas, the easier it is to identify with his achievements and to utilize them for our spiritual advancement.¹²

Furthermore, even if one were to deny the validity of such an interpretation *qua* biblical interpretation from an intellectual and religious perspective, it is undeniable that Gedolei Yisroel have adopted such positions. A prominent example is the Ramban, who both applied contemporary experience to interpret the psychology of the *Avot* and also famously criticized various actions of theirs,¹³ but he is far from being unique. Therefore, any claim that such an approach reveals a lack of *yirat shamayim* or diminishes the student's *yirat shamayim* is disparaging not only of contemporary Modern Orthodoxy but also of luminaries such as the Ramban and other Gedolei Yisroel.¹⁴

The third issue in the debate over current modes of *Tanakh* study is the utilization of Biblical Criticism and the inroads that it has made into our community. It is self-evident that a system of thought that challenges the most basic and fundamental principle of *Tanakh* as *dvar HaShem* is incompatible with our beliefs and a direct threat to our religious identity. Thus, the academic study of *Tanakh* as practiced in Bible departments throughout the country is not a threat to *yirat shamayim* – it is anathema to it. The only statement that one can make about this is *shomer nafsho yirchak mehem* (one who guards his soul will keep himself apart from them) or in a stronger vein, it is certainly appropriate to apply to it the dictum of the Gemara in *Avodah Zarah* (17a) regarding heresy: הרחק מעליה (Stay away from its path – this is heresy). Simply put, the Gemara advocates disengagement from an intellectual setting that threatens a person's *yirat shamayim*.

If we accept the above claim that Biblical Criticism and *yirat shamayim* are totally incompatible, a choice must be made between an affirmation of religious commitment and rejection of the academic findings or acceptance of the critical approach to *Tanakh* at the expense of *yirat shamayim*. This leaves a modern Jew who is both God-fearing and trusting in the achievements of the human intellect

in a bind, since he must choose between two conflicting sources of values and knowledge that are both recognized by him as valid.

At its root, the issue is not unique to Biblical Criticism; rather, it is part of the broader subject of faith and science that has engaged religious philosophy over the past millennium, since the essence of the issue pits the analytical findings of the human intellect against the plain meaning of the Scriptural text. This leaves us with three options: (1) accepting the findings of science and rejecting the plain meaning of the revealed text, either by denial of the text's authority or by reinterpretation of its meaning, (2) holding on to the literal meaning of the text and rejecting scientific knowledge as the product of fallible human reason, or (3) attempting to find middle ground, in which part of the scientific finding is recognized and integrated into the textual meaning while other portions are denied.

In theory, *yirat shamayim* can accommodate all three of these alternatives, although the first only by a radical redefining of many basic tenets and texts. Therefore, the traditional approach has been to choose the second or third options in varying degrees. Thus, even though the classic sources relate mainly to natural science and not to Biblical Criticism, which is a more recent phenomenon, the basic methodology is applicable in the case of Biblical Criticism and biblical archaeology as well. However, since Biblical Criticism is not a natural science, the prevailing tendency has certainly been the third approach that declines any acceptance of critical theories.

A radical break with this tradition was initiated by R. Mordechai Breuer who established a method of interpretation that is based upon adoption of the first alternative regarding Biblical Criticism. The method is predicated upon the assumption that the textual conclusions of Biblical Criticism are accurate and their findings indisputable, so that intellectual honesty requires us to validate them. The religious challenge, therefore, is not to deny the textual claims but to provide them with a metaphysical framework that is compatible with an Orthodox viewpoint. R. Breuer's approach figured prominently in a previous Orthodox Forum, whose papers have subsequently been published,¹⁵ there is not much point, therefore,

in entering into a lengthy discussion of it here, despite its relevance for our topic.¹⁶ However, the discussions of that forum focused upon the theological implications of the method and did not relate to the educational aspects of it. These, though, are a crucial element for any evaluation of his *Shitat Habechinot* and its relationship to *yirat shamayim*.

The inherent dangers of contact with Biblical Criticism and the attempt to integrate it into an Orthodox framework from an experiential point of view are of a dual nature. The first is a function of its content. Aside from the dilemma of adopting (or adapting) interpretations that were arrived at by a method whose implicit metaphysical axioms are foreign to any God-fearing outlook and the concern that these principles may unknowingly be the motivating force that underlies the suggested interpretation – which was the subject of the previous forum – there is the additional problem of the slippery slope. Exposure to a body of work that is academically impressive but whose theological premises are in contradiction to *yirat shamayim* may cause a student to go beyond R. Breuer's policy of accepting the details and rejecting the framework and induce him to accept the metaphysical structure as well. Essentially, such a person accepts the premise of R. Breuer's critics that the interpretations and metaphysics are inseparable, only like R. Breuer and unlike his critics, he is so convinced of the interpretations that he does not have the option of rejecting them. Therefore, he has no choice but to redefine his beliefs. Even if this is sincerely done out of deep religious motivation, the result will be a system of belief totally incompatible with traditional Orthodoxy. R. Breuer himself brought attention to this phenomenon in a very poignant piece that he wrote in *Megadim* a few years ago.¹⁷

The additional risk of this method is the emotional aspect. The constant contact with texts and/or people that treat *Tanakh* as an ancient piquant text lacking divine authority can have a corrosive influence. If the intellectual framework of reference is an academic milieu that treats Torah as fodder for deconstruction, then there is an existential price that is often exacted. The sense of awe, dignity, and reverence that we feel towards Torah as d'var HaShem is readily

compromised in the soul if critical concepts become routine and cease to jar the ears. References to “the Biblical narrator” or other similar phrases¹⁸ that convey a detached academic aloofness and the loss of intimacy and *varmkeit* that must accompany the study of *Tanakh* are not worth any intellectual gains that may have been gotten by exposure to such materials. To employ a metaphor, if a person has to choose between knowing more about his father or mother, but at the price that the additional understanding will come at the expense of the warmth and intimacy, isn’t it self evident that it’s better to know less and feel more rather than vice versa?

This brings us to the heart of the issue of *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim*. To paraphrase John Henry Newman’s remark about God and Nature, *we do not believe in God because of the Tanakh, rather we accept the Tanakh because of our belief in Him*. If medieval commentators saw *Tanakh* as a means of arriving at *yirat shamayim*, our perspective is the opposite – *Tanakh* is an expression of the relationship between Am Yisroel and God. Therefore, the entire approach to *Tanakh* must be transformed. If *Tanakh* is meant to persuade us to accept God and His Commandments, the focus must be its ability to fulfill an authenticating role. Thus, both the Rambam and the Ramban emphasized *Maamad Har Sinai* as proof of *Tanakh*’s divine origin and veracity. The medievals insisted upon Mosheh Rabeinu’s prophetic stature and integrity, since these elements are crucial to the burden of proof to which *Tanakh* must adhere. The advantage of such an approach is obvious, since it is able to supply an autonomous basis for our belief in *Tanakh*. The result, though, is that there is a strong emphasis in their writings upon the rational criteria in our evaluation of *Tanakh* at the expense of the emotional elements. Moreover, the medieval emphasis upon the mode of transmission of *Tanakh* as providing proof of its veracity assumes that the Torah can be submitted to a test of verifiability that will satisfy standards erected by human reason and dictated by the logic of the mind, and that its success in this test will support its message of faith and belief. The acceptance of such a standard was a policy that they willingly adopted, since they had no doubt in the outcome.

To us, though, such a premise is disastrous. If we were to

approach *Tanakh* critically from an a priori perspective that is not predicated upon our set of beliefs in God and without our accompanying tradition, we would be swept away by critical doubts and a historical skepticism that would cause us to view the biblical text as non-convincing. Therefore, *Tanakh* for us is not a catalyst for belief, but an expression of a relationship with Him whom we believe and trust, regardless of an objective critical evaluation of the textual evidence. Lest I be misunderstood, let me emphatically emphasize that this is not to claim that belief need not be based upon firm grounds of conviction, rational or otherwise; it is simply to state that the grounds for our belief are rooted in other spheres of life and are not a function of the contact with *Tanakh* per se.

Thus, the experiential rather than the intellectual element must be paramount in *Tanakh*, since the significance of *Tanakh* for us is rooted in its being d'var HaShem and not in its proving Him. Needless to say, understanding the statements of the most dear, beloved and respected Entity that exists is important as an expression of awe and love as well as for the content of divine wisdom. As the Rambam (Teshuva 10:6) long ago stated: על פי הדעה תהיה האהבה. Indeed, there is no doubt that in practice, the lion's share of time devoted to *Tanakh* study will focus upon analysis and comprehension. The root cause, however, is the recognition of *Tanakh* as God's message and from it are derived the applications that were discussed above. Be it the preference of Rashi's imaginative interpretations for children, the need for an engaged involvement or the challenge of biblical criticism, all of these issues revolve around the establishment of the priority of *Emunah* and *yirat shamayim* to *Tanakh*, and the transformation of the relationship between *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim* in the modern era. ואידך, זיל גמור – the rest is all study!

APPENDIX

The assigned topic of this paper, which was presented at a conference of the Orthodox forum held in 2006, was *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim*. The utilization of the Midrash and its mode of instruction to young children was intended simply as a case study to illustrate the basic and broader point of the interrelationship between these

two factors and was not meant as a detailed treatment of the subject of teaching Midrash to youngsters. Nevertheless, a good deal of the discussion at the Forum and of the subsequent comments that I received have focused on the details of the particular example that seemed to have touched a chord (or a nerve) and, therefore, a few words of elaboration upon this topic may not be out of place.

First, a word or two about the contemporary cultural background is necessary. The thesis outlined in the paper is rooted in human nature and the innate differences between the imaginative world of the child as opposed to that of the adult, and is, therefore, independent of any particular cultural context. Nevertheless, the art of education is to a large degree a system of checks and balances. Unless one believes in an extreme monochromatic view of the world in which there are no competing and conflicting elements that must be balanced but simply correct and incorrect approaches, there will always be a creative but disturbing dialectic between various values and goals that we aspire to realize, yet are at odds with each other and therefore engender in our souls a real tension between these different elements. This results in a spiritual and educational balancing act in which the differing states must be given their due, since each contains positive elements that we seek, yet without being tempered by opposing elements will be extremely one-sided and unfaithful to our needs. If not a golden mean that can create the proper balance, then at the very least, a constant shift from one value to the other. Thus, if one value is very prominent in a particular individual or society, there is a need to counter-balance it by emphasizing the opposite idea, while in a different setting, an opposite course of action will be preferable, despite the fact that in both cases we are attempting to achieve the same educational result.

Therefore, there may indeed be a significant difference regarding the advocacy of Midrash in the contemporary setting that is a function of an Israeli or American vantage point. As mentioned above, the basic message is valid in any context but in terms of educational practice – or in the Aristotelian metaphor that the Rambam adopted of bending the stave – there is a difference in perspective between the two continents.

The concerns raised by Orthodox Forum participants that the imaginative childhood narrative will remain the only version implanted in the learner's mind, leaving him or her with a simplistic and superficial picture of the biblical narrative, reflect a situation in which the naive viewpoint appropriate for childhood is never outgrown because there is no serious attempt to teach *Chumash* differently at a later age. My impression is that very few North American Yeshiva high schools teach *Tanakh* in the manner that is common here in Israel and so, therefore, there is no competing vision that is presented at a later age to supplement and/or supplant the younger version. I do believe that there is a slow but steady shift that is happening in American Modern Orthodoxy in this regard, that the *Tanakh* trade winds are blowing westward from Eretz Hakodesh to Medinat Hayam and that the *Tanakh* curriculum will evolve accordingly,¹⁹ so that the message of this paper will become more relevant in the United States, but at the moment there is a cultural gap between the two countries.

Religious Zionism, as well as classic secular Zionism, has a strong ideological interest in the literal meaning of *Tanakh*, since this serves as a model and a proof of the viability of Jewish life in the Land of Israel and a living connection to the past. While this is undoubtedly a priority, the price of such an approach is to emphasize the historical at the expense of the literary element. Midrash, which is the prime example of a literary and non-historical reading of *Tanakh*, therefore, suffers from a certain amount of neglect. My argument is not intended to belittle the importance of a literal reading of *Tanakh* but to point attention to the value of the imaginative elements and their contribution to *yirat shamayim*.

Moreover, not only is the Israeli Religious Zionist ethos more engaged by the *Tanakh* than the corresponding Modern Orthodox culture, but there is also much more contact and cultural osmosis between Modern Orthodox and Haredi society in the United States than in Israel. This is a situation that has many advantages, but like most such phenomenon, it also has its drawbacks.

One of these relates to *Tanakh* study. Iconoclasts excluded, human nature finds it uncomfortable to articulate opinions that the

speaker may believe in sincerely but which will shock the surroundings and therefore tends to tone down, modify and/or qualify statements that are out of sync with the rest of the community that we belong to and with whom we pray. In other words, the boundaries of the consensus do impact upon formulation and articulation of opinions. The moment certain positions are regarded by the majority as self-evident, the contours of the debate are influenced and positions undergo self-censoring. The result of this in contemporary American Modern Orthodoxy is that certain excesses of Haredi interpretation impact upon Modern Orthodox schools and shuls, so that any attempt to encourage Midrash at the expense of *pshat* is viewed as adding fuel to the fire.

In Eretz Hakodesh, which is the vantage point from which this paper was written, the situation is reversed; *pshuto shel mikra* rules the roost and has so taken over the field that no real attempt is made to teach Midrash or parshanut seriously in the school system. The Barkai system that teaches *Chumash* out of *Tanakh* in the early grades without Rashi or anything else is quite popular and used by many schools in the Religious Zionist system. There are many advantages to their hammering in the text at a young age, but it creates a warped system in the other direction. Thus, the current head of the religious high school *Tanakh* studies in the Ministry of Education, a very serious talmid chacham who believes in old-fashioned parshanut and assigns Ramban on the Bagrut exams, is universally villainized by *Tanakh* teachers and high school principals for teaching *Tanakh* in a wrongheaded manner and is considered totally out of touch with the contemporary *Tanakh zeitgeist*.

Thus, there is no comparable Religious Zionist text to the Little Midrash Says; the only text similar to it is *Koh Asu Chachmeinu* which tells over the stories of Chazal, but not *Tanakh*, and is indeed very effective in accomplishing the goal of familiarity and identity that was addressed in the paper. An article in *Tradition*²⁰ very perceptively noted how Mosad Harav Kook's *Torat Chaim* edition of the *Chumash*, which has effectively replaced the traditional Mikraot Gedolot in Religious Zionist circles, took out all the commentaries that were more midrashic and homiletical (in particular, the Kli

Yakar and Or Ha'chaim) and replaced them with a smorgasbord of medieval Spanish *pshuto shel mikra* oriented commentaries. Therefore, this paper is not swimming upstream against a simplifying Haredi current, but against an opposite Religious Zionist literal tendency and the advocacy of Midrash at a young age is partially meant as a counterbalance to the prevailing literal approach that is so dominant in contemporary Israeli Religious Zionist culture.

It is indeed true that in societies in which the reverse is true and the child's *Tanakh* curriculum is dominated by a steady diet of Midrash, sound educational policy would dictate issuing a call for more *pshuto shel mikra*. As stated above, education is to a large degree an attempt to create (or restore) an equilibrium between contrasting perspectives and, therefore, differs from society to society.

A second point that was raised by some of the participants regarding the use of Midrash was that it is perceived as a simplistic and fantastic text that will only invite ridicule and, therefore, the needs of the modern learner are better served by shelving these Midrashic passages as embarrassing secrets that do not warrant display. Indeed, the danger of too literal a reading of the Midrash exists and it is undeniable that many sincere learners in the past and present treat the Midrashic texts in too literal a manner that results in a simplistic text that belittles Chazal. Nevertheless, we must still utilize the Midrashim and not throw out the baby with the bath water.

The world of the Midrash is extremely rich and evocative, if explored in depth and not taken in the narrow literal sense. No less a figure than the Rambam devoted considerable energy to refuting the literal approach to Midrash and its consequences; however, he did not simply disqualify Midrash but rather insisted that it should be understood figuratively. Therefore, he often utilized Midrashin prominently in the *Guide*, a classic philosophical text that was addressed to a sophisticated audience. Ramban, an additional towering medieval authority whose philosophical world view was far removed from the Rambam's, makes the same point. In his perush on *parshat Chayei Sarah*,²¹ he quotes the Gemarah in Bava Bathra 16b that Avraham Avinu had a daughter named "*bakol*," points out that it is ridiculous to understand this claim literally, explains that the

“daughter” is the attribute of *midat hayesod* and that the Midrash is simply expressing a very basic idea in figurative language.

Thus, for example, the Midrash that Noah was assaulted by a lion whose food was late is a very colorful story but also contains more basic truths. Aside from illustrating the inherent cruelty of the natural world and man’s inability to replace God as a provider of the world’s needs, it is also staking a position regarding Noah. According to this Midrash, Noah was not rescued from the deluge because of his personal righteousness, but rather there was a need to rescue someone, anybody, so that the human race would continue and creation would not lose its meaning. Noah happened to be the best of a bad lot, but not much more. Therefore, the bare minimum – “*ach Noah*” – needed for survival of the human race was saved, viz. a wounded Noah who could hand the torch over to the next generation (which is the reason that he has no positive role in the post-deluvian world), but the price of the generation’s wickedness was exacted from him as well. This is an idea which is supported by other Midrashim relating to Noah and opposed by others. Support from the text can be summoned for both as well, so that the colorful Midrash taught to the child need not embarrass the adult, since it expresses a profound truth, if figuratively read by a serious adult.

Countless additional Midrashim could be summoned to illustrate this point (e.g., Yitzchak’s blindness as a result of the Akeidah is a similar idea to Noah and the lion), but we shall limit ourselves to the above example which was chosen since it was quoted in the opening sentences of this paper. Midrashim do not need to be undone or neglected at a later stage – they have to be reinterpreted and recast as adult texts that should be treated figuratively. This is admittedly difficult and requires providing teachers with the requisite pedagogic tools, but we certainly need not be embarrassed that they are mocked by those who lack the insight and sensitivity to understand an imaginative text. *L’havdil*, if Tennyson utilized Greek mythology, does that mean that he simplistically believed a primitive text or that he was able to imaginatively transcend the literal meaning and create a rich world of symbol and metaphor? So, too, the Midrashic form of expression is the literary vehicle that our sages chose as an

exegetical tool that can relate both to children and adults, addressing the needs of each at their respective levels.

NOTES

1. Tehillim 111:10.
2. Mishlei 1:7.
3. This claim is not due to an aversion to the English language but is meant to emphasize the familiarity and warmth that are associated with *Av*/Father and *Em*/Mother but are lacking from Patriarch and Matriarch, whose Latin etymology and archaic connotations transform it for the contemporary user into a word denoting a dignified but distant persona, which is the exact opposite of the nearness and intimacy that we seek with the *Avot* as our fathers and mothers.
4. The prohibition to teach Torah to non-Jews is derived by the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 59a) from the word *Morasha*. One opinion derives it from the literal meaning of the word (legacy) while the other transforms it into *Me'urasah* (betrothed). If we accept the first suggestion, this ban may be a halakhic expression of the principle that our study of Torah is not only for the sake of knowledge but is an act of participating in a family legacy that is not intended for others. Unlike the latter *drasha* that focuses upon the act of learning and the relationship that it creates between man and God, the utilization of the text's plain meaning that Torah is our legacy precludes those who do not belong to the family narrative and whose learning of Torah must be for the content alone.

[All of this is valid assuming that the *issur* includes Torah *shebekhtav* and not only Torah *shebaal peh* and that the guiding principle is the legacy or non-legacy element rather than a commitment vs. non-commitment division. For a brief survey of sources and references, see Margalit Hayam, ad loc.]

5. The primary purpose of this paper is the relationship between *Tanakh* study and *yirat shamayim* and not the teaching of Torah to children. Therefore, I have not attempted to chart a detailed course of *Tanakh* study for various stages of childhood and have limited myself to a schematic presentation.

I would also readily agree to the claim that exposing a youngster to a sophisticated interpretation will bring about a greater appreciation, and therefore also greater identification, but the age factor here is crucial. There is an age where the path to the heart and mind is through the Midrashic imagination and not in-depth analysis, and my remarks relate to this stage of development.

6. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch expressed a similar position regarding the analogous issue of anthropomorphism in *Tanakh*:

Regarding...anthropomorphic expressions of God, we would like to make a general remark. For so long people have philosophied all round these expressions to remove the danger of the slightest thought of any materiality or corporality of God that at the end one runs very nearly into the danger of losing all idea of the personality of God. Had that been the purpose of the Torah,

those kind of expressions could easily have been avoided. But this last danger is greater than the first... This was also the opinion of Ravad, the quintessential Jewish thinker, that awareness of the personality of God is of much greater importance than philosophical speculation about these matters.

(*Commentary* on Breishit 6:6)

7. Shulkhan Arukh HaRav, *hilkhot talmud Torah*, ch. 2, 12–13, ch. 3, 1–4, esp. *kuntres achron s.v. vehinei, vehashta*. Rav S.Y. Zevin “Talmud Torah Veediatah” in *Leor HaHalakhah* (Tel Aviv, 1957) pp. 204–13.
8. Cf. *Menachot* 99b, *Nedarim* 8a, Ran ad loc, s.v. *Ha, Kiddushin* 30a. Interestingly, the Rambam positioned *hilkhot Talmud Torah* in *Sefer Madah* and not in *Sefer Ahavah*.
9. In theory, the two are unrelated. A person can be unperturbed by scholarly claims regarding *Tanakh* and yet feel unengaged by its message, while others may accept critical theories relating to Torah but view it as the formative text of Jewish historical destiny and, therefore, of deep relevance to their lives. The latter, of course, was the attitude of classical Zionism to the *Tanakh* while the former is familiar to us as the routine of numerous individuals who live a frum lifestyle, but are distant from the world of *Tanakh*. Such a mindset is not necessarily a function of a modern sensibility; many factors may contribute to it, but, undoubtedly, the modern outlook can certainly create an experiential distance from *Tanakh* that is difficult to bridge.
10. 2:26; 5:1–2.
11. An enlightening example from *Tanakh* itself is the interplay between *Mishlei* and *Iyov*. Both address the issue of divine justice, but in markedly different perspectives. *Mishlei* presents a conventional, almost facile, morality that portrays a world in which the righteous are always rewarded and the wicked never prosper. The outlook of the companions that *sefer Iyov* so unflinchingly attacks is the very world that *Mishlei* champions. The juxtaposition of the two is almost an act of self-reflection on the part of *Tanakh*, with *Iyov* serving to call into question the conclusions of its companion *sefer*. One of the more plausible suggestions to explain the discrepancy is that *Mishlei* is addressed to the young child while *Iyov* reflects the world of the adult. The voice of the narrator in *Mishlei* is the didactic parental voice while *Iyov* presents the raging debate of the embittered adult conversing with his peers. Each message is age-appropriate for the needs of its participants.
12. It must also be emphasized that even if such a position is incorrect and the objective spiritual apex is a more important criteria than the subjective personal development, the vantage point of the *yirat shamayim* perspective cannot be utilized to deny the “human” reading of *Tanakh* as legitimate. Since it is an intellectually and religiously viable option that does not diminish the religious stature of the biblical heroes, it cannot be repudiated on the basis of disrespect or lack of *yirat shamayim*. As long as it is not adopted out of disdain to the *Avot* and *Imahot*, but is a sincere attempt to interpret *Tanakh*, *yirat shamayim* is wholly accepting of such an approach.

13. See Breishit 46:29, 12:10 and 16:6.
14. I am well aware of the claim that what is allowed to Ramban is off limits to us because of Ramban's greater stature. The essential point of the debate, though, revolves around the basic legitimacy of such an approach and is a theological issue that cannot be influenced by the greatness of the commentator or his personal piety. If it is a theological error to ascribe common human characteristics to biblical figures, the inescapable conclusion must be that Ramban gravely erred, so that it can unequivocally be stated that Ramban (and others) have legitimized the basic stance. Needless to say, it is undeniable that such an approach must be done with a deep and sincere respect vis-à-vis the biblical figures, but one need not be Ramban in order to sincerely trust to their greatness or to evaluate their actions responsibly and respectfully.
15. *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah*, ed. S. Carmy (New York, 1996). An additional collection of essays specifically devoted to R. Breuer's method has also appeared in Hebrew, *Shitat Habechinot shel Harav Mordechai Breuer*, ed. Y. Ofer (Alon Shvut, 2005)
16. Rav Breuer's paper was titled, "The Study of the Bible and the Primacy of the Fear of Heaven: Compatibility or Contradiction."
17. M. Breuer, "Al Bikoret Hamikra," *Megadim*, 30 (1999) pp. 97–107.
18. An excellent example that can be illustrated in the Israeli scene is the use of many observant intellectuals of the word **ה'א**, pronounced as it is written, of course, rather than the Holy One, Blessed Is He, or Ribbono shel Olam to describe God. The difference in terms of cold distance as opposed to a warm relationship is light years.
19. The recently introduced summer *yemi iyun* in *Tanakh* is a good example of this phenomenon. The concept, which originated in Israel, both reflects and creates a renewed interest in serious *Tanakh* study that will eventually have a trickle-down effect to the high school level.
20. B. Barry Levy, "Mikraot Gedolot and Other Great Books," *Tradition*, 25,4 (1991), pp. 65, 75.
21. Breishit 24:1.

6

What Are We Afraid of? Fear and Its Role in Jewish Adult Education

Erica Brown

Yirat shamayim – that mysterious co-mingling of religious awe, fear, and an exalted sense of the sublime – is becoming a more elusive aspect of spiritual life today. Religion for vast segments of the American population has become a feel-good hobby that generates harmony and happiness, community involvement, and lowers stress levels.¹ *Yirat shamayim*, however, is demanding. Fear of God involves another landscape of emotions entirely: humility, insecurity, submission, and surrender.

This sea-change in religious attitudes and expectations may best be described by a simple question posed by the art critic Michael Kimmelman. He wonders why we no longer paint pictures of mountains, why they no longer have a hold on us as a natural manifestation of religious dread.² He entertains the possibility that

the urbanization of society has made our attitude to mountains, among other awe-inspiring aspects of nature, less about fear and more about pleasure. Mountains are no longer wild, irregular, and asymmetrical natural structures that make us feel small through their vastness. Today we can cable-car or hike up mountains and then ski down them. We may even have cellphone reception at their peaks. It is hard to be in awe of something so easy to conquer.

Consequently, educators today rarely consider fear to be an active component of instruction. If anything, we are optimistic professionals who value ideas and will ply all the “tricks of the trade” enthusiastically. In Jewish adult education, specifically, educators aim for a satisfying class conversation with Jewish text at its center. Often we seek a dual outcome: a greater level of facility or familiarity with a written piece of our Jewish past coupled with an enhanced connection to the Jewish people generally and specifically with those in the room. Reflective educators keep up with research on adult education and consider practical applications of their research.³ To achieve these ends, we sing and dance our texts so that we can bridge the theological and linguistic abyss between modern learners and ancient assumptions. These performance aspects of teaching have acquired a more pressing role in a culture of “edutainment,” where charisma and dynamism are highly praised in our instructors. Packaging and content today are closely aligned as priorities for good teachers. Often overlooked in this simple description is how much of this performance and teaching generally is unconsciously related to fear. Palmer Parker writes that, “From grade school on, education is a fearful enterprise.”⁴ What is the fear that Parker so openly acknowledges is integral to the educational process?

This essay will not offer definitions of religious or educational terms.⁵ It will, instead, use the first part of the expression *yirat shamayim* as a way to look at the role of fear in teaching – the fear of the learner and the fear of the educator, and only later connect that fear to the spiritual ends implied by the word *shamayim*.

Three educational fears will be addressed in this paper, with special emphasis placed on these fears in relation to but not limited to the adult education experience. Students fear learning, instructors

fear students, and educators fear their profession. Each of these statements appears counterintuitive and requires extensive unpacking. The only anticipated expression – students fear teachers – is noticeably absent. Why? Today, we have relinquished the Draconian measures once used in classrooms, namely physically beating knowledge into students and emotionally intimidating them. We have all heard stories of parents and grandparents hit by rulers, pinched on cheeks and ears and verbally pummeled by their instructors for not asking the right question or for offering the wrong answer. By and large, today's pervasive emphasis on educational self-esteem means that we have said goodbye and good riddance to this mode of learning. The most obvious of educational fears has been replaced by more subtle and elusive ones that are rarely analyzed in educational literature.

STUDENTS FEAR LEARNING

Our first fear is a noble one if treated appropriately. Many adult learners are afraid of Jewish texts. They are afraid of the language and assumptions of traditional texts and also afraid to like them. Some teachers accommodate this fear of ancient texts; they believe that such texts cannot appeal on their own merit and must be dressed in modern idioms that stress relevance over authenticity.⁶ We are afraid that texts left on their own will not be properly analyzed or understood or afraid that the language (Hebrew, Aramaic, or even halting English translations) will be an instant wall to learning. In its extreme form, we may fear embarrassment that is generated by certain texts and apologize for them;⁷ in other words, we are afraid of teaching the texts as they are. Some of these fears have led to creative and elegant solutions. Others have stymied us from teaching naturally and comfortably. Some fears have stymied our adult students from appreciating Jewish teachings with their tensions and complexities.

Those of us in adult education must be trained to recognize these fears, and this section will put them on full display. The most overt of them is the fear of ignorance by those who have little acquaintance with Jewish texts, who are not quite sure why they are studying with us and who feel as insecure as if they had just stepped

back in time to early childhood. It is not the same fear as being cornered in an alley at gunpoint. Fear can be slippery. Yet fear of incompetence is an intense fear for adults, and we are not taught sufficient humility to encounter and confront the unknown of an inner world.

Adults sometimes enter learning situations apprehensively. They are not accustomed to feeling incompetent or ignorant. It is important that the learning atmosphere created by the teachers and other learners be accepting and affirming. Learners are to be accepted at whatever their entry point may be and respected for who they are and for wanting to learn and grow... There must be intellectual and emotional space in a learning environment to allow for growth and change.⁸

This fear can also be magnified by personal maturity and adult competence in other areas. Joseph Reimer discusses the adult process of “relearning” – going back to that which we may have studied as children as magnifying adult incompetence:

Jewish relearning can be very exciting because an adult may feel reconnected with his or her tradition in ways that allow one to feel more whole. At the same time relearning, and especially unlearning, may be threatening because it involves admitting how much one does not know, facing how unpleasant our initial Jewish education may have been and revising what may feel like our basic assumptions about Judaism. Adult Jewish learning is rarely an emotionally neutral event.⁹

Unless security cushions are put in place, educators risk losing adult students. Some years ago, two women in their fifties sat in the first class of a series I was giving at a JCC; one looked confused and neither returned the following week. The director of the program told me that there were too many Hebrew words in the class, words

loaded with religious assumptions. "Like what?" I asked, struggling with what I could have said that would have intimidated them since I so often simultaneously translate as I go along. "It wasn't you. One of the other women in the class said *musaf* and it made them feel like they just didn't belong." One word, just one, moved two possible participants out of the room. Note that adults are not only looking for a relationship to their instructor; they are also gauging the appropriateness of the social context set up in the class. They are asking themselves, "Do I belong here?" The teacher's sensitivity to translating terms and managing class conversations between students can make the difference between fear and friendship.

Adult resistance to learning can be a consequence of childhood associations and personal or professional stress.¹⁰ The notion that study can be transformational often involves a sense of threat to current identity. R.E. Wickett in *Models of Adult Religious Education Practice* contends that adult learning is often to bring about social change, which can produce anxiety:

There are moments when adults perceive the difference between the world as it should or could be and the world as it is. Many learners will choose to learn in order to affect change in the world as they know it. These learners will frequently come together because the group will be able to accomplish more than any individual within the social context. The religious context of this type of learning should not be discounted... The impact of this form of learning on the faith community may be quite dramatic. The process of changing society may involve changes in the faith community which are exhilarating to some but threatening to others.¹¹

Often it is not the language but the very act of being present that stirs powerful feelings of fear and inadequacy. Many adults are brought to a Jewish studies class by someone else. The power of the personal invitation is a key to enrollment in adult education classes generally. But the risk of the personal invitation is that there are often

people in every class who are there because someone else likes it or is willing to give it a try. The individual who is coming along for the trip at some point needs to make his or her own decision about whether to remain. This is based in part on the friendship and in large measure on the ability of the instructor to ease the way into a new and possibly frightening adventure. Adult instructors worth their salt do not ignore this fear of ignorance; they find respectful ways to address and even celebrate it. Lee Hendler, herself an adult educator who became Jewishly knowledgeable only as an adult, helps us understand the nature of this celebration:

For all new adult learners there is a moment of consciousness – when we suddenly acknowledge how ignorant we are of our tradition. In that moment we are incredibly vulnerable – on the verge of being able to receive wisdom or so frightened and overwhelmed by our inadequacies that we might deny them. We may all be inclined to mask or deny our vulnerability, but the admission is a magnificent moment of self-awareness that holds the potential for our adult Jewish liberation.¹²

From this perspective, our role as adult educators is not to deny, ignore or neglect the fear of our students but to acknowledge it openly and affirm ignorance as a moment of potential growth. Hendler writes that this “magnificent moment” when an adult first acknowledges ignorance has, “something sacred in it, pregnant as it is with remarkable potential for advancement and discovery.” But she worries that we put so many stumbling blocks in the way of these fragile learning situations that instead of openly inviting anyone to learn, we often imply that “only those who have prior knowledge need apply.”¹³

One such delicate encounter proved to be a powerful transformative moment for me as an adult educator, a moment when I felt the full wisdom of Hendler’s words. I was sitting in a well-established Reform synagogue social hall, among one hundred people in their twenties and thirties. The presenter distributed to all present a piece

of paper with one verse in English boxed on the top; the rest of the page was blank. The verse was from Genesis 28:16: "Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'surely God is present in this place and I did not know.'" Each of us was tasked with circling a troubling word in the verse, writing our name, and a comment on this word beneath the box. After one minute, we were told to pass the paper to our right where the next person would make a comment on our comment. The exercise was a wonderful way to have a written group-huddle around a piece of text that was speaking to each of us uniquely, while also offering insight into the function of commentary. The first minute was up, and the young gentleman to my left, who was dragged to the event by his girlfriend, passed me a blank sheet. "Aaron," I said, "nothing interests you in this verse?" He looked at me quizzically, "I don't get this. I don't know anything about the Bible. I never went to Hebrew school, and I just don't know what to do."

"Write that down," I replied.

"What do you mean? Write what?"

"Write down that you don't know."

"But that's not an answer. It's not even a question."

"But don't you see? It's O.K. not to know. Look at the verse. Jacob also did not know. It was the beginning of his own journey. Not knowing is the beginning of all knowledge."

This young man felt fear. He came to a Jewish event and felt vulnerable and inadequate. He didn't want to be there, and he did not feel comfortable with the task at hand. It reminded him of a Jewish education he did not have, of a community in the room he stood on the margins of, and of a table of people who could all do something that he thought he could not.

Lest we think that this fear is present only in those who are not Jewishly educated, let us remind ourselves that in practically any Orthodox Jewish grouping today, there are people who have varying levels of Jewish education. There are those who went to day schools their whole lives and those who became observant through a college Hillel. There are yeshiva graduates who have learned on the most advanced levels and those who sat through day school dreaming of basketball. There are women who have never seen a page of

Gemara, men who have only a fleeting knowledge of *Tanakh*, and men and women with every variation in between. Adult educators in the Orthodox community can rarely afford assumptions about the knowledge-base in a room full of people. If that is true then we have to acknowledge that fear may be a lingering element in any educational transaction.

In addition, there are other fears working independently and in parallel fashion for such adult learners: one is the fear of being the outsider. “Will I say something that will label me an outsider in this classroom or will my ignorance of a basic Jewish concept, book, ritual, belief, etc. affirm that label?” Barry Holtz acknowledges that definitions of a Jewish “insider” may be exhaustive, and, thereby, can minimize self-confidence even among those labeled or perceived as insiders by others:

To be an “insider” in Judaism, one needs first and foremost to master at least one language (Hebrew) in its various historical permutations ranging from biblical texts to the latest editorials in the Israeli press. One needs to know in addition to the choreographic movements of synagogue ritual (when to sit or stand or bow or sing), the skills of daily and festival practices, all of which insiders perform with a kind of second-nature ease. Add to that the musical tropes for the public readings of Torah and prophets, the languages that Jews have used both for religious and secular purposes over many centuries and the bits of knowledge that insiders always seem to have at hand – historical facts, aphorism and quotations, and so on – and it is no wonder that the challenge for education seems almost overwhelming.¹⁴

Each aspect of Jewish knowledge that defies mastery may not be regarded as “neutral ignorance” but as a source of guilt and possible failure. “It’s terrible that I never learned Hebrew. I really should take a class.” “I went to a Jewish wedding and felt so stupid because I had no idea what was going on.” “I have never even opened a page of Tal-

mud.” In preparing a group of young professionals for an upcoming Federation mission to Israel, I asked participants to take a little I.Q. test (Israel Quotient) together; they rated their own knowledge of Israel in terms of language, culture, personal connections, financial support and knowledge of current events based on a series of written questions. When the exercise was complete, I asked them by a show of hands how many of them felt badly about the score they gave themselves. Almost every hand in the room shot up. “Why?” I asked. “Would you have felt uncomfortable if we were preparing for a trip to an exotic location in Africa and you didn’t know much about the language and culture?”

“But it’s different,” one young woman replied. “We’re *supposed* to know.”

Just how much are we supposed to know? We have no clear markers, despite strong intuitive feelings that we never know enough. Jewish guilt – emphasizing that we are not good enough because we do not know enough – can be a wonderful motivator, but it can also be a remarkable source of distance and intimidation. Jewish adult educators engage in risky behavior when using ignorance as a repeated “tool” to leverage Jewish study. There are limits to how much any of us are willing to invite the full weight of ignorance into our mental landscape without the accompanying paralysis. Adult educators beware.

The second adult fear is that knowledge will provoke behavioral change; since change precipitates anxiety, there is a natural suspicion of Jewish text and value teaching lest it generate change. Once we are knowledgeable, theory may turn into practice. Learning stimulates us to think more expansively and openly and change our ideas, opinions and possibly, our way of acting in the world. As John Dewey writes in *Education and Experience*:

Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It goes on in there, for it influences the formation of attitude of desire and purpose. But this is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under

which experiences are had.... When this fact is ignored, experience is treated as if it were something which goes on exclusively inside an individual's body and mind. It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does not occur in a vacuum.¹⁵

Yet the very source of anxiety for a student can make an adult educator feel wonderfully accomplished; adult learners have really taken us seriously. Our students are not only listening; they are *really* listening. They are *doing* things differently. For educators associated with *kiruv* [outreach] organizations, behavioral change is regarded as the barometer of success. Michael Rosenak, in his chapter, "The Scholar, the Believer and the Educator" draws attention to the fear that is generated for the student that should become a source of caution for the educator:

Secular Jews fear the "hidden ideology" of a religious discussion (i.e., the view that Judaism is a religion), whereas religious Jews suspect academic attempts to reduce religion to culture (i.e., the view that it is not "really" a religion).¹⁶

Hidden ideologies are rarely welcome. Adults appreciate direct communication and an understanding of the teacher's reason for teaching. When teachers have a secret agenda to make adult students observant, they often minimize the very impact of what they *are* teaching because of the fear of change that their adult learners feel. Adults feel respected when they are able to explore ideas and draw their own conclusions without having conclusions drawn for them.

These two fears, the fear of being an outsider and the fear of change, work against each other in ways that inhibit authentic learning. The desire to be an insider – to use the right language in the right contexts – is mitigated by the fear that being an insider will demand a change of behavior to mimic the behavior of insiders. I want to learn to be part of a collective that eludes me, but if I do, I may need

to change myself to be a more authentic part of that collective. When educators deal with this dialectic openly with their students, they invite a more profound quality of learning in their classrooms.

TEACHERS FEAR STUDENTS

Teachers fear students. On first blush, this makes no sense. Teachers do not fear students; if they did, they would never become teachers. They would become paralyzed every time they walked into a school by an irrational trepidation that would make them forego the profession. Yet, teachers *are* afraid of their students. They may be afraid that they will not keep a student's attention. They are afraid of not being liked. They may be afraid of what students say behind their backs or to their faces in front of others. They may be deathly afraid of difficult students who challenge their authority or competence in front of others. They may fear that their students do not really respect them. In this age of self-esteem and consumerism, teachers can easily be made to feel afraid of parents. When not sufficiently protected by administrators, a teacher's competence can be called into question for relatively minor "offenses" or judgment calls. The fear of losing a student, tarnishing his or her attitude to Judaism or even losing tuition dollars can be a strong motivator for administrators to pressure teachers to rethink grades or opinions.

Two specific teaching fears will be presented here, as they relate to adults. The first is a relatively superficial fear that requires experience and technical competence to overcome. The other is a profound fear that may never be mastered. The first is the fear of the difficult adult student. The second is the fear that we as educators are imposters. We are not who others think we are. The difficult adult student is, I believe, an undiagnosed fear for adult teachers. Difficult students challenge our ability to manage a class. Since educators cannot discipline a difficult adult student by calling parents or a principal, reminding them vigorously of the "homework" or testing their mastery of the subject, we keep this problem to ourselves and often suffer in silence. We all know the signs of difficult adult students, but no one is really talking about the problem in a deliberative way. The challenging adult student can be so by virtue of any

number of qualities. An adult learner can be considered a difficult student if he or she:

- Dominates class discussion or needs to be the center of attention.
- Shares strong opinions worded in an offensive way.
- Has obvious emotional baggage and is there for emotional support and not for the subject matter.
- Claims directly or indirectly to know the subject better than the teacher.
- Has a hygiene problem, nervous ticks or overt health issues that alienate other participants.
- Continuously challenges the knowledge or assumptions of other adult learners in the room.
- Arrives perpetually late and enters the room with a crescendo of noise, breaking up a learning atmosphere.
- Tries repeatedly to move the subject to an area of personal interest.

This is the short list. The variations and combinations are virtually endless. Why, though, should a teacher be afraid of such students? Within moments, any or all of these problems are glaringly obvious to everyone in the room. No one faults the teacher. Or do they? The teacher is not held responsible for another adult's behavior but is held responsible for *managing* that behavior. The lack of self-consciousness on the part of the student turns into acute self-consciousness on the part of the teacher.

This dynamic may be best compared to a manager in a corporate environment whose job is to make sure that people are working efficiently and to task. The manager minimizes distractions, solves problems, encourages results and massages bad tempers so that the outcomes desired will be achieved. The teacher is the manager in a classroom. His or her response to a difficult student will be regarded as a sign of competence or incompetence. Because a difficult student can stand in the way of creating a community of learners and get in the way of learning itself, teachers fear that these difficult students

will show the rest of the class – as they so often do – their own incompetence as a classroom manager.

We have all had such students. Many of us have them on a regular basis. Years ago, I remember getting stomachaches every Monday afternoon before a series of classes dominated by two adult women. One woman constantly corrected me and the other used the class as a way to work out her own “Jewish aggression,” tensions she had about her Jewish past. Our subject was *Tanakh*, and there was little room for either of these voices with a very packed syllabus. I could sense the squirming of others and the rolling of eyes each time either of these women opened her mouth. The irony of the class was that each woman, separately, asked me after class to do something about the other. More than the subject, this management challenge occupied my attention for an entire semester. I devoted a great deal of reflective time to finding and making a mental list of effective techniques for stopping each woman’s behavior from hijacking a potentially wonderful educational exchange. I discovered the gifts of using humor, body language, small group work, polite phone or after-class personal interactions (Let’s discuss this later. Here is my contact information.), and direct and firm requests to get back on track. Other adult learners appreciated my efforts to keep the learning space clear of inappropriate distractions. They supported my role as manager so that I could go back to my role as teacher.

We have all had moments when we thought that a sign of good teaching is getting the worst participant in the room to perk up and take note of our intelligence, our creativity, or interesting presentation. We measure ourselves by the interest or lack of it in one difficult person in the room. But we cannot afford to concentrate on one person and ignore the learning needs of the others; they have just as much of a right to learn as those who challenge us. Fear of particular students can make teachers do very foolish things in a classroom. The need to impress the most difficult of people is not a teaching issue, it is a matter of personal ego. Without any research to support this thesis, I am always struck by how much new teachers want to display their knowledge and creativity – look at how smart I am – and how much veteran teachers move the focus to the

learners – what will help them learn the most. Teaching is not about making other people be wowed by our brilliance; it is about finding the right balance between study and discussion around interesting material that helps students learn better.

EDUCATORS WHO FEAR TEACHING

In 1978, two researchers studied a group of successful women and coined the phrase, the “imposter syndrome,” to describe a set of doubts and inadequacies that did not match the actual competence of the women studied. These individuals were highly capable but, nevertheless, were afraid to be “found out.” Someone would catch on to the fact that they were not really that talented or smart or competent.¹⁷ The authors make recommendations for overcoming this fear and acknowledge how pervasive and ultimately untrue this fear is among successful individuals. Perhaps the fear is best distilled in a joke. “What do you call an imposter ten years from now?...Boss.”

Imposter is a strong and morally loaded term, and therefore, may not adequately describe the nuanced sense of self-generated insecurity felt by many educators. Jewish educators can add another layer to this syndrome because, like any other instructor of religion, the role modeling expectation is profound.¹⁸ In that case, we may not really be the role models of religious “best practices” that we have set ourselves up to be. Michael Rosenak presents questions that those who recruit teachers must answer with conviction and confidence:

Is a specific conviction or life-style a pre-requisite for teaching in a religious school? If so, will this be a requirement for instructors in all subjects or only for teachers of subjects stipulated as “religious?” Or does it suffice for the teacher to have a firm intellectual grasp of the tradition, its texts and its recommended experiences?

If a teacher is committed to religious practice and has religious conviction, is doctrinal conformity required or merely commitment to using the community’s theological language? Does commitment to a religious life-style

require that the teacher be loyal to its *details* or “only” to its principles?¹⁹

In adult education, these fears can be more subtle and elusive. The adult classroom can be a more honest place for a teacher to admit ignorance or discuss a challenging life situation in the company of peers without fear, but every time we stand up in front of a room to expose ideas, we are also exposing ourselves and making ourselves vulnerable in the process. The fear of this vulnerability is intense and we do many things to overcome, control or disguise it.

After thirty years of teaching, my own fear remains close at hand. It is there when I enter a classroom and feel the undertow into which I have jumped. It is there when I ask a question – and my students keep a silence as stony as if I had asked them to betray their friends. It is there whenever it feels as if I have lost control: a mind-boggling question is asked, an irrational conflict emerges, or students get lost in my lecture because I myself am lost. When a class that has gone badly comes to a merciful end, I am fearful long after it is over – fearful that I am not just a bad teacher but a bad person, so closely is my sense of self tied to the work I do.²⁰

This honest confessional speaks to two fears: the fear of inadequacy as a teacher that emerges when we have not mastered our material or figured out a way to present it coherently and compelling. But there is another fear here that is profoundly entangled in identity formation: am I a fake? Am I good at what I do? Do I dare ask myself that question?

Because teaching is so closely aligned with being for many educators, these questions are more troubling than mere professional angst. For Jewish studies teachers the issue of fear may be compounded by institutional loyalties. We may find ourselves teaching to please our administrators and thereby saying or intimating

things that we don't ourselves believe to be true. We may find our work environments mediocre but without any means of disassociating ourselves with mediocrity, we become afraid that others will assume that we are our institutions. In more academic contexts, the fear of not getting tenure and not achieving professional security can hijack one's mental space. For others, the fear of not being brilliant enough to impress colleagues and justify one's position can be intense. But again, this fear needs to be mined for all that it can do to raise the bar on good teaching and prevent it from distracting us professionally.

My fear that I am teaching poorly may not be a sign of failure but evidence that I care about my craft. My fear that a topic will explode in the classroom may not be a warning to flee from it but a signal that the topic must be addressed. My fear of teaching at the dangerous intersection of the personal and the public may not be cowardice but confirmation that I am taking the risks that good teaching requires.²¹

The fear of asking ourselves if we are good enough should be eclipsed by the bigger fear of educators who do not ask that question, who are not sufficiently humbled by their work to ask if they are good enough. We have once again changed a fear into a potential strength. The fear of the adult learner that he or she does not know enough has metamorphosed into the beautiful sacred moment of transformation. The fear of the adult educator that he or she is not living up to a set of ideals forces an internal questioning that promotes reflection and professional growth. We cannot be afraid of fear. We have to harness it. It is telling us something.

TURNING FEAR INTO YIRAT SHAMAYIM

A discussion of fear in adult education will miss the mark if it does not turn into a reflection on *yirat shamayim*. We have identified the fears: the student's fear of the text, the teacher's fear of the student,

and the teacher's fear of teaching. Now we must connect them to heaven.

D.H. Lawrence, in his poem "The Old Idea of Sacrifice," muses on the nature of giving up something of ourselves for a higher purpose:

Sacrifice is the law of life which enacts
that little lives must be eaten up into
the dance and splendor
of bigger lives, with due reverence and acknowledge-
ment.

Shamayim is the "dance and splendor of bigger lives." It means placing God above us at all times, valuing the expansiveness of a spiritual life and sacrificing to have that expansiveness. It takes work; it involves loss.

There are practical reasons that this expansiveness is not highlighted in the adult education classroom. The emphasis on covering material rather than discussing it, the awkwardness the teacher feels in using terms like "fear" and "sacrifice" in the adult classroom,²² and the simple lack of time provided for reflection:

One of the most frequently reported lamentations of learners after they have experienced a formal educational course is how the richness of the experience was reduced so drastically by their being forced to do too much in too short a time. Teachers seem to err in favor of breadth over depth, no doubt because of frequently being constrained by the need to fit learners into a series of institutionally prescribed, progressively taken curricula teachers rush through masses of content...the "mulling over" period is neglected.²³

Considering these issues as practical recommendations may create some desired changes that stimulate more thinking about *yirat*

shamayim. More than any particular technique, however, is the need for fear to be more openly acknowledged in the adult classroom. Harnessing the fears described above and using them as a portal into the inner landscape of teaching both requires and generates humility. To me, humility is at the heart of *yirat shamayim*. It is humility that makes us tremble during *U'netaneh Tokef*, cower before the majesty of nature, think twice – three times – before bending our integrity or transgressing a commandment. *Yirat shamayim* for adults must be more than the fear that lightening will strike us when we do something wrong. As we mature, that lightening rod must be activated within us, not outside of us. As we muse over texts and traditions, we are nurturing an internal barometer that allows us not to fear less but to fear more.

Jewish adult education at its finest attenuates adult learners to be exquisitely sensitive to the call of the spirit, to the presence and needs of others. It inculcates profound reverence for good teaching and humility before sacred texts. It makes us afraid because we may have to change the way we think and the way we act; that fear is a great blessing and prevents the onset of moral and spiritual stagnation. This is critical for the Orthodox community that often – and often falsely – characterizes itself as a spiritual denomination when, in actuality, it nurtures a sense of superiority to other forms of Jewish observance which can undermine genuine spiritual growth.

...moral concerns are often not as great as they should be in the religious community...Judaism is often transmitted to children not as a *moral* way of life but as non-rational habits which become a social way of life. Many children raised in observant environments come to observe Jewish law not from an appreciation of the laws' moral and spiritual bases, but out of simple habit, out of fear of being "caught" violating a law, and because everyone around them is doing it. They are not taught to observe Jewish laws with the intention of becoming moral through them, and the laws, therefore, cease to have the morally elevating effect which they are meant to have.²⁴

We can substitute “moral” in this passage with “spiritual” and arrive at the same conclusions. The admission that we value habituation over growth is a painful one, but one at the core of any discussion of *yirat shamayim* in education.

The ineffable dimensions of learning discussed in this paper tell us something very important about fear of heaven. Fear must not be treated as a pejorative word. We must take it out of the old religious lexicons, dust it off, hold it up and acknowledge its integral role in promoting personal growth and a deepening relationship with God. Fear of heaven can only be discussed in adult education when we can talk about fear unabashedly and acknowledge the fears in the heart of every student. But no teacher can discuss the fear of the student without first examining his or her own fears as an educator. The fear of failure, the fear of being inauthentic, the fear of not living up to our own truest selves – these are the fears that when confronted honestly allow us to fear heaven with increased humility.

In Exodus 20, in the aftermath of the giving of the Decalogue, the children of Israel stood at a distance from the smoke covered mountain. Moses explicitly addressed their fear of approach. *Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may ever be with you, so that you do not go astray.* Fear is important. Do not be afraid of this emotion. Moses could not convince them. He could only do what they would not: *So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.* Moses entered the *arafel* – the murky, diaphanous fog that God occupied. Moses anticipated fear, spoke of it explicitly and then, when rejected, confronted it alone. As educators, we can address fear and create safe space to learn, but ultimately, we can only experience *yirat shamayim* without the company of our students.

NOTES

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2. Michael Kimmelman, *The Accidental Masterpiece* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), pp. 66–67.
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 4. Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), p. 36.
 5. For a discussion of definitions relevant to the world of education, see Israel Scheffler, "Definitions of Education," *The Language of Education* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 1968), pp. 11–35.
 6. For more on this tension, see the section on "text" in Seymour Fox, "The Art of Translation" in *Visions of Jewish Education*, eds. Seymour Fox, Israel Scheffler, Daniel Marom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 265–70.
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 10. See Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), p. 7.
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7

Fear of God and Prayer

Jack Bieler

A DISTURBING DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES IN MANY MAJOR CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX SYNAGOGUES

In his widely publicized article analyzing the possible causes for the massive amount of conversation taking place during formal communal prayer in Orthodox settings,¹ clinical psychologist Dr. Irving Levitz² offers the following characterization:

In most Orthodox synagogues, when the cacophony of noise from adult socializing and the clamor of children playing, crying and scampering about has reached some unacceptable decibel level, rabbis and synagogue presidents will stop the service in order to scold, admonish, and even threaten the offending worshippers. Protests from the pulpit tend to affect no more than a temporary respite, however, and within moments, the congregation resumes its social agenda.³

Sociological and psychological considerations aside, from a theological perspective, the lack of decorum during synagogue services can easily be attributed to shortcomings in the degree of Fear of God in the average synagogue worshipper.

YIRAT HASHEM (FEAR OF GOD) AND THE COMMANDMENTS

Based upon the manner in which the term *Yirat HaShem* (the Fear of God) is used in biblical verses, it is evident that the need for a Jew to develop such a sensibility is both a Commandment in its own right,⁴ as well as a type of *weltanschauung* informing both the performance of all Commandments⁵ and behaviors defined as other than specifically religious observances and practices.⁶ Furthermore, according to at least one *Aggadic* passage in the Talmud, the sensibility of *Yirat HaShem* is both considered a prerequisite as well as an ultimate outcome for the overall Jewish religious experience.⁷ However, in order to fulfill certain individual Commandments, *Yirat HaShem* appears to not only add additional religious significance to a course of action that already contains intrinsic value,⁸ but sometimes constitutes the very essence of the particular Commandment.⁹ One such Commandment¹⁰ whose not only optimal, but even minimal level of fulfillment is defined by the codifiers¹¹ as requiring a clear-cut sense of *Yirat HaShem* is *Tefilla* (prayer).

YIRAT HASHEM BY VIRTUE OF ALWAYS BEING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

R. Moshe Isserles, in his gloss on *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 1:1, concerning what one is to do in the morning upon awakening, draws on RAMBAM's *Guide for the Perplexed* III: 52 to describe how the realization that one always finds himself standing before God, independent of particular acts of prayer or blessing, inevitably should result in ongoing emotions of fear and dread in everyone.

RAMA, *Orach Chayim* 1:1

[Psalms 16:8] "I have placed the Lord before me always..."¹² This is a great principle of Torah and a quality of

the righteous that walk before God. Because the sitting of a person, his moving about, or his engagement in activities when he is alone in his house is extremely different from his sitting, moving and activity when he is before a great king. And his manner of speech and his uninhibited opening of his mouth [i.e., he speaks whenever he wishes] when he is together with his household and relatives is nothing like his speech when in the presence of a king. All the more so when a person considers that the Great King, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, Whose Glory Fills the entire universe, is Standing over him and Sees his actions, as it is said, [Jeremiah 23:24] “Can anyone hide himself in secret places and I will not See him? says the Lord,” immediately *an individual should sense fear and subservience and terror of the Lord, Blessed Be He, and he should be shamed before Him unceasingly.*

Consequently, it is possible for a sensitive, introspective individual, by means of reflection regarding one’s existential reality vis-à-vis the Divine,¹³ to achieve *Yirat HaShem* without ever engaging in formal prayer, or invoking blessings. The formal structure of prayer as well as the more informal occasions for individual blessings, in addition to providing an ongoing means by which the God-fearing individual can express himself to the Divine, can also be understood to serve as constant and varied reminders to the individual of his ongoing relationship to God since he might at least from time to time lose sight of this reality when caught up in the exigencies of everyday life.¹⁴

INFORMAL LITURGICAL AFFIRMATIONS IMPRESSING UPON A PERSON THAT HE IS ALWAYS IN GOD’S PRESENCE

While the petitionary nature of the *Amida* (lit., the standing; a prayer consisting of nineteen blessings of praise, supplication and thanksgiving, which serves as the centerpiece of the morning, afternoon and evening services), implicitly suggests that for the individual

engaged in prayer to have a meaningful spiritual experience, he must sense that he is very much in God's Presence.

Sanhedrin 22a

Said R. Chana bar Bizna in the name of R. Shimon Chasida: One who prays should view himself as if the Divine Presence is immediately before him, as it is said,¹⁵ [Psalms 16:8] "*I have placed the Lord before me always...*"¹⁶

Jewish primary sources as well as portions of the "informal" Jewish liturgy¹⁷ suggest that such awareness is expected to be *de rigueur* throughout one's waking hours, even when one is not formally praying *per se*.¹⁸

From the moment that one gains consciousness in the morning, the chilling and intimidating realization arising from the *Modeh Ani* (I give thanks) statement¹⁹ that a Jew is expected to immediately recite, i.e., that one not only suddenly finds himself in the Presence of the Great King but that he must attribute the continuation of his very life to a specific and individual Divine decision made daily, should give him considerable pause and overwhelming perspective. This early morning acknowledgement of *HaShem's* control over each of our lives and deaths is a completion of a theme begun the night before prior to retiring, when during the course of *Kriyat Shema Al HaMita*²⁰ (lit., the *Shema* recitation on the bed), reference is made to the conception of sleep as the consignment of one's soul/life to God along with the sincere hope that it will be "returned."²¹

Whereas the issue of the dependency for our very lives becomes crystallized only when we go to sleep and then awaken, or during other hopefully isolated moments when we find ourselves at risk due to life-threatening illness or potentially lethal circumstance, the assumption that we are always expected to approach *HaShem* as literally our King and we His Subjects/Slaves applies to even our mundane conscious existences via the myriad blessings incumbent upon us to pronounce daily. We are required to repeatedly articulate our acknowledgment of God's Kingship

“Blessed are You, *Lord* our God and *King* of the universe...” in the form of the many blessings that comprise not only the broader structure of the morning, afternoon, and evening prayer services, but also whose individual recitations are precipitated when we are about to perform a *Mitzva* (commandment), such as prior to and following eating, while we are traveling, upon seeing a remarkable sight.

Aside from the obvious implications of the word *Melech* (King) within each blessing, *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 5:1 mandates that specific understandings of the various Divine Names used in these blessings should carefully be contemplated each time we invoke a specific Name of God.²²

The blessings known as *Birchot HaShachar*²³ (Blessings of the morning), particularly when they were originally recited at every stage of one’s arising from bed and during the course of getting dressed,²⁴ further serve to impress upon the individual how dependent he is upon *HaShem* for all of his everyday actions as he progressively moves from an essentially unconscious and non-functioning state during sleep to the resumption of full human activity upon awakening.²⁵ Such blessings appear to serve as a hedge against man developing a sense of his independence and self-reliance, and therefore their recitation ought to further contribute to a sense of *Yirat HaShem*.

THE AWARENESS OF BEING IN GOD’S PRESENCE MUST INTENSIFY STILL FURTHER IN ORDER TO SUCCESSFULLY PREPARE FOR FORMAL PRAYER

Nevertheless, even as a general sense of God’s Immediacy and Kingship is meant to accompany us as we go about our daily activities, a more intense realization of these verities is required in order to pray properly and thereby confront the One who is the focal point of our requests, praises, and thanksgivings. The assumption that already prior to beginning to pray, one ought to be aware that he is entering into a particularly direct relationship with the Divine to the point of engendering “fear and trembling,” underlies parallel Talmudic passages that appear to equate the experiences of formal prayer with receiving prophetic Revelation.

Berachot 31a–b

The Rabbis taught: One should not stand to pray while in a mood of melancholy, joviality, conversation,²⁶ or light-headedness, but rather consumed by joy emanating from the opportunity to fulfill a Commandment.

Shabbat 30b; *Pesachim* 117a²⁷

...to teach you that the Divine Presence does not dwell in a mood of laziness,²⁸ melancholy, joviality, light-headedness, conversation,²⁹ or meaningless activities, but rather when he is pervaded by a spirit of joy emanating from the opportunity to fulfill a Commandment, as it is said, [II Kings 3:15] “But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass when the minstrel played, that the Hand of the Lord Came upon him.”

The parallel between those yearning for prophecy and therefore understandably needing to prepare themselves in order to qualify for such a spiritual experience, and individuals intending to pray *Shacharit*, *Musaf*, *Mincha*, and *Ma'ariv* clarifies the actions of the *Chasidim HaRishonim* (early pietists) who in *Berachot* 30b are described as “waiting an hour, and only then praying in order to direct their hearts to their Father in Heaven.” Although *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 5:1 delineates the need to reflect upon the implications of God’s Names within the context of the recitation of blessings, such reflections are similarly appropriate each time the Divine Name is invoked throughout our formal prayers, whether as part of biblical verses, particular supplications, or expressions of thanksgiving, creating a type of mantra whereby *HaShem*’s Name serves as a means by which we personally iterate His Power and Kingship over us repeatedly throughout the prayer service. It is highly likely that contemplating the implications of the various Names of God and similar matters well before actually beginning a particular prayer service constituted at least a portion of those pietists’ preparations for prayer.

**THE REQUISITE ATTITUDE FOR ACTUALLY
BEGINNING TO ENGAGE IN FORMAL PRAYER
AS DEFINED BY JEWISH LITURGY**

The standard liturgy of the morning service itself suggests that as soon as one enters a synagogue in which he intends to fulfill his obligation to pray, it is expected that a particularly intense awareness of *Yirat HaShem* be achieved. The following verses, containing ample references to *Yirat HaShem* in both verbal and kinesthetic forms, are customarily recited as one first comes into a place of prayer:³⁰

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Numbers 24:5 | How goodly are your tents, Jacob; your dwelling places, Israel. |
| Psalms 5:8 | As for me, due to Your abundant Kindness, I will enter Your House; <i>Eshtachaveh</i> [I will prostrate myself] ³¹ toward Your Holy Sanctuary <i>BeYiratecha</i> [in fear/awe of You]. |
| Ibid. 26:8 | <i>HaShem</i> , I love the House in which You Dwell, and the Place where Your Glory Resides. |
| Ibid. 95:6 | As for me, <i>Eshtachaveh</i> [I will prostrate myself] <i>VeEchra'a</i> [and bow]; <i>Evrecha</i> [I will kneel] before <i>HaShem</i> , my Maker. |
| Ibid. 69:14 | As for me, may my prayer to You, <i>HaShem</i> , be at an opportune time; O God, in Your abundant Kindness, Answer me with the Truth of Your Salvation. |

Chafetz Chayim, citing *Sha'arei Teshuva* in the name of *Pri Eitz Chayim*, recommends a practice designed to assist one preparing to pray immediately before physically entering the synagogue:

Mishna Berura, 46, Introduction

Before one comes into the synagogue, while he is still standing in the courtyard of the synagogue, he should say,³¹ [Psalms 55:15] "...And we walk to the House of God *BeRagesh* [with emotion]."³² And he should be overcome

with emotion and *he should recoil when he enters the synagogue due to his great fear*. And he should wait and delay a short while and say, [Psalms 5:8] “As for me, due to Your abundant Kindness, I will enter Your House...” And only afterwards, he should enter.³³

The association of Psalms 55:15 with the moment just prior to an individual’s entering the synagogue parallels RAMBAM’s directives concerning the manner in which one is to enter the Temple’s Courtyard:

RAMBAM, *Hilchot Beit HaBechira* 7:5

...And anyone who enters into the courtyard, should do so calmly, and only in an area where he is permitted to enter there, and he should see himself as standing before God, as it is said, [1 Kings 9:3] “...And my eyes and my heart will be there [in the Temple] all of the days.” *And he should walk with terror, fear and dread*, as it says, [Psalms 55:15] “And we walk in the House of God *BeRagesh*.”

Chafetz Chayim apparently co-opts the homiletical interpretation of R. Yitzchak in *Megilla* 29a regarding Ezekiel 11:16, “...and I will Be to them a *Mikdash Me’at* [miniature Sanctuary]...” and extends the concept that a synagogue is a “House of God” by microcosmically paralleling the Temples of Jerusalem, to include developing a mindset similar to what was required for entry into the Temple in order to walk through a synagogue’s doors!³⁴ Furthermore, verses in the Torah emphasize that when people came to participate in or observe the Temple’s Divine Service, *Yirat HaShem* was unambiguously experienced and enhanced,³⁵ and there is apparently a similar expectation for when someone comes to a synagogue to participate in a prayer experience. Not only is it wholly understandable that the mindset of *Yirat HaShem* that ideally informed one about to enter the Temple should likewise be required in order to properly enter a synagogue, but the general commandment to “fear My Temple”³⁶ which clearly was originally intended to create an aura surrounding

the Temple, is at least on some level applicable today to the synagogues in which we pray:

Sefer Mitzvot Katan, 6

To fear the *Mikdash*, as it is written [Leviticus 19:30] “And My Temple you shall fear.” And today, the synagogue is a miniature Temple.

“To fear the Temple:” it is explained in *Yevamot* 6b – in the same verse³⁷ is stated observance of *Shabbat* and fear of the Temple. Just as in the case of *Shabbat*, one does not fear *Shabbat* but rather the One that Commanded its observance, so too with regard to the Temple, *it is not the Temple that is to be feared, but rather the One Who Warned concerning how it is to be treated...*

And what constitutes fear of the *Mikdash*? One is not to enter the Temple Mount with his shoes or his pack, and he is not to make it into a shortcut, and expectorating obviously is inappropriate. And it is prohibited to make our synagogues into shortcuts...and it is inappropriate to act frivolously within them, and to eat in them other than meals associated with religious occasions. And one is not to enter into them to escape either the sun or the rain...

VISUAL AIDS TO DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING AN ATTITUDE OF YIRAT HASHEM WITHIN THE SYNAGOGUE PROPER

Once inside the synagogue space wherein prayer is intended to take place, in addition to the prayers themselves that constantly invoke God's Name and make repeated references to His Kingship,³⁸ visual reminders are often placed in strategic positions in order to attempt to insure a congregation's serious attitude and cognitive focus. Biblical verses chosen for their inspirational content are emblazoned above the Torah Ark as well as upon the curtains that hang in front of it.³⁹ The cloth covers of Ashkenazi *Sifrei Torah* (Torah scrolls) and the coverings of synagogue furniture such as the *Shulchan* (central Torah reader's table) and the *Shtenders* (book rests for the leaders

of the services as well as the synagogue dignitaries) are similarly embroidered with pointed phrases and spiritual symbols. In some sanctuaries, verses are painted on the walls and incorporated within the synagogue's windows, particularly those made of stained glass. A striking visual focal point are mystical charts known as *Shivitis*,⁴⁰ on which Psalms 16:8, the verse previously centrally cited in the passages from *Sanhedrin* 22a and RAMA's commentary on *Shulchan Aruch*, is decorously written in calligraphy, with the Tetragrammaton given particular prominence, surrounded by various themes executed in micrography, often including mystical representations of the Temple Candelabrum and the palm of a human hand. Such charts can be observed in some synagogues either next to or in front of the place designated for the *Shliach Tzibbur* (the representative of the congregation designated to lead services) to stand. The underlying assumption behind these "decorations," is that they serve as pointed reminders, in coordination with the prayers themselves, of the type of atmosphere that should ideally exist during the times when prayers are being offered by the congregation.

CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH PRAYER IN THE SYNAGOGUE THAT ARE DESIGNED TO ENHANCE YIRAT HASHEM

Aside from the numerous visual cues that are typically scattered around the synagogue space designated for prayer, specific behaviors either mandated by Jewish law or simply customary, are also designed to contribute to producing and maintaining an atmosphere of Fear of God.

Although the *Amida* is obviously the highpoint of any formal prayer service, the additional proclaiming God's greatness within the context of the biblical references in *Pesukei D'Zimra* (verses of praise), of *Shacharit* (morning prayers), as well as the recitation of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41 in succession) as part of the morning and evening prayers, constitute not only significant prayer experiences in terms of themselves, but also contribute to creating an aura of fear of God. The first section of

the morning prayers is devoted to describing God as a Creator,⁴¹ a judge,⁴² a redeemer,⁴³ a source of miracles.⁴⁴ when a person thinks about the implications of such qualities, it would seem to be virtually impossible not to experience the powerful emotions described by RAMBAM as the fundamental responses to the observable universe:

RAMBAM, *Mishna Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2

And what is the path towards loving and fearing Him? When a person reflects about His great, amazing Actions and Creations, and recognizes His Intelligence that can neither be evaluated nor delineated, immediately he loves and glorifies and extols and powerfully desires to know the Great Name...

But when he reflects about these matters themselves, immediately *he stumbles backwards and he fears and he recognizes that he is a tiny, insignificant, inconsequential creature of extremely limited intelligence standing before the most Perfect Intelligence...*

And while a goodly part of *Pesukei D'Zimra* does describe how much we appreciate *HaShem's* kindness, mercy and concern for us,⁴⁵ nevertheless, the sense of *Yirat HaShem* ought to be inescapable as well.

Once *Pesukei D'Zimra* are completed, and the section known as *Kabbalat Ohl Malchut Shamayim* (the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven) is begun, the overall mood, if anything, only intensifies. The recitation of *Shema* and its surrounding blessings is standardly associated with deep concentration, recognition of the gravity of what is being verbally accepted and ratified, and even with martyrdom during times of persecutions of the Jews.

Chaye Adam 21:4, 5, 11

Kriyat Shema must be read *with terror, fear and trembling...*

It is prohibited to hint with one's eyes, to point with

one's fingers, and obviously to engage in work...during the reading of the first paragraph, and it is prohibited to do so during the second as well...

...It is good if the *individual has in mind that he would be prepared to subject himself to death for the sake of this belief* [in the uniqueness of *HaShem*], and he should imagine in his mind that he is being burned at this moment for the sanctification of His Name, to fulfill [Psalms 44:23] "For Your Sake are we killed all the day long..." and he should think that he is actually carrying this out...

As for the *Amida*, *Shulchan Aruch* notes the association between sacrifices and prayer suggested in the *Midrash* –

BaMidbar Rabba 18:21

[Hosea 14:3] "Forgive all iniquity and receive us graciously. So we will offer the words of our lips instead of calves" – Israel said: Master of the Universe! During the time that the Temple was extant, we would offer a sacrifice and we would be atoned. But now all we have at our disposal is prayer...

Israel said: When the Temple was extant, we would offer fats and limbs [of animals] and we would achieve atonement. But now all we have is our own fats and bloods and souls. Let it be before You that these will earn atonement for us...

and in addition to the obvious broader parallels existing between these two ritual categories, the author homiletically identifies the manner in which very specific practices ought to be adopted so that prayer will be brought in line with the offering of sacrifices in a most detailed and comprehensive manner.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 98:4

Prayer is in place of sacrifice, and therefore it should parallel the example of sacrifice

(a) with respect to intention, no irrelevant thoughts should be present, since within the context of sacrifices, such thoughts would render the offerings disqualified;

(b) it should be engaged in while standing, similar to the Temple Service during which the Priests, as well as those providing the sacrifices all stood;

(c) a fixed place should be established for prayer, since with respect to sacrifices, each type of offering had a specific place for its slaughter and the application of its blood;

(d) ideally, nothing should stand between the prayer and the wall, just as with respect to sacrifices any object or substance that would stand between the blood being applied and the wall of the altar upon which it was being thrown, would render the sacrifice unacceptable;

(e) one should have nice clothing set aside especially for prayer, paralleling the priestly garments that the Priests were required to wear while engaged in the Temple Service...⁴⁶

When one considers not only the individual details that *Shulchan Aruch* outlines, but also the general mindset demanded of the priests engaged in offering sacrifices in the Temple, the engendering of an atmosphere of precision, seriousness and even fear by all participants in the prayer service is clearly implied.

The body language that is particularly associated with the *Amida* further contributes to the deference and trepidations that *Yirat HaShem* naturally engenders:

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 18:5

(a) One should line up his feet one next to the other, as if he possesses only a single foot in order to resemble angels, as it is said, (Ezekiel 1:7) "And their feet were like a straight foot..."

(b) and one should bow his head slightly to the ground,

(c) and he should shut his eyes so he will not look at anything, and if he prays from a Siddur, he should concentrate upon looking only into the Siddur,

(d) and he should place his hands upon his heart, the right hand atop the left,

(e) and he should pray with a whole heart, in terror, in fear and in subservience, like a poor individual begging at the door,

(f) and he should utter the words from his mouth with intention and precision...

Ibid. 20:4

(g) And in the *Kedusha* [the section added when the *Amida* is repeated in the presence of a *Minyan* (ten adult males)], everyone should be careful to line up their feet, that both should be together, as if they were a single foot,

(h) and when everyone says, "Holy, Holy, Holy!" and "Blessed" and "May He Reign," each should raise his body and his heels upwards,

(i) and the custom is to lift his eyes upwards,

(j) and it is good if the eyes are closed.

Contributing further to the sense that one is literally standing before *HaShem* while praying is the series of bowings that mark the end of the various forms of the *Kaddish* prayer,⁴⁷ the *Barchu* (lit., bless; the introduction of the portion of the prayers leading up to *Shema*,⁴⁸ as well as the introductory statement of the blessing when one is called to the Torah), the turning points within the *Amida*⁴⁹ as well as the manner in which the individual is directed to conclude his prayers.⁵⁰

Sefer Kol Bo 11

And one has to bow within the course of each *Amida* five bows, both at the beginning and end of *Avot* [lit., the fathers; the first of the nineteen blessings], at the

beginning and end of *Hoda'a* [lit., thanksgiving; the first of the last three blessings whose theme is thanksgiving] and when one has completed his prayer, he bows again and takes three steps backwards, but no more than that since otherwise it appears as hubris, and then one turns towards his left, which corresponds to the "Right" of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, and then towards his right, which corresponds to His "Left," and then he utters *Amen*, all within the same single bow...

On *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom HaKippurim*, perhaps in an effort to impress upon the pray-er even more the degree to which he is to acknowledge his subservience to God in the spirit of emphasizing the *Malchiyot* (kingship) theme of the Days of Awe, in addition to the standard bowings, it is customary to also engage in literal prostrations.⁵¹

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 129:16

During the repetition of the *Amida* [on *Rosh HaShana*], when the prayer leader recites, *VaAnachnu Korim* [and we bow] it is customary for the congregation to say this with him and also bow and bend their knees. However they do not "fall on their faces" [i.e., prostrate themselves fully] except on *Yom HaKippurim* during the description of the Temple Service ...⁵²

Another parallel between the Temple and modern-day synagogues is obliquely referred to in Mishna Sukka 5:2. The Mishna notes that a *Tikun Gadol* (a significant rectification of an unfortunate situation) was instituted during the *Simchat Beit HaShoeiva* (rejoicing over the point of water drawing, used for the water libations on Sukkot). This "rectification" is interpreted by later commentators as the construction of balconies to separate men and women in order to alleviate the frivolousness that arose when the genders came together in the Temple. This is the historical precedent for the sexes being separated by a *Mechitza* (barrier) in contemporary Orthodox synagogues, not

only to physically mimic the Temple, but also to similarly try to maintain a relatively sober atmosphere during prayer.

RAMA, quoting the Responsa of *Binyamin Ze'ev*, offers a comment that although not necessarily having direct bearing on decorum, nevertheless implies a particular approach to being able to give prayer one's undivided attention.

RAMA on *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 98:1

It is prohibited for a person to kiss his small children in the synagogue, in order to establish within his [the parent's] heart that there is no love like that for the Holy One, Blessed Be He.

While the focus of this instruction would appear to be theological in nature, i.e., what sort of emotional stance is one to assume vis-à-vis *HaShem* during the time when one prays, there is also the tacit assumption that if parents are enjoined against showing their children affection while in the synagogue, children will not necessarily be present, unless they are old enough to properly participate in the service for significant lengths of time. Taking care of children who require an adult's full attention, and being able to pray properly appear to be mutually exclusive.⁵³ *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 98:1 is quite unequivocal in this regard:

...And children, who cause their parents to become confused with regard to prayer, should not be brought at all to the synagogue.

Assuming a different perspective, a medieval pietist quite provocatively draws upon the manner of worship of other religions as a basis for developing a minimal standard for the ideal behavior and mood that should permeate Jewish houses of worship:

Sefer Chasidim, 18

...[After a discussion of the prohibitions against all forms of unnecessary conversation during prayer services]

And woe to the *evildoers who conduct themselves frivolously and are devoid of the terror of Shakai* [the particular Name of God connoting Self-sufficiency and All-powerfulness] *and upon whose faces there is missing His Fear and His Awe*, and they don't understand and they don't learn lessons despite their having traversed the "islands of the *Kit-tiyim*"⁵⁴ and they saw and they considered that in all of those lands the kings bow on their knees in their houses of worship, and they stand in terror and fear and trembling and their palms are spread out to their gods, the works of their hands, that neither see nor hear.⁵⁵ Surely, we who stand before the King, King of all Kings, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, living and existent, exalted and on high, may His Name be blessed, and may His memory be lifted up, to Him belong all silences and praises, all the more so we should stand before Him in *terror and fear and trembling*. And concerning those who claim to be fatigued and therefore are unable to stand, the verse states, [Isaiah 43:22] "But you have not called upon me, Jacob. But you have been weary of Me, Israel." Throughout the day you are not tired, but when it is time to pray, you are tired. All day they stand in the market before the bureaucrat or before some foolishness and are not tired. And at the time for prayer they are unable to stand.

Sefer Chasidim raises the specter of communal prayer lacking *Yirat HaShem* as not only spiritually unfulfilling, but even constituting a public *Chillul HaShem* (profanation of God's Name).

**IS THE PRAYER EXPERIENCE IN THE
CONTEMPORARY MODERN ORTHODOX
SYNAGOGUE IN KEEPING WITH THE
STANDARD OF YIRAT HASHEM THAT
APPARENTLY WAS IDEALIZED IN THE PAST?**

Despite all of these reminders, textual interpretations, visual cues, and liturgical associations intended to inspire and maintain a high

level of *Yirat HaShem* throughout the communal prayer experience, a visitor to most contemporary modern Orthodox synagogues in North America would be hard-pressed to report that he experienced an atmosphere that reflected high levels of spirituality or particular engagement with and fear of God. Considerable restlessness and movement, conversation,⁵⁶ perfunctory prayer at break-neck speed,⁵⁷ individuals arriving quite late and leaving early, inappropriate dress in terms of modesty and/or informality all contribute to the absence of a sense that the congregation is in the presence of the King of Kings, that it is suffused with fear and awe of the Divine.

Samuel Heilman, in his classic ethnographic study of a Modern Orthodox synagogue, *Synagogue Life*,⁵⁸ categorizes the typical prayer experience in the following semantic terms, reflecting a major gap between the few who are spiritually sensitive and the majority who apparently are not, at least when it comes to prayer:

*Kehillat Kodesh*⁵⁹ Jews seldom if ever call their worship “prayer” or even [in the Hebrew] *Tefilla*, terms which strictly speaking, connote a spiritual experience infused with *Kavana* [intention, spiritual focus]. Instead they allude to their *Davening*, a Yiddish term, while it denotes prayer, also refers to the context, both spiritual and mundane, in which prayer occurs. Hence while only the inspired may be able to pray, everyone can *Daven*, even those who, like children, know nothing of the majestic spirituality of *Tefilla*.

The fact that the Orthodox Union, the National Council of Young Israel, and the Rabbinical Council of America have cooperated for the last few years to declare *Parshat BeShalach*⁶⁰ a “Shabbat of Awareness” with regard to “synagogue decorum and spiritual awareness”⁶¹ gives ample testimony to the existence of a problem. Irving Levitz has written,

The widespread practice of combining prayer with social camaraderie... is an enigma. Orthodox Jews, as a rule, do

not blatantly violate or openly ignore *Halachic* imperatives...

Orthodox Jews are, therefore, particularly conscientious about *Halachic* standards pertaining to the sanctity of their synagogues and fastidious about such matters as the height of the *Mechitza*, the placement of the *Bima*, the prescribed liturgical service,⁶² the flawless precision with which the Torah is read and the exacting requirements with which the scroll is written. Yet despite the most decisive *Halachic* prohibitions against talking or socializing during the synagogue service itself, the vast majority of Orthodox Jews see nothing disturbing or incongruous about praying in a social environment.⁶³

What might explain this profound “disconnect” between the primary sources and Halachic codifiers of Jewish Orthodox tradition and the current religious climate in our synagogues?

The first official indication that originally, the “bar may have been set too high” in terms of the type of intention and concentration that is discussed in the Talmud and the early Codes, or at least that during a significant portion of post-Talmudic Jewish history, the demand for high levels of *Kavana* was considered to be a standard that *Rov Tzibbur Eino Yachol La'amod Bo* (most of the Jewish community was unable to live up to), is a comment attributed to *Tosafot* by *HaGahot Maimoniyot*, a gloss on RAMBAM's *Mishna Torah*. Responding to RAMBAM's strong statement concerning the importance of *Kavana* for prayer, *HaGahot Maimoniyot* blunts the force of RAMBAM's adjuration.

RAMBAM, *Mishna Torah, Hilchot Tefilla*, 4:1

There are 5 things that prevent⁶⁴ prayer from occurring: ...and 5) *the intention of the heart*.

Hagahot Maimoniyot on *Hilchot Tefilla* 4:1, 20

*Tosafot*⁶⁵ have written that in this entire issue we are now not careful, since even under the best of

circumstances we do not have so much proper concentration for prayer...[a precursor to Heilman's distinction between *Tefilla* and *davening*?]

Tur is more specific than *HaGahot Maimoniyot* as to the origin of the view that focus and intention are no longer demanded in order to be considered to properly pray:

Tur, Orach Chayim 98⁶⁶

And R. Meir MiRotenburg wrote, "We are not careful concerning all of this at this time since we ordinarily do not have much *Kavana*⁶⁷ during our prayers."⁶⁸

Lechem Mishna, commenting on the same reference in *Mishna Torah*, suggests a Talmudic source that implies that the minimum level of *Kavana* required for prayer is considerably lower than the discussion appearing in *Eiruv* 65a⁶⁹ which most probably served as the basis for RAMBAM's position in *Hilchot Tefilla* 4:1. This commentator therefore posits that even in Talmudic times, there was already a recognition that it would be difficult for at least some pray-ers to commonly and regularly sustain the requisite amount of minimal intention required to pray properly:

Berachot 34b

When one says the *Tefilla*, he must say all of the blessings with intention. And if he cannot say all of the blessings with intention, he should say one with intention.

R. Chiya said in the name of R. Safra who received it from the school of Rebbe: This one [blessing] should be the "Blessing of the Patriarchs" [the first of the nineteen blessings].

RAMBAM does appear to reference the source in *Berachot* in a later comment in *Mishna Torah*:

RAMBAM, *Mishna Torah*, *Hilchot Tefilla* 10:1

One who has prayed *VeLo Kivein et Libo* [but failed to focus his mind] should pray again, this time with intention. But if he had previously succeeded in focusing his attention during the first of the Blessings [the view of R. Chiya in the name of R. Safra], he does not pray a second time.

R. Chaim Brisker⁷⁰ in an attempt to reconcile 4:1 with 10:1, posits that there are two types of *Kavana*: (a) (*Eiruvין* 65a; 4:1) The awareness that one is standing before the King of Kings while engaged in prayer (if such a sensibility is lacking, then the very act of prayer has by definition not taken place and therefore if one is capable to think of this by praying again, he should, and if not, then he should forgo prayer until such time as he becomes capable to think such thoughts); and (b) (*Berachot* 34b; 10:1) In addition to recognizing that one is standing before *HaShem*, the individual must understand what he is saying. When the latter form of *Kavana* is lacking, nevertheless an act of prayer has occurred, albeit one considerably flawed. Furthermore, “understanding what one is saying” is minimally defined as understanding the meaning of the first Blessing. While these two sources in *Mishna Torah* could have been reconciled in other ways, e.g., since when one tries to pray a second time, it is easier to begin to think about before Whom one is standing than to suddenly acquire understanding of the Hebrew language. There is greater insistence upon a repetition in the first instance than in the second, and consequently greater readiness to accept a *BeDiAvad* (a posteriori) performance (minimally the first blessing has to be understood in order to be considered to have fulfilled one’s obligation). R. Chaim’s solution could also be seen as “lowering the bar” in the sense that a greater number of people can be considered to be able to pray when defining the minimal *Kavana* needed as a state of mind (4:1) rather than a body of cognitive knowledge (10:1). Yet the fact that the comment of *Hagahot Maimoniyot* is attached to 4:1 rather than to 10:1 suggests within the context of Rav Chaim’s interpretation,

that even the requirement to sense that one is standing before God is considered too elitist and therefore has been waived.

However, it seems that other more recent decisors have attempted to “swing the pendulum” back in the opposite direction in terms of encouraging significant levels of *Kavana*, if not the absolute demands made previously.

Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chayim, 98:4

...Truly the *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* have written that we are now not careful about all of this, because we do not concentrate so much in prayer. But one must take care to pray in a manner of supplications, like a pauper who begs in the doorway, and to do so calmly and not to make prayer appear burdensome and something that one wishes to exempt himself of as quickly as possible, i.e., even if one recites prayer in a supplicatory manner, if he does not approach the matter as one who needs something and comes to ask it of the king, but rather only prays in order to fulfill his religious obligation, and to exempt himself from it, it is an unacceptable prayer.

And although *Chafetz Chayim* is not as positively assertive as *Aruch HaShulchan*, he nevertheless supplies his own caveats to the rather extreme implications of *Shulchan Aruch*.

Mishna Berura on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 98, 6, 7

And it is obvious, that in any case, if a person wishes to pray while in a state of anger or the like, that he should at first attempt to dissipate the thoughts that are disturbing him, as stated in 98:1.⁷¹

And the *Pri Megadim* writes in the name of the *Levush*, “Even though we are not able to have *Kavana*, nevertheless we do what we can.” Therefore one is not to pray in a house where there is new beer or mead, all the more so if there is a bad or spoiled odor.

In summary, although there appears to be a tradition dating from the medieval period suggesting that either because of the principle of *Nitma'atu HaDorot* (the steady spiritual decline of progressive generations) or a long-overdue admission that what is described in the Talmud and Codifiers are reflections of a “*Halacha* of aspiration,”⁷² it is important to attempt to maximize the degree to which one who prays understands not only what he is saying, but the overall mindset of a servant/slave of God that is associated with the act of prayer. Furthermore, it should be relatively obvious that just as a pray-er's overall spiritual perspective has the potential to be deeply reinforced and positively realigned on each occasion that he engages in praying to *HaShem* in a reflective and self-conscious manner, were an individual to become routinized in approaching prayer in a perfunctory, mechanical style, devoid of the intense awareness that he is literally standing before God and all that that suggests, it is likely that he will approach the rest of his Judaism in a similar manner.⁷³ Consequently, successful efforts to enhance abilities of Jews to properly pray per force should have far-reaching implications for everything that they do, both overtly religiously as well as in all other aspects of their lives.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO RESTORING HIGHER LEVELS OF YIRAT HASHEM TO PRAYER AND THE SYNAGOGUE

Even if we would be sympathetic to the demands of recent decisors to attempt to restore higher levels of *Kavana* to typical Jewish prayer services, a number of factors can be identified that would each have to be addressed in order for there to be any real chance to raise the level of prayer in Modern Orthodox North American synagogues,⁷⁴ as well as in our personal lives.

(a) American society in general and its unique ethnic and religious communities in particular are becoming progressively decentralized, distrustful, and even disrespectful of sources of authority both from within and without. In terms of the Modern Orthodox community, unfortunately, this includes Rabbinic authority both in

terms of the diluted influence of individual Rabbis as well as the Rabbinic organizations which attempt to promote various policies and initiatives. Calls insisting upon increased synagogue decorum and individual self-discipline have been,⁷⁵ and will probably continue to be, met with significant resistance by those who associate the sources of such initiatives with what they consider as the antiquated past and/or calls emanating from authority figures with little clout. In addition to the problems of general distrust and even disrespect for authority, if the metaphorical terminology describing the ideal relationship between a Jewish worshipper and God is specifically one between king and servant, our lack of experience with monarchies,⁷⁶ coupled with the American historical tradition of having freed ourselves from British royal control in favor of establishing a democratic governmental structure, contributes to difficulty with accepting *HaShem* as our literal King.

(b) Our culture is increasingly one where individuals obtain their information, entertain themselves and even engage in their professions by means of video representations of texts on interactive screens.⁷⁷ How effective will books be upon their readers, even *Siddurim* and *Machzorim*, when they are not interactive, colorful, and engagingly designed?⁷⁸

(c) As materialism flourishes in the Modern Orthodox Jewish community,⁷⁹ the sense of dependency on God that lies at the heart of prayer, is steadily eroded. When individuals are self-satisfied, and at least can afford themselves the illusion that they are in relative control of their circumstances, what incentive do they have to devote themselves to trying to pray sincerely and urgently?

(d) American society has never been particularly philosophical or introspective.⁸⁰ Can homegrown pragmatism be overcome with a desire to transcend oneself and engage in metaphysics and contemplation of the Divine?

(e) Haym Soloveitchik has written⁸¹ of the dissolution of the time honored mimetic Jewish tradition by the effects of the Enlightenment, Socialism, Communism, Zionism, and the Holocaust which all served to severely disrupt the practices and behaviors that had been handed down previously from generation to generation.

Could it be said that a different, fairly negative, mimetic tradition now exists in the sanctuaries of our synagogues which socializes young people, *Ba'alei Teshuva* (returnees to religious observance) and *Geirim* (converts) into practices with regard to prayer that are destructive and anti-spiritual?

(f) Measurements made of the attention spans of not only children, but also adults has indicated a significant decline over the years.⁸² How can individuals be expected to concentrate for intense prayer sessions when their minds have not been trained to focus for sustained periods of time?

POSSIBLE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE PRAYER IN THE MODERN ORTHODOX WORLD

If Jewish religious leadership agrees that *Tefilla* in many Orthodox shuls and schools leaves a great deal to be desired, then rather than engaging in dramatic hand-wringing, strategies for improving the situation have to be sought after. In the spirit of the progressive thinking of *Tosafot* and R. Meir MiRotenberg, who took the radical step in the face of so many opinions coming before them, of deciding that praying with little or even no *Kavana* is better than not praying at all, our Rabbis should undertake a similar course and come up with ideas that comply with the *Halachic* system by which the importance, meaningfulness and inspiration that was always meant to be associated with prayer can be realized anew. Some of these strategies might include:

- (a) A redesign of *Siddurim* that would engender greater focus and a more meaningful spiritual experience.
- (b) A commitment to explore theology, i.e., attempting to understand God, the purpose of the world, the phenomenon of faith in synagogues and schools.⁸³
- (c) An adaptation of meditative techniques to the prayer experience. Aryeh Kaplan⁸⁴ for example, discusses the effects of memorizing prayers, closing one's eyes while reciting at least portions of the liturgy and placing particular focus upon the first blessing of the *Amida*.

- (d) Engineering the synagogue service so that it will be maximally conducive to spiritual experience. Variables to be addressed include: speed at which prayers are conducted, the order of the service's components, the qualities of and expectations for those chosen to lead the services, the number of honors bestowed, and the length of sermons, interpolations and announcements.
- (e) Rethinking synagogue architecture and interior decoration in order to advance the prayer experience. Aside from incorporating appropriate symbols and cues throughout the sanctuary, attention should be given to the color scheme, sound-locks to exclude extraneous noise from the hallways, the utilization of light and windows, furniture, seating configuration that would best contribute to creating an atmosphere of spirituality.
- (f) Considering the appropriate maximum size of *Minyanim* and placing limits upon settings that are unduly large. The size of a *Minyan* contributes mightily to the sense of intimacy and direct involvement. While the principle of *B'Rov Am Hadrat Melech*⁸⁵ (With a great multitude there is glory to the King) would encourage the creation of larger and larger *Minyanim*, when the size of these gatherings lead to less *Kavana* and personal engagement in prayer, an approach that recognizes the value of smaller groupings is required.
- (g) Trips and excursions that would carefully expose individuals to different prayer venues in order to encourage them to experience relating to the Divine in different venues. In addition to obvious venues in Israel, local settings that can serve as memorable settings for meaningful prayer should be made part of a synagogue's regular activities. Community retreats provide excellent opportunities for creating new venues and providing fresh perspectives on spirituality.
- (h) Self-conscious modeling of proper prayer focus and behavior by Rabbis, teachers, parents, and older children. While all adults should view themselves as potential role models, it is of particular importance that individuals who are expected to

appreciate the centrality of prayer consistently live up to such expectations.

- (i) A development of means by which *Bei'ur Tefilla* (the explanation of prayers) as well as consideration of the appropriate *Kavannot* that should accompany prayers⁸⁶ can become available to a greater percentage of synagogue-going Jews. The claim that the prayers are “irrelevant” or “esoteric” must be combated with education in as many venues as feasible.
- (j) Encouragement for people to personalize their prayers. A means by which greater immediacy can be given to one's prayers is when they become, at least in part, individual expressions of needs and concerns. Many individuals may not be aware of where and how such insertions can be halachically included, and such information should be made readily available to all.
- (k) The establishment of different styles of *Minyanim* to appeal to the broadest range of pray-ers.

In addition to projects and programs that are specifically related to synagogue life, I believe that it is important to undertake global communal initiatives in this area as well. As long as there are lone synagogues that care about making *Tefilla* meaningful, it will remain the purview of only a few communities, allowing the vast majority of those attending Orthodox synagogues to continue the downward spiral of ever-less understanding and inspiration emanating from synagogue services. A communal approach would necessitate a coalition of congregational leaders, school faculty and administration, camp personnel, etc. to all develop coordinated curricula, activities, publicity and educational initiatives that would be conducted both inside and outside the synagogue in order to try to comprehensively address⁸⁷ the manner in which prayer is currently conducted and practiced.⁸⁸

While prayer may be one of the most difficult commandments to properly fulfill, the degree to which members of a synagogue community can achieve meaningful and spiritual *Tefilla* serves not

only as a litmus test for “where the congregation is currently at,”⁸⁹ but also a crucial means by which it can be further sensitized and become more deeply devoted to its traditions and lifestyle expectations. All efforts designed to raise our respective *Tefillot* to ever more significant levels are crucial for the continued religious vitality of Orthodox Judaism.

NOTES

1. The interchangeability of *yirat HaShem* (Fear of God) with *yirat shamayim* (fear of Heaven) is well exemplified by the passage in *Berachot* 33b.
2. Dr. Irving N. Levitz, “Talking During *Tefilla*: Understanding the Phenomenon,” *The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, No. 33 (Spring 1997), pp. 95–119. The late Max Safrin underwrote the publication and dissemination of this article by the Orthodox Union to its network of synagogues beginning in 1998. The pamphlet has been reprinted ten times, and the article has been posted on the Internet at http://www.project-awareness.org/page_talkingduringtefillah.htm.
3. R. Chanina further said: Everything is in the Hand of Heaven except for *yirat shamayim*, as it is said, [Deuteronomy 10:12] “And now Israel, what else does the Lord, your God require of you other than *LeYira Et HaShem Elokecha* [to Fear the Lord your God]...?”

Perhaps in the interests of avoiding invoking the Divine Name unnecessarily, *Shamayim* was substituted by the Rabbis – the phrase *yirat shamayim* does not appear in the Bible. However, with respect to prayer, where the focus of the pray-ers is to communicate with *HaShem*, it seems to me that *Yirat HaShem* is the term that captures this crucial component of the prayer experience with greater precision.

4. Verses that dwell exclusively on the relationship of a Jew to his/her God, one aspect of which is experiencing fear, include:

Deuteronomy 6:13 “The Lord your God you shall fear, and Him you shall serve, and by His Name you shall swear.”

Ibid. 10:20 “The Lord your God you shall fear, Him shall you serve, and to Him you shall cling, and by His Name you shall swear.”

5. Verses that list fear of God as a necessary prerequisite for proper *Mitzva* (Commandment) observance include:

Ibid. 6:2 “In order that you will fear the Lord your God, to observe all of His Statutes and His Commandments that I am Commanding you and your children and your grandchildren all the days of your life, and in order that you will lengthen the days of your life.”

Ibid. 13:5 “After the Lord your God you shall walk, and Him you shall fear, and His Commandments you will observe, and to His Voice you will listen, and to Him you shall cling.

6. E.g., Particular cases in point might be verses referencing the fear of God on the

part of individuals who ostensibly are not bound to *Torah Mitzva* observance, and therefore can only manifest “fear of God” in non-*Mitzva* contexts:

Genesis 20:11 “And Avraham said: Because I said that there certainly is no fear of God in this place [Gerar] and they would kill me regarding the matter of my wife.”

Ibid. 42:18 “And Yosef said to them on the third day: This do and live. It is God that I fear.”

Exodus 1:17 “And the midwives feared God, and they did not do as the king of Egypt had spoken to them, and they caused the children to live.”

7. *Shabbat* 31a–b

Reish Lakish said: What is meant by the verse [Isaiah 33:6] “And these shall be faith in your times, strength, salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the Fear of the Lord is His Treasure?” “Faith” refers to the Mishnaic Order of *Zeraim* [Seeds]; “your times” – *Moed* [Festivals]; “strength” – *Nashim* [Women]; “salvation” – *Nezikin* [Damages]; “wisdom” – *Kodashim* [Sacrifices]; “knowledge” – *Taharot* [Purity]. Yet even so, the Fear of the Lord is His Treasure.”

(While *Torah* study, particularly the Oral Tradition, is a wondrous gift that God has bestowed upon the Jewish people, awaiting their study and analysis, the most important Divine contribution to His Nation is the potential to become God-Fearing.

The parallelism implied in this homiletical interpretation suggests that just as one must work to master the Orders of the Mishna and their commentators, progressing from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge, the same is true regarding the development of *yirat shamayim*, i.e., that it is an eventual outcome of process and effort. Furthermore, since *yirat shamayim* is listed along with groups of primary sources of Jewish tradition, it is implied that a means by which such a mindset can be acquired is via the study of such texts.)

Raba said: When man is led in for judgment, he is asked: Did you deal faithfully, did you fix times for learning, did you engaged in procreation, did you hope for salvation, did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom, did you understand one thing from another. Yet even so, if the Fear of the Lord is his treasure, it is well; if not, it is not well.

This may be compared to a man who instructed his representative: Take me up a *Kor* of wheat to the loft, and he went and did so. Did you mix in a *Kav* of *Chumton*? he asked him. No, he replied. Then it was better that you did not carry it up, he retorted...

(The elements of the inventory that constitutes the basis of the evaluation of one's life are all activities and processes in which one engages, including the study of *Torah* that was the focus of the previous interpretation. *yirat shamayim* serves as the pre-existing informing principle that legitimizes and validates each of these processes as laudable and spiritually significant, much as *Chumton* is the preservative that maintains the stored wheat's freshness and viability. (Since each of these

elements could be motivated by alternate considerations, e.g., an individual adheres to honest business practices because of his commitment to a secular social contract rather than due to spiritual sensibilities; one studies *Torah* in order to gain public approbation or as a result of intellectual curiosity as opposed to attempting to probe the Will of the Divine, etc., only actions that have been conducted within the context of the Fear of Heaven will be considered worthy of positive evaluation.)

Rabba b. R. Huna said: Every man who possesses learning without the Fear of Heaven is like a treasurer who is entrusted with the inner keys, but not with the outer. How is he to enter?

(The analogy unambiguously posits that *yirat shamayim* must precede the act of *Torah* study in order for the latter to have the proper effect upon the student.)

R. Yanai proclaimed: Woe to him who has no courtyard, yet makes a gate for the same.

(The previous analogy is now being reversed, in order to demonstrate that *yirat shamayim* is the ultimate goal of learning, rather than merely the means by which to access it.)

R. Yehuda said: The Holy One, Blessed Be He, Created His world only that men should fear Him, for it is said, [Eccl. 3:14] "And God has Done it, that men should fear before Him."

(The final comment of this Talmudic passage could be used to support both contentions, i.e., that *yirat shamayim* is both the starting and end point of the elements constituting a religious life.)

8. E.g., even if an individual would carry out a charitable act independent of any religious or spiritual associations, it still would have intrinsic value in its own right, by virtue of the help and support offered someone in need. The same could be said of someone who maintains a high standard of personal morality and integrity without understanding such values as specifically religious behavior.
9. Practices carried out by the priests in the Tabernacle/Temple, particularly from the perspective that they are *Shluchoi D'shamaya* (lit., the surrogates of Heaven; they are authorized by God to accept sacrifices offered by man – see *Nedarim* 35b) would intrinsically appear to require the priests to possess a significant modicum of *Yirat HaShem* in order for their actions to be considered spiritual rather than merely mechanical. The virtually non-existent margin of error that pertained to the priests engaged in the Divine Service which could be taken as a manifestation of a deficit in their requisite minimum measure of *Yirat HaShem* is duly reflected in the punishments to Nadav and Avihu in Leviticus 10:2, as well as the anecdote recorded in *Yoma* 19b regarding a Sadducee who deliberately altered the incense sacrifice on Yom Kippur and met a premature and unpleasant end.

A second area that would appear to require *Yirat HaShem* as a *sine qua non* in order that the responsibilities be even minimally carried out in an appropriate fashion would be the state of mind required of those serving as judges on Jewish courts. Once again, numerous statements are made to the effect of how those who serve on Jewish courts are God's surrogates – e.g., *Sanhedrin* 7a "Said R. Shmuel bar

Nachmani in the name of R. Yonatan: Every judge that judges a completely true judgment causes the Divine Presence to dwell among Israel, as it says, [Psalms 82:1] 'God Stands in the congregation of God; He Judges among the judges.' And every judge that does not judge a completely true judgment causes the Divine Presence to be removed from Israel, as it is said, [Psalms 12:6] 'For the violence done to the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I Arise,' says the Lord." In order to represent God, it would appear to be necessary to properly appreciate what a relationship with Him entails, i.e., *Yirat HaShem*.

10. See the dispute concerning the nature of the Commandment to pray summarized in R. Yissachar Yaakovson, *Netiv Bina*, vol. 1, *Sinai* (Tel Aviv, 1964), pp. 23–25.
11. The Talmud in *Eiruv* 65a quote *Amoriam* who state rather categorically that not only the "ideal" prayer, but any prayer at all is to take place only when an individual truly has the requisite presence of mind to have proper intention and concentration:

R. Chiya bar Ashi citing Rav ruled: A person whose mind is not at ease must not pray, since it is said, [Job 36:19] "He who is in distress shall give no decisions."

R. Chanina did not pray on a day when he was agitated. It is written, "He who is in distress shall give no decisions."...

R. Eliezer ruled: A man who returns from a journey must not pray for three days, for it is said, [Ezra 8:15] "And I gathered them together to the river that turns to *Ahava*, and there we encamped three days, and I viewed the people."

On returning from a journey, Shmuel's father did not pray for three days. Shmuel did not pray in a house that contained alcoholic drink. R.

Papa did not pray in a house that contained fish hash.

Absolute statements such as these influenced RAMBAM to make his own strong statement.

12. This is the identical verse cited by R. Shimon Chasida in *Sanhedrin* 22a concerning envisioning facing God during prayer. It would appear that the word *Tamid* (always) is better served within RAMA's context.
13. RAMBAM suggests that contemplating the natural world, as opposed to engaging in traditional Jewish prayer or *Torah* study, as the most potent catalyst for achieving *Yirat HaShem*:

RAMBAM, *Mishna Torah*, *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2

And what is the way to develop Love for Him and Fear of Him?

When a person contemplates His Actions and His great and amazing Creatures, and recognizes in them His Wisdom that is impossible to evaluate or delimit, immediately he loves and praises and glorifies and experiences a great and overwhelming desire to know the Great *HaShem*...

But when he further reflects concerning these things themselves, immediately he stumbles backwards and he is fearful and knows that he is a tiny, lowly, insignificant creature who possesses a small, limited mind before the Perfect Intelligence...

14. RAMBAM suggests that the best time to truly reflect on the type of matters discussed by RAMA is at the end of one's day, when rather than praying or studying *Torah*, one is alone and undistracted:

RAMBAM, *Guide to the Perplexed* 111:51

...When however you are alone with yourself and no one else is there and while you lie awake upon your bed, you should take great care during these precious times not to set your thought to work on anything other than the intellectual worship consisting in nearness to God and being in His Presence in that true reality that I have made known to you...

15. It is notable that whereas the statement in *Sanhedrin* 22a cited above suggests that the existential reality of prayer is realized when there is a sensibility that one is communicating directly with the Divine, halachic decisors appear to view the awareness that one is in the Presence of God as only one among many practical and ritual prerequisites in order to fulfill this Commandment:

RAMBAM, *Mishna Torah, Hilchot Tefilla* 4:1,15,16

There are five things that prevent prayer from taking place even if the proper time of day has arrived: 1) the purity of one's hands, 2) the covering of "nakedness," 3) the purity of the place of prayer, 4) matters that cause the pray-er to rush, and 5) the intention of the heart.

What is the intention of the heart? Any prayer that is devoid of intention of the heart is not a prayer. And if one prays lacking intention of the heart, he must repeat the prayer with intention of the heart...

What is the intention? That one divests him/herself of all (extraneous) thoughts and sees him/herself as if s/he is standing before the Divine Presence...

(By virtue of RAMBAM listing the intention of awareness that one is standing before God not as a value unto itself, but rather as the last of five prerequisites of prayer would appear to devalue the emphasis that R. Shimon Chasida places upon this awareness in *Sanhedrin*.)

Tur, Orach Chayim 90, 98

One who prays must 1) prepare the place of his prayer, 2) prepare his clothing, and 3) his thoughts and body...

What is [meant by] "his thoughts?" We learn in a *Baraita* (*Berachot* 31a): One who prays is required to direct his heart, as it is said, [Psalms 10:17] "You will Direct their heart; You will Cause Your Ear to listen." (This is a paraphrase of the passage in *Berachot* that separates between the original anonymous *Tanaitic* statement, and Aba Shaul's invoking of the verse in Psalms as a "*Siman*" [mnemonic device].) The meaning [of "directing his heart"] is the meaning of the words that s/he utters with his/her lips, and that he must think that the Divine Presence is before him/her, as it is said, [Psalms 16:8] "I have placed the Lord before me always..."...and he should think that were he speaking before a human king, who is today alive and tomorrow in the grave, he would arrange his words and carefully choose them lest an error be made all the more so [is such care necessary] before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He, where one has to be careful even concerning

his thoughts, because before Him, thoughts are equivalent to speech, because He discerns all thoughts...

(As in the case of RAMBAM, *Tur* lists the requirement to have a particular mindset for prayer as the third of three prerequisites, and the sensibility that one is standing before God as secondary to an understanding of what one is saying. Particularly in light of the Halachic position that as long as one is praying in Hebrew, even if he does not understand most of what is being prayed, the Commandment of prayer is considered to be fulfilled (see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 62:2 *Bei'ur Halacha*, d.h. *Yachol LiKrato BeChol Lashon*), one might have expected that the awareness that the pray-er is standing before *HaShem* would have at least been given greater prominence among the requirements for proper prayer, if not actually listed as a “stand-alone” aspect of the prayer experience.)

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 98:1

One who prays must intend/understand within his heart the meaning of the words that he is uttering from his lips, and think as if the Divine Presence is before him, and reflect that were he to be speaking before a human king, he would organize his words and carefully choose them lest an error be made, all the more so [is such care necessary] before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He, Who Probes the depths of all thoughts...

(Since *Shulchan Aruch* does not precede his discussion of the need for “intention of the heart” with an overarching statement of the various prerequisites for prayer as did RAMBAM and *Tur* (*Sh.A., O. Ch.* 90:1 reads: “One who prays should not stand upon a bed, and not on a chair...”), it might be possible to contend that R. Yosef Karo deliberately elevates *Kavana* in general, and the recognition that one is standing before God when praying in particular, to greater prominence than did his predecessors among the great codifiers. However, even in the *Shulchan Aruch*, mention of understanding the words that one is praying is still listed before the need to think that one is facing the Divine Presence while praying.)

16. The usage of the adverb *Tamid* (always) clearly suggests that while the sensibility of standing before God may be crucial for prayer, it is not relegated exclusively to times of prayer, but should play a prominent role in all that one consciously does.
17. Indications that a particular prayer is “informal” include, not requiring a quorum of 10 adult males or a specific location for recitation, and a significantly shortened length as compared to *Shacharit, Mincha, Ma'ariv*, etc.
18. According to R. Kook, just as one should place *HaShem* before himself constantly, so too the soul of man is constantly in a state of prayer.

Olat RAYAH, vol. 1, Introduction, p. 11

The constant prayer of the soul struggles to emerge from concealment into the open, spread out over all the living faculties of the spirit and soul as well as over all the forces of the entire living body...

As a result, preoccupation with *Torah* and its wisdom is the constant unfolding of

- hidden prayer of the soul. (Psalms 138:1) “The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name, Lord, our God.”
19. “I gratefully thank You, O Living and Eternal King for You have returned my soul with compassion. Great is Your faithfulness.”
 20. The Complete ArtScroll *Siddur*, ed. R. Nosson Scherman and R. Meir Zlotowitz (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1990), pp. 288–95.
 21. May it be Your will, *HaShem*, my God and the God of my forefathers, that You lay me down to sleep in peace and Raise me erect in peace...and may You illuminate my eyes lest I die in sleep... (ArtScroll *Siddur*, pp. 288–89.)
 Lay us down to sleep in peace, *HaShem*, our God; Raise us erect, our King, to life... (Ibid. pp. 292–93.)
 Into His Hand I will entrust my spirit when I go to sleep – and I shall awaken! With my spirit my body shall remain, *HaShem* is with me, I shall not fear. (Ibid. pp. 294–95.)
 22. “One should focus one’s intentions on the meaning of the words: when the Name of God is mentioned, one should reflect [on the one hand] upon the manner in which It is pronounced with regard to His *Adnut* [status of Master] that He is the Master of all, as well as how It is written with the *Yud Heh*, reflecting His Existence in past, present and future; when *Elokim* [more specifically *Elokeinu*] is recited, one should reflect that He is Mighty, Omnipotent and Master of all forces.”
 23. ArtScroll *Siddur*, pp. 18–21.
 24. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 46:2 attributes the shift of these blessings from early morning rising at home to the beginning of *Shacharit* (the morning services) in the synagogue to ritual impurity and general illiteracy.
 25. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 46:1
 - a) When one awakens, he should say...
 - b) When he hears the sound of the rooster, he should say...
 - c) When he dresses, he should say...
 26. RASHI: “*Sicha*” – mockery, joking.
 27. *Pesachim* 117a omits “conversation.” See fn. 87 below.
 28. One reason why prophecy might be precluded by laziness, is that the prophet typically will have to energetically either deliver or act upon the Divine Message with which he was entrusted, as opposed to the typical pray-er, who is not necessarily expected to do anything in particular once he is finished praying. Furthermore, due to prayer’s frequency, perhaps a lower standard is established, so that individuals will have less of an excuse not to pray. See the later discussion of halachic decisors who stood down from the standard of focus and concentration originally called for with regard to prayer.
 29. Whereas much prophecy takes place when the prophet is alone, prayer ideally is a social experience, and therefore the temptation for conversation and joking with another is considerable.
 30. See e.g., ArtScroll *Siddur*, pp. 12–13.
 31. Although many biblical commentators interpret *BeRagesh* as connoting an experi-

ence undertaken by a group of people, in light of the comments of *Chafetz Chayim* as well as RAMBAM cited above, the term is at least understood by them to include a reference to deep emotion.

32. *Magen Avraham, Orach Chayim* 46, Introduction, attributing *HaKavanot* as his source, records a custom that in spirit parallels that of *Chafetz Chayim*, but specifically reverses the verses that are being discussed.

Before one comes to the synagogue, he should say: “And I in Your great Mercy...” When he enters he should say: “In the House of God...” ...Syntactically this makes more sense than the accepted practice in light of the respective verb forms of each of the verses in question, i.e., Psalms 5:8 *Avo Beitecha* [I will come to Your House], as opposed to Psalms 55:15 *Neileich* [we are walking], implying that one is already within.

33. An Internet search results in discovering that in synagogues around the world, the following verses expressing more or less parallel sentiments to Psalms 55:15 were inscribed in some manner above the entrances of various synagogues around the world:

Psalms 118:20 “This is the Gate of *HaShem*, the righteous come through it.”

<http://www.hsje.org/images/Alexandria/entrance%20alexandria%20shul.jpg>

Psalms 100:4 “Come through His gates in thanks, His courtyards in praise.”

<http://www.webfeats.com/Poland/p100999/Dscn0134.jpg>

Psalms 118:19 “Open up to me the gates of righteousness.” http://www.jhom.com/bookshelf/synagogues/images/page178_small.jpg

Psalms 26:8 “...I love the habitation of Your House and the place where Your Glory dwells.” <http://images.creatas.com/common/detail/00/90/22849000.jpg>

Shemot 20:20 “...and in every place where I cause My Name to be pronounced, I will come to you and bless you.” http://hobartphoto.org.au/photo_galleries/normal/CaroleBradford_Entrance,OldestsynagogueinAustralia.jpg

While these verses do not challenge the individual coming into the synagogue to reflect upon fear of God per se, nevertheless, one who sees and thinks about them on his way to pray, will have the opportunity to frame his subsequent prayers with thoughts of righteousness, thanks and blessing.

34. One might speculate as to whether or not this substitution of synagogue for Temple would continue when the Third Temple is ultimately rebuilt.
35. Deuteronomy 14:23; 31:12, 13.
36. Leviticus 19:30; 26:2.
37. “My Sabbaths you will observe and My Temple you will fear, I am the Lord.”
38. In addition to the many blessings that formulaically contain the phrase “King of the universe,” additional references to God’s Kingship are made during the course of the prayers. Here is a listing of such terminology in the section of weekday *Shacharit* known as *Pesukei D’Zimra* (the verses of song/praise):
 - a) Blessed is the Name of His glorious Kingdom for all eternity. (ArtScroll *Siddur*, pp. 28–29; 40–41.)
 - b) Let all who walk the earth recognize and know that You alone are the God over all the kingdoms of the earth. (Ibid. pp. 28–29)

- c) May He give reign to His Kingship in your lifetimes and in your days, and in the lifetimes of the entire family of Israel, swiftly and soon. (Ibid. pp. 52–53; 56–57)
- d) We shall exalt You, praise You, glorify You, mention Your Name and proclaim Your reign, our King, our God. O Unique One, Life-giver of the worlds, King Whose great Name is eternally praised and glorified. Blessed are You, *HaShem*, the King who is lauded with praises. (Ibid. pp. 60–61)
- e) (Psalms 20:10) May the King answer us on the day we call. (Ibid. pp. 62–63; 66–67)
- f) (Psalms 103:19) *HaShem* has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom reigns over all. (Ibid. pp. 64–67)
- g) The heavens will be glad and the earth will rejoice; they will proclaim among the nations, (1 Chronicles 16:31) “*HaShem* has Reigned.” (Psalms 10:16) “*HaShem* Reigns.” “*HaShem* has Reigned.” (Exodus 15:18) “*HaShem* will Reign for all eternity.” (Psalms 10:16) “*HaShem* Reigns forever and ever, even when the nations have perished from his earth.” (Ibid. pp. 66–67)
- h) Psalms 145:11–12) Of the Glory of Your Kingdom they will speak, and of Your Power they will tell...

To inform human beings of His mighty Deeds, and the glorious splendor of His Kingdom.

Your Kingdom is a Kingdom spanning all eternities, and Your Dominion is throughout every generation. (Ibid. pp. 68–69)

- i) (Psalms 146:10) *HaShem* shall Reign forever, your God, O Zion, from generation to generation, *Halleluja*. (Ibid. pp. 68–69)
- j) (Psalms 147:5) Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength, His understanding is beyond calculation. (Ibid. pp. 70–71)
- k) (Psalms 149:2) Let Israel exult in its Maker; let the Children of Zion rejoice in their King. (Ibid. pp. 72–73)
- l) (1 Chronicles 29:11) Yours *HaShem* is the greatness, the strength, the splendor, the triumph, the glory, even everything in Heaven and earth. Yours *HaShem* is the kingdom and the sovereignty of every leader. (Ibid. pp. 76–77)
- m) (Exodus 15:18) *HaShem* shall rule for all eternity [followed by Aramaic translation]. (Ibid. pp. 80–81)
- n) (Psalms 22:29) For sovereignty is *HaShem*’s and He rules over nations. (Ibid. pp. 80. 81)
- o) (Obadiah 1:21) The saviors will ascend Mt. Zion to judge Esau’s mountain, and the kingdom will be *HaShem*’s. (Ibid. pp. 80–81)
- p) (Zacharia 14:9) Then *HaShem* will Be King over all the world and on that day *HaShem* will Be One and His Name One. (Ibid. pp. 80–81)
- q) May Your Name be praised forever, Our King, God, the Great and Holy King in Heaven and on earth. (Ibid. pp. 82–83)
- r) Blessed are You, *HaShem*, God, King, exalted through praises, God of thanks-

- givings, master of wonders, who chooses songs of praise, King, God, Life-giver of the world. (Ibid. pp. 82–83)
39. In Neil Folberg's *And I Shall Dwell Among Them: Historic Synagogues of the World*, (An Aperture Book), photographs from distinctive synagogues from around the world include the following verses on walls, Arks, curtains, covers and charts:
 1. Deuteronomy 5:6–17 The Ten Commandments – pp. 16, 32, 36, 60, 65, 67, 74, 78, 83, 86–88, 106, 107, 110, 114, 140, 151.
 2. Deuteronomy 10:12: And now Israel what does the Lord your God Ask from you other than to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all of His Ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul. – pp. 20, 58.
 3. Ezekiel 3:12: Blessed is God's glory from His place. – p. 24.
 4. Psalms 16:8: I have placed *HaShem* before me always. – pp. 27, 44, 62, 65, 97, 103, 158.
 5. Otzar HaMidrashim Eliezer p. 29 Know before Whom you stand. – pp. 28–31, 158.
 6. Habakkuk 2:20: There was silent before Him the entire earth. – p. 37.
 7. Psalms 137:5: If I forget you Jerusalem, let me forget my right hand. – p. 50.
 8. Deuteronomy 6:4–9: *Shema* and blessed be His Glorious Name, His kingdom should be forever. – pp. 60, 88.
 9. The symbol of a *Kohen's* hands in the position to give the Divine Blessing – pp. 89, 92, 94–95.
 10. Malachi 1:11: From the rising of the sun until its setting, great is My Name among the nations. – pp. 46, 97.
 11. *Avot* 5:20: [R. Yehuda ben Teima said] Be audacious like a leopard, swift as an eagle, run like a deer, and be strong like a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven. – p. 97
 12. Psalms 98:6: With trumpets and the sounds of Shofar sound blasts before the King, *HaShem*. – p. 98.
 13. Numbers 24:5: How goodly are your tents Jacob, your tabernacles Israel. – pp. 104, 107.
 14. Genesis 28:17: ...How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God and the Gateway to Heaven. – p. 97.
 15. Psalms 55:15: ...In the House of God we walk with emotion. – p. 104.
40. A virtual *Shiviti* is offered at the following website: <http://www.kosherTorah.com/shivitisaver.html> accompanied by an halachic opinion concerning the permissibility of erasing the *Shem HaShem* from a computer screen <http://www.cckollel.org/html/heritage/questions/question37a.shtml> A respondent to Rabbi Dr. Asher Meir's essay regarding overcoming viewing improper sites on the Internet (<http://besr.org/ethicist/impropersites.html>) recommends the installation of such a *Shiviti*!
41. "Life-giver of worlds" – ArtScroll *Siddur*, pp. 60–61.
"HaShem made the heavens" – Ibid. pp. 62–63.

- “He is the maker of heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in it.” – Ibid. pp. 70–71.
- “For He commanded them and they were created.” – Ibid. pp. 72–73.
- (All of the references to aspects of nature praising *HaShem* also assumes that they are acknowledging their Creator.)
42. “Decrees and fulfills” – Ibid. pp. 58–59.
- “Gives reward to those who fear Him” – Ibid.
- “He will have arrived as judge of the earth.” – Ibid. 62–63.
- “O God of vengeance, *HaShem*, o God of vengeance appear.” – Ibid.
43. “redeems and rescues” – Ibid. pp. 58–59.
- “He let no man rob them [the Jewish people] and He rebuked kings for their sake.” – Ibid. pp. 60–61.
- “Gather us and rescue us from the nations.” – Ibid. 62–63.
- “I am *HaShem*, your God Who raised you from Egypt.” – Ibid. pp. 64–65.
44. “Remember the wonders that He wrought.” – Ibid. pp. 60–61.
- “Relate among all peoples His wonders.” – Ibid.
- “You imposed signs and wonders upon Pharaoh and all his servants and upon all the people of the land.” – Ibid. pp. 76–77.
- “You split the sea before them and they crossed in the midst of the sea on dry land.” – Ibid. pp. 78–79.
- (The Song of the Sea explores this theme in even greater detail.)
45. “Give thanks to *HaShem* for He is good; His kindness endures forever.” – Ibid. pp. 63–64.
- “May Your kindness and truth always protect me.” – Ibid.
- “May Your kindness, *HaShem*, be upon us, just as we awaited You.” – Ibid. pp. 64–65.
- “Show us Your kindness, *HaShem*...” – Ibid.
- “Gracious and merciful is *HaShem*, slow to anger and great in bestowing kindness.” – Ibid. pp. 68–69.
46. *Aruch HaShulchan*, basing himself on an anecdotal report in the *Talmud*, makes a distinction with regard to special clothing between times of trouble and times of peace, between *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*.
- Aruch HaShulchan*, *Orach Chayim* 91:2
- And also it was said there [in *Shabbat* 10a] that R. Ashi said: I saw R. Kahana, when there was trouble in the world, would take off his cloak as if to say he took off his cloak from upon him so he should not appear like an important person [RASHI], and when there was peace in the world he would dress himself and cover himself and wrap himself and say, “Prepare to meet your God, Israel.” And in times of trouble he would take off his cloak and clasp his hand and fingers like a person troubled due to fear of his master.
- And therefore it is possible to derive that now, when there is trouble in the world, one should pray *Mincha* and *Ma'ariv* [why does the decisor

omit *Shacharit*?] in the weekday without a top garment [jacket?] and on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*, one should pray with a top garment because we do not recall the troubles on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*...

Consequently, at least according to this view, preparing for prayer in terms of dress not only may involve putting on special garments, but also taking them off within particular contexts!

47. E.g., ArtScroll *Siddur*, pp. 54–55, 56–57, 82–83, 158–59, 160–61.
48. Ibid. pp. 84–85, 142–43.
49. Ibid. pp. 98–99 (2×), 112–13, 114–15.
50. Ibid. pp. 118–9.
51. *Chafetz Chayim*, in *Mishna Berura* 131, 3 notes that originally the posture that would be assumed during the recitation of *Tachanun* (ArtScroll *Siddur*, pp. 132–33) (and for that matter at the end of *Selichot* recited during the Penitential period) was one where the individual would literally fall to the ground, but without extending his arms and legs in full prostration. However, the present custom is merely to cover one's face. The act of at least covering one's face as a result of the fear and concern that has arisen as a result of the intense prayer experience until this point parallels the actions of Moshe, Aaron and Joshua in Numbers 16:22 and Joshua 7:6.
52. While the distinction listed here between what the congregation does regarding the *Aleinu* prayer on *Rosh HaShana* as opposed to *Yom HaKippurim* is based upon a comment of *Magen Avraham* on *Orach Chayim* 131, 22, it is customary in many Ashkenazic synagogues for everyone to prostrate themselves both on *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom HaKippurim*, as stated in *Machzor Chayim Yechezkel*, (*The Complete ArtScroll Machzor, Yom Kippur*, ed. R. Nosson Scherman and R. Meir Zlotowitz (New York: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1986), p. 549.
 ...There are varying customs [re *Aleinu*]: In some congregations, everyone kneels and brings his face to the floor; in some everyone kneels and bows but does not bring his face to the floor; and in some only the *Chazzan* kneels and bows, with or without bringing his face to the floor...
53. An example of a modern day form of responsa expanding upon this issue appears on the website of the Chicago *Eruv* Inc. <http://www.geocities.com/chicagoeruv/>
54. A term appearing in Ezekiel 27:6, connoting far-off places.
55. A paraphrase of Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2; Psalms 115:5; 135:16.
56. In its introduction to the pamphlet entitled "*Kunteros Galut HaShechina*" (Brooklyn, 5740), p. 3, consisting of a collection of sources from different epochs of Jewish history bemoaning the lack of decorum in synagogues and warning of the potential consequences should the situation not improve, the organization *Vaad LeHaromat Keren HaTorah*, Committee to Strengthen Torah Judaism, writes:
 [Leviticus 19:30; 26:2] "And from My Temple you shall fear!"

We the undersigned [78 Rabbis and *Roshei Yeshiva* are listed] are troubled to hear how many of the Jewish people – men, women and children – take lightly the holiness of houses of prayer and study, and engage there in conversations of no import and secular matters even during prayers and the reading of the *Torah*

- mostly as a result of ignorance regarding the significance and gravity of the transgression, but some due to disrespect, frivolity and rebelliousness, Heaven Forbid. Woe to the ears that hear that the holiness of synagogues is reduced to something that people do not take seriously...
57. In one of his letters, RAMBAM takes to task those who pray exceedingly quickly:
- Yitzchak Shilat, *Igrot HaRAMBAM*, Vol. 2, *Ma'aliot* (Jerusalem, 5753), p. 589–90.
- ...Surely the recitation of 100 blessings or the praises in haste and at great speed is a complete sin. And whoever does not restrain leaders of the prayer services in this matter sins. All of these religious acts that are functions of speech, the requisite intention for them is reflection during the time of their being spoken, and the one saying them must direct his mind, and realize that with the Master of the entire universe he is speaking by means of them, whether he is requesting something of Him, or he is thanking Him or praising Him, or he is recounting His Actions and Kindnesses, or he is telling His Miracles as manifested in His Creations and His Power. These are the categories that encompass all the blessings or poems or verses of praise. And since all of this is speaking with Him Who is Exalted, how is speed allowed in such a matter? It will constitute a removal of the mind/attention from what is being said. If we are dealing with someone who does not know and does not understand what is being said, with regard to prayer he is considered no more than a parrot or raven, who has been trained to speak human words.
58. *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 68.
59. The fictitious name that Heilman gives to the Orthodox congregation that he describes in his book.
60. This particular *Shabbat* was chosen because of the reading of Exodus 14:14 – “The Lord shall Fight for you, and you will be silent.” (I have never been fully compatible with this textual association. While congregants might be urged to refrain from conversation, this does not mean that they should be silent! On the contrary, heart-felt prayer involves enunciating the words that are being recited. While during *Amida*, voices are not to be raised to the point where one’s fellow congregant can hear what is being said, that does not mean that the individual is silent. The phrase in I Samuel 1:13, “...Only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard,” describing Chana’s prayers requesting finally having a child, is cited by *Berachot* 31a as the paradigm for Jewish prayer, i.e., the *Amida*. The proper recitation of *Kriyat Shema*, on the other hand, specifically requires the words to be pronounced in an audible manner in order to satisfy R. Yosi’s view in *Berachot* 15a. With respect to the rest of the prayer service, certainly the portions that consist of blessings should be pronounced carefully and loudly enough so that one can hear what he is saying. Consider the following regarding the recitation of blessings outside the context of

prayer, which *Chafetz Chayim* in Mishna Berura 62, 5 cross-references with respect to the blessings surrounding and following *Kriyat Shema*:

Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chayim 206:5

One needs to pronounce each blessing so that he can hear his own words, and not like those who bless in whispers to the point that they themselves do not hear and therefore do not completely recite the blessing. But rather one should bless in a low voice pronouncing each individual word...

Consequently to represent the ideal as being silent during prayer as the Jews were requested to be when standing at the edge of the Sea of Reeds, in my opinion, misses the point. Refraining from conversation does not constitute "silence" during prayer.

61. Karen Prager Kramer, "Shhh...it's national-you-will-remain-silent-in-shul week," N.J. Jewish News, Jan. 29, 1999, http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-o-/module/displaystory/story_id/10441/edition_id/200/format/html/displaystory.html
62. Ironically, some of the disturbances that most profoundly detract from a spirit of *Yirat HaShem* in the synagogue are verbal disputes between congregants and synagogue officials regarding the proper order of prayers or honors bestowed at a given service. See the OU's *Synagogue Trends*, 11:2 (Spring 1998) at http://www.ou.org/pdf/syntrends/SynTrends_Spring_1998.pdf
63. Levitz, "Talking During *Tefilla*: Understanding the Phenomenon," pp. 95–96.
64. The term *Me'akev* (prevents) typically carries with it the connotation that not only will the commandment being discussed not be fulfilled *LeChatchila* (apriori), but even *BeDi'avad* (aposteriori).
65. The fact that this leniency is attributed to *Tosafot* in general and R. Meir MiRotenberg in particular, raises the possibility that not praying with proper *Kavana* constitutes another instance where the Rabbinic authorities of Ashkenaz found a means by which to justify somewhat questionable practices on the part of their constituencies. See Haym Soloveitchik, "Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example," *AJS Review*, 12:2 (Autumn 1987), pp. 205–21.
66. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 98:2 quotes the position of our not being careful regarding matters of *Kavana* in *Tefilla* anonymously. *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Orach Chayim* 98, on the other hand, makes no exceptions for "our times" and essentially presents the highest *Kavana* requirements in unmitigated form.
67. An additional manifestation of the caveat that the standard level of minimum *Kavana* has changed the baseline of our expectations for what is necessary in order to legitimize engaging in prayer, is presented by *Magen Avraham*.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 89:8

At times of duress, e.g., one has to rise early in order to set out on a journey, it is possible to pray once the morning star has arisen, and wait to recite *Kriyat Shema* until its time comes. And although in this way he will not juxtapose the blessing *Ga'al Yisrael* [Who redeemed Israel] to the beginning of the *Amida*, it is better that he pray the *Amida* in his house

while standing stationary, as opposed to praying at the proper time while walking, and then being able to juxtapose *Ga'al Yisrael* to the *Amida*.

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This requires careful study because most people's practice is not to conduct themselves in this manner [i.e., to disconnect *Ga'al Yisrael* from the *Amida*, but rather they wait until they can say both together]. Perhaps they follow other decisors who state that juxtaposing this blessing with the *Amida* is to be preferred under these circumstances. Furthermore, RASHI has explained that praying while standing stationary is preferred because in this manner one can have more *Kavana*; today, since we never have that much *Kavana*, therefore it is preferred if one would juxtapose *Ga'al Yisrael* to *Amida*...

Consequently, not only does one not take into consideration the level of *Kavana* when determining whether or not to pray in the first place, but there are practical consequences arising from an assumption of the inability to summon up significant *Kavana* in terms of the order of prayer under abnormal circumstances that disturb the normal order of the prayers.

68. R. Aharon Lichtenstein speculates that a strategic decision was made by halachic decisors such as *Tosafot* and R. Meir MiRotenberg to the effect that if people would literally follow the directive to only pray when feel adequately prepared and inspired, prayer, both communal and individual, would perforce cease because no one wishes to risk the danger of taking *HaShem's* Name in vain. Therefore, in the spirit of (*Tehillim* 119:26) *Eit La'Asot LaShem, Heifiru Et Toratecha* (A time to do something on behalf of *HaShem*; they have violated Your *Torah*), the trend for high standards of *Kavana* was deliberately reversed by these Rabbis. (Paraphrased from the Orthodox Forum meetings, 2006.)
69. See fn. 9.
70. *Chidushei Rabbeinu Chaim HaLevi: Chidushim U'Biurim Al HaRAMBAM* (New York: Friedman, 5725), p. 2a-b.
71. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 98:1

One who is praying must intend in his heart the meaning of the words that he utters from his lips.

And he should think as if the Divine Presence is opposite him.

And he should remove all of the thoughts that are troubling him to the point where his thoughts and his *Kavana* are pure in his prayer.

And he should think that since were he speaking before a human king, he would organize his words and carefully express exactly what he wished to say so that he does not err, all the more so [must one do likewise] before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He, Who Discerns all thoughts.

And the pious ones and accomplishers of great spiritual deeds would isolate themselves and reflect upon their prayers to the point where they would divest themselves of their physicality and the domination of

their intellectual powers, until they would achieve close to the level of prophecy.

And if an extraneous thought comes to him during his prayer, he should be silent until the thought departs.

And he should think of things that subjugate the heart and direct them towards his Father in Heaven.

And he should not think of things that are associated with frivolousness.

This statement can be divided up between those things that are to be done positively in order to enhance prayer, and those things that are to be avoided so that at least a minimal form of prayer can be achieved. *Chafetz Chayim* is stating that whereas the former may no longer be possible for the average individual, the latter is certainly doable and ought to be pursued.

72. R. Aharon Lichtenstein discusses such a construct with respect to the principle of “*Lifnim MiShurat HaDin*” (lit., going beyond/within the “line” of the law) in “Does Jewish Tradition Recognize an Ethic Independent of *Halacha*?” in Menachem Marc Kellner, *Contemporary Jewish Ethics* (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1978), p. 110.
73. It must be admitted that even perfunctory prayer may be better than no prayer at all, since there is at least the possibility that eventually, at some future point, the pray-er will be able to invest proper meaning and intention within his ritual performances that presently are empty and meaningless. Such is R. Norman Lamm’s recommendation to someone who harbors substantive doubt regarding the nature of his beliefs and his relationship to God:
Norman Lamm, “Faith and Doubt,” *Faith and Doubt Studies in Traditional Jewish Thought* (New York: Ktav, 1971), p. 28.
...When we are convinced...that confrontation precedes cognition that the existential encounter and the sense of trust have priority over the propositional belief – that aspect of faith, then we shall realize that it is possible by an act of will to locate ourselves in a situation of prayer...
74. The manner in which Orthodox synagogue services are portrayed in contemporary American fiction illustrate the perceptions as well as the realities of the typical synagogue experience that is currently extant. Examples of such descriptions appear in the two works of Tova Mirvis, *The Ladies Auxiliary*, Chapt. 2 (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999); *The Outside World*, Chapt. 14, New York: Vintage Books, 2004); as well as Robert Greenfield’s *Temple*, Chaps. 14, 21 (New York: Summit Books, 1982). These descriptions of Orthodox synagogues are echoed in William Helmreich, *Wake Up, Wake Up to Do the Work of the Creator*, New York: Bantam Books, 1976). p. 24, but then starkly contrasted with his prayer experiences in a Yeshiva on pp. 133–34.
75. Three major initiatives recently undertaken by the Orthodox Union focus upon: a) synagogue decorum with respect to improper conversation during prayer services, b) the “*kiddush club*” phenomenon whereby members of the congregation leave the sanctuary usually during the reading of the *Haftora* in order to make *Kiddush* early

and thereby engage in social drinking before services end, and c) drunkenness on Purim. All three situations targeted by the OU's programs were at least indirectly related to prayer. A general impression on the part of most Orthodox Jews appears to be that while a great deal of discussion has been generated by the OU's calling attention to these issues, to say that substantive change has taken place in a significant number of synagogues is questionable, and at best too early to tell.

76. R. Moshe Lichtenstein commented, probably only half in jest that in Israel a metaphor for this type of total authority is a Brigadier General. While such a reference has power within a country where there is a universal draft, in the United States, military reference points might have meant something to WWII veterans, but not very much to the average American today. (A comment made at the Orthodox Forum meetings of 2006.)
77. See Stephen A. Bernhardt, "The Shape of Text to Come: The Texture of Print on Screens," *College Composition and Communication*, 44:2, pp. 151–52.
78. The change in American society from a book to a video culture does not only impact the religious community. Schools and colleges are moving away from text books, record storage is done electronically rather than by creating paper records, television shows and web casts serve as the source for current events and the news, rather than newspapers and periodicals.
79. The historian Edward S. Shapiro, in his analysis of the current state of Modern Orthodoxy ("Modern Orthodoxy in Crisis: A Test Case," *Judaism* (Summer 2002) writes:

Modern Orthodox Jews have sought, often unsuccessfully, to reconcile the demands of *Halacha* with the attractions of American materialism, to live a lifestyle which Charles Leibman has described as "half-pagan, half-*Halachic*."

Dodi Tobin, in her paper "Parent-Child Relationships in the Context of a Year of Study in a Post-High School Yeshiva Program in Israel," pp. 24–25 (<http://www.atid.org/journal/journal00/tobin.doc>), when describing the community experience that students coming to Israel for a year leave behind, writes:

...the Modern Orthodox communities in the U.S. which were described by a *New York Times* reporter as places where "huge houses are being torn down to build even huger ones"...

The description of the Modern Orthodox community in America suggests a lifestyle embodying both piety and excess, two values that are contradictory. Indeed the values taught to Modern Orthodox students in America may contain a mixed message...

The shallowness of contemporary modern Orthodox thought is somewhat laid at the feet of the attractions of materialism when Alan Mittleman, "Fretful Orthodoxy," *First Things*, 136 (October 2003) <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0310/opinion/mittleman.html>) writes:

Modern Orthodoxy's immense success in building up a socially vibrant culture in the American suburbs has distracted it from the requisite intellectual task of providing depth and justification for its way of life.

80. "...The essence of the behavioral and thought patterns of American Jewry fits most appropriately into the general climate of America as a whole. The very ethos of this land is still a-theological. It is basically activist and pragmatic, with an overtone of distrust for doctrine or ideology. Inwardness and speculation have rarely been advanced as primary American virtues." – from Norman Frimer, "The A-theological Judaism of the American Jewish Community," *Judaism*, 11 (Spring 1962), quoted in Robert G. Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America* (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 100, fn. 19.
81. "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition*, 28:4, 1994, pp. 64–130.
82. Sources define contemporary adult attention spans to range between 5 to 7 minutes (http://www.tonjeary.com/newsletters.cfm?action=newsletters_details&newsletterID=7151), 20 minutes (http://www.utexas.edu/research/cswr/psti/newsletter/trainerscorner/TC_12.php) and 90 minutes (<http://meted.ucar.edu/resource/soo/ntcanat.htm>). The typical *Shabbat* morning service usually lasts substantially longer than 90 minutes, while the time it takes to pray the *Amida* properly is longer than 5–7 minutes.
83. During the course of the presentation of this paper at the Orthodox Forum meetings, I strongly advocated that all programs leading to Orthodox ordination should include requirements for the study of theology and philosophy. Only in this manner can Rabbis and teachers at least come to grips with issues that will most probably plague at least some of their congregants and students. Objections were raised that such studies would possibly cause confusion and even undermine the belief of some of those exposed to it. I responded that for those who are determined to assume pulpits or join the faculties of Jewish schools, this kind of study must be part of the professional training that they receive so that they can not only respond to questions, but initiate discussions of these topics as well. Certainly in the realm of being able to assist individuals develop their *Kavana* for *Tefilla*, these disciplines are most important.
84. *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*, Chapter 11 "The Way of Prayer," (New York:Schocken Books, 1985).
85. Proverbs 14:28.
86. The same organization that was mentioned earlier as being responsible for a pamphlet presenting the issue of talking during prayer services, has also issued "*Kunteros Yosheiv Tehillot Yisrael*" (the Anthology of [Psalms 22:4] You Who are Enthroned by the praises of Israel), in which is collected sources from the Talmud and Midrash exploring the nature of prayer and the attitudes that ought to accompany its performance. Aggudath Israel of America launched in 2005 a "National *Tefilla* Initiative" that included the free distribution to synagogue Rabbis the volume *BeRumo Shel Olam – Kavannot HaTefilla Al Pi HaPoskim* (In the Heights of the Universe [Pesachim 118a] – the Intentions of Prayer according to the Decisors) accompanied by the encouragement to dedicate sermons to this subject. This year, the organization is encouraging congregations to purchase and study

together *Praying with Fire – A 5-Minute Lesson – A – Day*, by R. Heshy Kleinman. As opposed to the *Shabbat Tacharishun* project mentioned earlier, which appears to demand no more than a cessation of all conversation – even wishing another “*Shabbat Shalom*” – for one *Shabbat*, these initiatives assume that sermons and *Torah* study will be necessary in order to begin to change the culture of lack of decorum.

87. See my contribution to the PEJE publication, *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education*, Vol. 2, *Tefilla* for a description of the manner in which a synagogue and a day school can coordinate a Tefilla program designed to raise the level of students’ prayer experiences.
88. A few suggestions of this nature as well as the drawing attention of specific problems regarding synagogue decorum are presented in an engaging manner in the OU’s “Let’s Schmooze about Davening” at <http://www.ou.org/services/davening/openingletter.htm>
<http://www.ou.org/services/davening/part1.htm>
<http://www.ou.org/services/davening/actualdavening.htm>
<http://www.ou.org/services/davening/learningdavening.htm>
<http://www.ou.org/services/davening/openletter.htm>
89. Just as the *Ba’alei HaMusar* (individuals concerned with proper religious and ethical conduct) strongly advocate people looking to improve their behavior to engage regularly in a *Cheshbon HaNefesh* (a review of one’s personal spiritual state of affairs in the interests of identifying areas in need of improvement) the same is true for religious institutions such as *shuls* and schools.

8

Contemporary Impediments to *Yirat Shamayim*

Aharon Lichtenstein

Other participants in this year's Orthodox Forum colloquium have been assigned the stimulating and inspiring task of coping with one of the most central and august aspects of the religious life, in general, and of *yahadut*, in particular: *yirat shamayim*.¹ Theirs is the analysis of content, both denotative and connotative; the nice perception of nuances, carefully honed and delineated; the definition of the phenomenon per se as well as the description of its interactive relation to proximate concepts; the limning of its own contours and the determination of its position within the broader spiritual landscape.

Mine is, alas, a sorrier lot. I have been charged with the survey and analysis of impediments to the attainment of this lofty goal – presumably, of such as exert this influence perennially as well as those which are characteristic of the contemporary context. I am not,

however, complaining. Would that this were, at the practical plane, a non-topic. Would that adherence to familial and communal spiritual patrimony were the order of the day and deviant defection from the traditions of *knesset Israel*, a rare exception. However, one need not be steeped in sociology to perceive how tragically different is our current reality. Even unencumbered by statistics, any knowledgeable observer, residing *בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי*, “within my [own] people,” is painfully aware of the magnitude of the problem and its ramifications, whether in Israel or the Diaspora. Ignoring the issue would thus constitute irresponsible pretense, and its confrontation becomes a matter of duty – painful, but duty nonetheless.

Moreover, at issue is not only possible desertion but, equally, the impact upon dilution and desiccation of religious experience of those firmly entrenched within the fold. And here, I find myself in excellent company. Students of Rav Moshe Haym Luzatto’s classic, *Messilat Yesharim*,² will recall that his discussion of the qualities of *zehirut* and *zerizut* – of care and alacrity, respectively – is capped by a survey of the elements which impede the optimal attainment of these virtues and of the need to avoid these. Ramhal could, in turn, have looked for precedent, amongst rishonim, to that premier blend of *musar*, pietism, and philosophy, Rabbenu Bahyya’s *Hovot Halevavot*,³ which follows a similar procedure with respect to its topics.

Finally, my charge does entail a modicum of definition, however cursory and rudimentary, after all. Obviously, we can hardly identify and analyze impediments without some elucidation of what is being impeded. Hence, in our case, this self-evident proposition impels a preliminary discussion of the meaning of *yirat shamayim*. Broadly speaking, the term admits of three distinct senses. At one plane, it denotes a specific *mizvah* – catalogued as such in familiar *pesukim*: “את ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא וְאֵתוֹ תַעֲבֹד וּבִשְׁמוֹ תִשָּׁבַע” – “Hashem, your God, you shall fear, Him you shall serve, and by His name you shall swear.” Or again: “את ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא אֵתוֹ תַעֲבֹד וְבוֹ תִדְבֹק וּבִשְׁמוֹ תִשָּׁבַע” – “Hashem, your God, you shall fear, Him you shall serve, unto Him you shall cleave, and by His name you shall swear;”⁴ enumerated amongst the list of *taryag* [613 commandments]; defined with reference to content and characteristics, and contradistinguished from parallel norms,

such as the commandments to emulate the Ribbono Shel Olam, to love Him, and to serve Him. 'והמצוה הד', the Rambam predicates, היא שצונו להאמין יראתו ולהפחד ממנו ולא נהיה ככופרים ההולכים בשרירות לבם ובקרי אבל נירא ביראת ענשו בכל עת וזהו את ה' אֵלֶיךָ תירא.

And the fourth [positive] commandment is, that He has commanded us to affirm His awesomeness, and to fear Him, and we shall not be as infidels who pursue their hearts' desires wantonly. Rather, we shall fear His retribution at all times; and this is the import of "Hashem, your God, you shall fear."⁵

At a second plane, the term refers to the impetus motivating overall religious experience and observance. In this sense, *yirah* is posited as an alternative to *ahavah*; and it is generally perceived as an inferior alternative, love being deemed as preferable to fear or even awe as an incentive to the religious life. Thus, while in dealing with love and fear as specific *mizvot*, the Rambam in no way grades them, but simply postulates, – האֵל הַנִּכְבָּד וְהַנּוֹרָא הַזֶּה מִצְוָה לְאַהֲבָה וּלְיִרְאָה אוֹתוֹ, – “This august and awesome God, we are commanded to love and fear”⁶ – when, in the concluding chapter of *Sefer Maddah*, he discusses their respective roles as energizing and moving worship he emphatically endorses *avodah me-ahavah*, “service out of love” as the prime and desired mover, and relegates *avodah mi-yirah* to the religiously unsophisticated and uninitiated.⁷ The invidious comparison, we note, has its roots in Hazal. It appears, for instance, with regard to different levels of *teshuvah*;⁸ and, in a personal vein, is the focus of discussion concerning the quality of Iyov's and Avraham's service of God.⁹

At yet a third plane, *yirat shamayim* does not merely denote the impetus to religious being but, rather, refers, comprehensively, to its overarching scope – to a life of faith, service, and obedience, actualized in accordance with divine will. Thus, Rav Yohanan cites Rabbi Elazar's sweeping assertion, בעולמו אלא יראת שמים בלבד, – “In this world, the Kadosh Barukh Hu has only *yirat shamayim*,”¹⁰ the gamut of specific norms certainly not being excluded. Similarly, the statement that הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים – “All is in the hands

of Heaven, but for *yirat shamayim*”¹¹ – obviously embraces the totality of religious observance as beyond the pale of deterministic fiat. Indeed, the Rambam went so far as to postulate that the exclusion refers to the totality of freely willed human activity, even palpably neutral choices being presumably weighed in the light of spiritual alternatives, and with an eye to possible ramifications:

וכל מעשה בני האדם בכלל יראת שמים הם וסוף כל דבר ודבר ממעשה בני
האדם בא לידי מצוה או עבירה

The entire range of human activity is included within
yirat shamayim, as, ultimately, each and every human act
entails [an aspect of] *mizvah* or *averah*.¹²

Hence, in dealing with impediments to *yirat shamayim*, we shall need to approach the topic from a multiplanar perspective. That perspective is also in order with reference to the historical period under consideration. Probably, the formulation of my specific topic, “Contemporary Impediments to *Yirat Shamayim*,” was obviously grounded with an eye to the modern era. And this, I presume, for two possible reasons. First, it is the scene within which we live and work – and, hence, of greatest interest and relevance to ourselves. Second, the formulation was probably also based on the supposition that the phenomenon was particularly prevalent in the modern world, so much more secularly oriented than the preceding Renaissance, medieval, or classical periods. The issue is therefore more pressing, and the need to cope with it especially challenging and urgent.

The factual assumption is, obviously, a virtual truism. The assertion of man at the expense of God (to invert a phrase once coined to encapsulate Jonathan Edwards’ thought) characteristic of much modern culture and the concomitant emphasis upon the attainment of personal gratification within the temporal world, as that within which, in Wordsworth’s terms, “we find our happiness or not at all,” has palpably and radically altered the context of religious existence and influenced the conditions for its realization. Moreover, the post-Emancipation emergence of most of Jewry into the mainstream of

general – and, particularly, Western – culture, has changed the character and direction of much of *klal Israel*, specifically, and therefore has impacted upon both its disaffected and committed components. Hence, the pursuit of *yirat shamayim* and the barriers to its achievements have assumed a more acute dimension.

These observations border, again, on the platitudinous. And yet, we need beware of exaggeration. Impediments to religious faith, sensibility, and lifestyle were not patented by Voltaire or Comte, by Spinoza or Y.L. Gordon. They are inbred within human nature, inherent within patterns of culture, the primary categories familiar from time immemorial. They are endemic to the fabric of the soul, part and parcel of *רע מנעריו* – “For the desire of his heart is evil from his youth,”¹³ or of Kohelet’s observation, *כי הא-לקים עשה*, – “God made man upright, but they have sought out many complexities,”¹⁴ on the one hand; and to *דרך ברייתו של אדם להיות נמלך בדעותיו ובמעשיו אחר ריעיו וחבריו ונוהג כמנהגו* – “It is natural for man to be drawn, with respect to his traits and actions, after his friends and peers, and to conduct himself in accordance with local practice,”¹⁵ and we need not exposure to Augustine or Aristotle to acknowledge these facts.

Indeed, the course of danger has been clearly anticipated and described by the Torah. Within the exposition of the significance of the *mizvah* of *zizit*, we encounter a *pasuk*, familiar from our recitation of *keri’at shema*: *והיה לכם לציצת וראיתם אתו וזכרתם את כל מצות ה'* – “It shall constitute *zizit* for you, and you shall see it, and you shall remember all of Hashem’s commandments, and you shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes after whom you fornicate.”¹⁶ The Rambam, followed by the *Sefer Hahinukh* and the Semag, read the conclusion of the *pasuk*, upon which he comments, as a negative imperative:

ועל ענין זה הזהירה תורה, ונאמר בה ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם
אשר אתם זנים כלומר לא ימשך כל אחד מכם אחרי דעתו הקצרה וידמה
שמחשבתו משגת האמת

And with respect to this matter, the Torah has admonished us, as is stated in it, “And you shall not stray after

your heart and after your eyes after whom you fornicate.” To wit, that each of you should not be drawn after his own limited understanding and imagine that his thought has attained the truth;¹⁷ and he enumerated it, accordingly, within the list of *mizvot lo ta’aseh*.

His predecessor, Rav Sa’adya Gaon, had not included it in his list, and it has been reasonably suggested¹⁸ that he interpreted the reference to possible straying as a rationale for *zizit*, in light of pitfalls it helps avoid, rather than as an independent admonition.¹⁹ On either reading, however, the anticipatory concern over a lapse in commitment is evident.

With an eye to a point I suggested earlier, I believe the concern here expressed is not confined to apostasy or the abjuration of halakhic commitment, fundamentally and comprehensively. There are, of course, contexts, which admonish against such extreme developments, aptly represented by a *pasuk* familiar from the *parshah* of *shema*: השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים והשתחוויתם להם – “Beware for yourselves lest your heart be diverted and you shall deviate and worship other gods and prostrate yourselves before them.”²⁰ To my mind, this is not the case, however, with respect to our *pasuk*. It includes, rather, impact upon the quality of religious life – attrition which erodes the vitality of faith and observance, allure which saps content and conviction. It includes, that is, the gamut of contemporary impediments under our consideration.

Of particular note is a second exegetical detail. Rashi, possibly on the basis of a midrash, explains: העין רואה והלב חומד והגוף עושה את – “The eye sees, and the heart desires, and the body enacts the transgression.”²¹ According to this interpretation, the *pasuk* deals with a single continuum, visual allure tempting the viewer into passionate desire – and, thence, possibly into Halakhic violation. However, the gemara in *Berakhot* cites a different view:

דתניא אחרי לבבכם זו מינות וכן הוא אומר אמר נבל בלבו אין אֱלֹקִים
אחרי עיניכם זה הרהור עבירה שנאמר ויאמר שמשון אל אביו אותה קח

לי כי היא ישרה בעיני אתם זונים זה הרהור עבודה זרה וכן הוא אומר ויזנו אחרי הבעלים.

“After your heart” – this [refers to] heresy, as is written, The knave says in his heart, There is no God. “After your eyes” – this [refers to] sinful [sexual] rumination, as is written, And Shimshon said to his father, take her unto me, for she has found favor in my eyes. “You fornicate” – this refers to idolatrous rumination, as is written, “And they fornicate after the Baalim.”²²

This is likewise paralleled by a comment of the Sifre,²³ ad locum (presumably, the gemara’s source), albeit with a different exemplifying proof-text.

On this reading, the *pasuk* does not deal with sequential phrases of a single failure, but, rather, with multiple dangers, relating to varied areas of religious life and different wellsprings of religious lapse.²⁴ The Ramban adopted this interpretation, with slight modification, but localized it:

ואמר ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם זו האפיקורסות, להזהיר ממנה שלא יטעו בה...שלא יהרהרו מן התכלית באפיקורסות או בעבודת גלולים, אבל יהיה לכם הכל לציצית וראיתם אותו וזכרתם.

And it states, “And you shall not stray after your heart, as referring to heresy, to forewarn us with regard to it... that the *tekhelet* should not induce heretical or idolatrous thought, but, rather, that it should be all as fringes which you will see and be stirred to remembrance.”²⁵

Surprisingly, the Ramban understands that the projected danger is not that of general religious failure, but, rather, that which might, prospectively, derive from the *tekhelet*. To these strings – given their unique character, to which the Ramban addresses himself earlier, as the fusion of all colors (much as physical science regards white light today), as endowed with profound teleological significance, and out of its azure affinity with sea, sky, and the *kissei hakavod*²⁶ –

one might attach problematic mystical and metaphysical qualities, associated with pagan culture; and it is against this tendency that the Torah forewarns.

It is a strikingly original interpretation, but one which, for our purposes, largely eviscerates the *pasuk* as a relevant source. Given the more conventional understandings of the gemara and the Sifre, however, we are here introduced to the psychological and existential patterns which will help us classify impediments to *yirat shamayim*; to ideological wanderlust and passionate concupiscence, respectively. I assume, for our purposes, that the terms, *hirhurei averah* or *zenut* need not be understood in their narrower senses, as denoting thoughts of fornication or sexual license, but can be read as referring to libidinous lust, generally – or, even beyond that, to material desire, which competes with the committed religious life, distracts a person from its realization, and distances him from the Creator. At one plane, the Jew, as *homo religiosus*, is confronted by the allure of material gratification, by the beck and call of the flotilla of sirens of the order of *hayyei sha'ah*, the realm of temporal bliss. These vary greatly. They of course include carnal experience in the narrow sense of the term, the satisfaction of physical needs and aspiration, in response to urges, both bestial and human, at the level of need, comfort, or luxury. However, they also include less visceral elements, more social or passionate than appetitive – power, status, opulence, leisure – as well as the blend of the carnal and the passionate typified by sexuality. At a second plane, the aspiring Jew encounters obstacles more closely related to the quest for *hayyei olam*, whether the attraction of alternate religions, enticing by dint of ritual pageantry or social provenance, or the impact of ideology and speculation which poses philosophic difficulty.

These are the archetypal impediments, material and spiritual, to the optimal attainment of *yirat shamayim*. To these may be added elements, such as esthetic pleasure, especially music, which straddle both realms. Taken collectively or even independently, these are formidable dangers under the best of circumstances. However, each unquestionably has been reinforced within the modern context. On

the material side, the concern with creature comfort, and the faith – at least, within the West – that it could be significantly attained, have increased measurably; and the scientific and technological revolution, animated by Bacon's conviction that "knowledge is power" and the relative mastery of nature as the fruits which that revolution has wrought, are self-evident as agents of that concern.

That revolution, more than welcome per se, has, however, exerted an ancillary negative impact upon instinctive religious sensibility. Religious existence is significantly interwoven with a sense of dependence. At the philosophic and theological plane, it manifests itself in the Rambam's assertion that only divine existence is independent, in contrast with all else: שכל הנמצאים צריכין לו – "For all existent [entities] need Him, and He, blessed be He, does not need them or any of them."²⁷ Existentially and psychologically, it expresses itself in a sense, alternately, of need and reliance. Emphasis upon this factor is frequently related with Schleiermacher, who almost identifies religion with absolute dependence, but antecedents are plentiful, and roots in our tradition are clear. The Maharal, for instance, in explaining why *tefillah* is denominated *avodah*, dwells upon its link to dependence:

אבל התפלה מורה שהאדם נתלה בו יתברך...שכל ענין התפלה שהוא מתפלל אל השם יתברך לפי שהוא צריך אל השם יתברך נתלה בו ית' ואין קיום לו בעצמו כי אם בו יתברך ולכך מתפלל אליו על כל צרכו

But prayer indicates that man is dependent upon Him, blessed be He...For the whole substance of prayer is that he [i.e., the *mitpallel*] prays to Hashem, blessed be He, because he needs Him and is dependent upon Him, and has no independent personal existence but through Him, blessed be He. Therefore He prays to Him with respect to all his need.²⁸

He, in turn, may very well have looked to a familiar *pasuk* in *Te-hillim*:

הנה כעיני עבדים אל יד אדוניהם כעיני שפחה אל יד גברתה, כן עינינו אל
ה' אֶל־לִקְינוּ עַד שִׁיחַנּוּ

Behold, as the eyes of servants unto the hand of their
masters, as the eyes of a maidservant unto the hand of
her mistress, so our eyes are unto Hashem, our God, until
He will grace us.²⁹

At the human plane, Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor could have opted for rejecting the trade-off of liberty for economic security. Vis-à-vis the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, however, the basic human condition – and a fortiori, the basic Jewish condition – is defined by the terms of a servitude which holds man in bondage to his Master and Provider.

Scientific progress, has, however, eroded the sense – and, from a certain point of view, possibly also the reality – of human dependence. As Bonhoeffer noted, “The world which has attained to a realization of itself and of the laws which govern its existence is so sure of itself that we become frightened.”³⁰ In an admittedly lesser vein, according to some rishonim, a similar problem arose millennia ago, and spiritual leadership took steps to cope with it. The gemara in *Pesahim*, citing a passage from the Tosefta, states that among the initiatives undertaken by Hizkiyahu which earned the approbation of contemporary Torah scholars was the banning of medical books. The gemara gives no reason, but Rashi explains:

לפי שלא היה לבם נכנע על חולים אלא מתרפאין מיד

Because their heart was not subdued over the sick, as they
were cured immediately.³¹

The Rambam went out of his way to criticize and even ridicule this attitude;³² and we are inclined to agree with him, as I presume few if any today would readily assent to abandoning state-of-the-art medical care, when available. However, the basic religious issue is real, and positive as we may be about the humanitarian benefits of science, we cannot but lament the concomitant illusion of self-reliance and the vitiation of the sense of dependence.

The erosion of this sense is, in part, endemic to the modern scene as a whole – a function of the infrastructure which, in industrialized societies, enables even the poor to reap some benefits of a system which confers upon them, in areas such as health and sanitation, benefits of which the Croesuses of two centuries ago could barely dream. For many, however – particularly, in the West – the process is often both accelerated and exacerbated by affluence. I have neither the inclination nor the right to indulge in railing against the pitfalls of opulence. Nevertheless, without risking the hypocrisy of such moralizing, one can simply note the obvious fact that the amenities afforded by affluence as well as the self-image buttressed by it, may often reduce one's reliance upon divine sustenance. The theme recurs in Sefer Devarim, whether as anticipatory admonition – פֶּן תֹּאכַל וּשְׂבַעְתָּ... וְרָם לִבְכָּךְ וּשְׁכַחַת אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ – “Lest you eat and be sated...and your heart shall then be uplifted, and you shall forget Hashem, your God”³³ – or, as prophetically retrospective narrative: “And Yeshurun waxed fat, and rebelled”³⁴ וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבְעַט. And it appears, enunciated by a suppliant anxious to avert spiritual lapse, in the penultimate chapter of *Mishlei*: רֹאשׁ וְעֵשֶׂר אֶל תֵּת לִי...פֶּן אֲשַׁבֵּעַ – “Give me neither poverty nor riches...Lest I be sated and abjure, and say ‘Who is Hashem?’”³⁵ The scenario I am herewith discussing, does not, again, necessarily deal with outright apostasy or religious defection. The prospect of attrition induced or stimulated by material prosperity is, in its own right, grave enough. Optimally, in *tefillah*, even the wealthiest are suffused by a sense of need, as the archetype of תַּחֲנוּנִים יִדְבֵּר רֶשַׁע, “A pauper pleads,”³⁶ prescriptive as well as descriptive, characterizes their prayer no less than that of the indigent. That reality requires, however, an exercise of will and imagination not always readily attainable.

The extension and amelioration of life has been accompanied, moreover, by a change in outlook and sensibility. Other-worldliness which could be expressed to the strains of a danse macabre while a plague decimated Europe, has been largely supplanted by affirmation. Bentham's identification of happiness and the good with the pursuit of pleasure has not gone without serious challenge; but, at the popular plane, utilitarian ethics are inlaid to an extent unthinkable

in medieval culture. For all the levity and the traces of ribaldry in some of the *Canterbury Tales*, and despite Arnold's complaint over the lack of "high seriousness of noble purpose," Chaucer could conclude with a prayerful epilogue, in which he expresses the hope that he will attain divine forgiveness for "my giltes, and namely of my translacions and enditinges of worldly vanities, the which I revoke in my retraccions."³⁷ Two centuries later, Sir Philip Sidney, his career as an Elizabethan courtier notwithstanding, could open his final sonnet with the exhortation, "Leave me, O love which reachest but to dust,/And thou my mind aspire to higher things;" and conclude it with a parting assertion: "Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see;/Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me."³⁸ Modern counterparts would strike a very different note.

The possible impact of this change upon the level and quality of *yirat shamayim* should be obvious. It may be sharply exemplified by reference to remarks of Rabbenu Bahyye ben Asher. Under the rubric of *yirah* in his compendium, *Kad Hakemah*, he addresses himself to the relation between Kohelet's initial nihilistic assessment that all is *havel havalim*, "vanity of vanities," with the concluding affirmation, **סוף דבר הכל נשמע את הא-לקים ירא ואת מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם** – "In sum, when all has been considered; Fear God and observe His commandments, for that is the whole of man;" and he comments **למדך בזה כי לא תתכן היראה זולתי אם יהביל ויבוזה ענייני העולם הזה** – "This is to instruct you, that *yirah* is inconceivable unless one condemns and despises the matters of this world."³⁹ Few modernists would accept this sweeping assertion in toto. Precisely for that reason, however, it is, for our purposes, noteworthy.

The change in the philosophic climate is even more marked; and here we confront not only issues concerning the quality of *yirat shamayim* within the context of commitment but the loss of religious identity, ranging from "honest doubt" to secularization and apostasy. Arnold's contrast between a culture in which "The Sea of Faith/Was once, too, at the full," and his own context, of which he asserts, "And we are here, as on a darkling plain/Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight/Where ignorant armies clash by night,"⁴⁰ is, in its lament over the loss of certitude, both familiar and typical.

Here, too, the impact of science has been crucial; and this, in several respects. At one level, it has often challenged the verities of Torah across a broad front, particularly with regard to factual issues. Harnessing the methodology and claims of various disciplines – physical, historical, and linguistic – its practitioners and advocates have often sought to cast a pall over the integrity and veracity of sacral texts and classic tradition; and while much of the battle was fought in earlier centuries, from Spinoza to Spencer, and has, to an extent, subsided, its echoes are still part of the current scene.

The influence of scientism has, however, extended beyond factual assertion and has encroached upon sensibility. As cultural historians have not tired of noting, as Dante's neat three-story geocentric cosmos has given way to modern conceptions, the prospect of the tyranny of Tennyson's "hundred million years and hundred million spheres," often arousing more stupor than wonder, has, quite apart from issues concerning the age of the universe, undermined the sense of man's worth and of his relation to ultimate reality. And this has often affected *yirat shamayim* directly. Confronting a universe supposed by Einstein to be thirty-five billion light years in diameter, it is difficult to experience the sense of direct *amidah lifnei hamelekh*, of standing directly before the Ribbono Shel Olam, so essential to *yirah*.

In a third vein, the scientific approach has imprinted upon the minds of many a kind of practical empiricism, whereby the canons of judgment are identified, be it subliminally, with palpable proof, logical or sensual. In principle, such a mindset is inimical, if not antithetical, to *emunah*, as is manifest from a passage in *Baba Bathra*. The gemara narrates that, in the course of a homiletic discourse, Rav Yohanan projected that, at some future juncture, the Ribbono Shel Olam would bring huge precious stones and place them in the gates of Jerusalem. The size seeming to him fantastic, a student ridiculed him. Subsequently, the latter embarked on a voyage, in the course of which he encountered angels hewing precious stones of the predicted size; and upon inquiring as to their destination, he was informed that they were to be positioned at the gates of Jerusalem. Upon his return, he approached his master and exclaimed: דרוש רבי לך נאה לדרוש

כאשר אמרת כן ראיתי – “Hold forth, my rav! It is befitting for you to hold forth! Just as you stated, I have seen.” Whereupon Rav Yochanan responded: ריקא אלמלא ראית לא האמנת מלגלג על דברי חכמים אתה – “Scoundrel! Had you not seen, you would not have believed. You ridicule the words of the sages.”⁴¹ While *yahadut* does not foster fideism, it clearly rejects positivism. It is precisely that, however, which many modernists, even such as to whom the philosophic nomenclature may be totally foreign, imbibe from the passive and symbiotic absorption of prestigious scientific premises and habits. Hence, in this respect too, scientism may impede *yirat shamayim*.

The potential straying “after your heart” is not confined, classically or contemporaneously, to sciences, however. The *minut* in question may also derive from humanistic culture – indeed, more directly so. The possible ravages of philosophy, as decried by variegated pietists, are too familiar to require elaboration; but, in our connection, we may nevertheless single out two distinct dangers to *yirat shamayim*. The first is full-fledged *minut* proper, raising the banner of skeptical inquiry as a point of departure and, at times, adopting heretical or agnostic theses at conclusion. At this level, the upshot may be total defection. Absenting that, however, there still lurks the lesser danger of spiritual or emotional desiccation, inhibiting profound religious experience, whether out of an erosion in the capacity for awe and wonder – that “cold philosophy” of which Keats lamented that it “will clip an Angel’s wings/Conquer all mysteries by rule and line/Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine/Unweave a rainbow”⁴² – or whether the restraint it often preaches brakes all powerful spiritual experience. As regards the last point, literature – particularly, “the literature of power” – presumably poses no problem and should even serve to compensate. Obviously, however, authors have their own agendas, explicit or implicit, which may not coincide with a Torah *hashkafah*; and literary imagination is often currently harnessed for the production of so much which is both religiously and morally deleterious.

At the heart of the contemporary accretion to both *aharei levavkhem* and *aharei eineikhem* lie two distinct and yet related factors. The first is the homocentric character of much modern

culture – even of its religious component. At one plane, we are witness to an overwhelming emphasis upon human welfare and desire, however, defined, as the telos of the good life. At another, liberal doctrine ensconces man – preferably, individual man – as the arbiter of moral and theological truth, in the face of traditional authority. Quite apart from the specifics of a particular contretemps, the concomitant defiance may be inconsonant with fostering the humility so critical to meaningful *yirat shamayim*. This tendency is greatly exacerbated by the thrust of postmodern theory and practice. While its character may intensify certain modes of religion, the subjectivist bias encourages a heterodox *elu v'elu* which leads to an unbounded doctrinal no man's land, devoid of dogmatic content or commitment. *Yirat shamayim*, however, demands both.

The second factor is that which the *mizvah* of *zizit* is explicitly intended to counteract. The Torah explains that it is geared to inculcating remembrance of the entire complex – וזכרתם את כל מצות – “And you shall remember all the *mizvot* of Hashem and implement them.”⁴³ The implication that the spiritual dragon to be confronted is obliviousness is clear. The Torah addresses itself to this issue in various contexts, through both normative admonition and narrative rebuke: השמר לך פן תשכח את ה' א-לקיך – “Beware, lest you forget Hashem, your God,” at one pole, and צור ילדך תשי ותשכח א-ל – “The Rock who begot you, you ignored, and forgot God who bore you,”⁴⁴ at another. The topic has, however, a distinctly current dimension. Secular modern culture does not so much rebel against the Ribbono Shel Olam as it ignores Him. Its model is not Hazal's portrait of Nimrod – so called, they suggest, because יודע רבונו ומתכוין – “He knows his Master and [yet] intends to rebel against Him;”⁴⁵ nor Aeschylus' Prometheus, or Milton's Satan. It is, rather, that of less heroic and less magisterial figures, engrossed in serenely, perhaps complacently, conducting their affairs, without reference to divine order. “*Je n'ai pas besoin de cette hypothèse*,” replied Laplace when asked why he had omitted God from his treatise, *Mécanique Celeste*. For religious modernists who do not, of course, wholly omit, the core besetting sin is,⁴⁶ היסח הדעת obliviousness – not that which, Heaven forbid, denies heretically, but such as is content with feeble

fulfillment of the Rama's opening codicil in *Shulhan Arukh*: 'שויתי ה' – "I have always set Hashem before me" – this is a grand principle regarding Torah and the levels of the righteous who walk before God."⁴⁷ The feebleness per se constitutes, however, a serious impediment to *yirat shamayim*.

I have focused upon spiritual impediments – in part, because of personal orientation and predilection, and, in part, because I regard them as the most critical. Unquestionably, however, one can note others as well, of a more sociological character. Just how attractive the world of *yirat shamayim* is – culturally, ethically, even, to a point, esthetically – may impact significantly. How young people, in particular, are treated by family, teachers, peers, or the general community; the nature of the interpersonal stimuli and/or provocation to which they are exposed; the *kiruv* of embrace without conquest, the degree of understanding and empathy they encounter on their religious odyssey – all may exert profound influence upon the course of their experience and development.⁴⁸ None of this can or should be denied. At the extreme, these may make the difference between sustaining or abandoning commitment. However, even where basic identity does not hang in the balance, here too, the quality and level of Torah existence frequently does. "If one is angry at the *hazan*," runs a Yiddish adage, "one does not answer *amen*."

Hazal were well aware of this element; and they counseled accordingly: לעולם תהא שמאל דוחה וימין מקרבת לא כאלישע שדחפו לגחזי בשתי ידי – "One should always distance [a disciple] with the left and draw [him] near with the right, unlike Elisha who pushed Gehazi with both hands."⁴⁹ Moreover, I was once struck by the addendum of a *meshgiah* of one of the preeminent *haredi yeshivot ketanot*, to the effect that, given our prevalent cultural climate and rising student expectations, the guideline should be amended to dictate two-handed *kiruv*.

I freely acknowledge the relevance of these factors; and any attempt to cope with religious attrition at the public plane must clearly take them into serious consideration. However, they raise a host of halakhic, educational and communal issues which lie, I believe,

beyond my present mandate and, to some extent, possibly, beyond my expertise. I return, therefore, to my more narrowly defined area of primarily personal confrontation.

In this connection, with an eye to both the narrower and the broader senses of *yirat shamayim*, we may distinguish between four separate levels of contemporary impediments to its attainment. The most comprehensive is emotional atrophy, the inability to feel deeply and sensitively about almost anything – especially, of a spiritual nature; the personality of a lotus-eater of sorts, unruffled and uninspired, marked by lassitude and insouciance, issuing in, or bred by, radical ennui.

At a second level, we may note an individual fully capable of powerful emotion, both positive and negative, but tone deaf to the quintessence of *yirat shamayim*: reverence. He may love and hate, he may aspire and labor, he may even admire and appreciate – but all under a low ceiling. If he is pragmatically oriented, and if he believes sufficiently in the cardinal tenets of natural religion, the existence of God and reward and punishment, he may attain *yirat ha'onesh*, the fear of retribution. But if he lacks the capacity for reverence, for anything or anyone, he is, with respect to the higher strains of *yirat haromemut*, the “awe of majesty,” a spiritual cripple.

One rung higher, we can encounter a person endowed with the capacity for reverence, but lacking the ability or the desire to perceive its unique content within the context of the divine and transcendental. Awed by the grandeur of human creativity, cosmic mystery, or, like Kant, by the moral law, he is nonetheless insensitive to *sui generis* response to *sui generis* reality. He does not fully appreciate the import of *yihud Hashem*, in its qualitative sense, and, hence, does not apprehend the sense of the singularly numinous. Finally, within our own community, there exist those who, whether floundering or assertively self-assured, may be religiously motivated in universal terms, but not attuned to the particularistic context of *yahadut*, not sufficiently convinced that *Mosheh emet v'torato emet* [Moshe is true, and his Torah true]. Whereas the previous class is marked by taints of idolatry, these decline or defect, tinged by skepticism or agnosticism.

Modes of response to these levels, and strategies capable of coping with them, obviously vary. One cannot compare a loyal but superficially complacent votary with a troubled and teetering soul, perhaps anxiously seeking to find God and to believe in Him, but riven by philosophic doubt and unable to make the leap of faith. Attitudes need to differ, the means to vary, and in counseling individuals or groups, we clearly take this into account. However, if a general comment may nonetheless be advanced, across the board, we need to pay special attention to the spiritual – or, if you will, the experiential – dimension. It is not that we have over-intellectualized faith. It is, rather, if such a term exists, that we have under-emotionalized it. Oblivious to Coleridge's crucial distinction, we have often been satisfied to identify it with belief. I trust that I shall not be misunderstood. I am deeply committed to serious *talmud Torah*, crucially important per se, as both a major aspect of *avodat Hashem* and a means to its enhancement. The sense that *בראתי יצר הרע בראתי לו תורה* – “I have created an evil desire, and I have created Torah as its antidote,”⁵⁰ ascribed to the Ribbono Shel Olam, is, for me, not just an authoritative dictum but an existential axiom. *Ule'avdo zeh Talmud* – “To serve Him – this refers to [Torah] study.”⁵¹ Its value and effectiveness is, however, very much a function of its experiential character; and that, in turn, depends, in no small measure upon its emotional quotient. Ambivalence and shallowness flourish when *devekut* has withered or passion has waned.

We are particularly challenged by a simple fact – upon reflection, perhaps obvious, and yet, in a sense, singular and incongruous. I introduce it on a semi-homiletic note. With respect to the commandment to love God, *bekhol levavekha*, the mishnah, noting the use of *levav* as opposed to *lev*, observes: *בכל לבבך בשני יצריך ביצר הטוב* – “With your whole heart, with both the good and the evil desires.”⁵² Its intent is clear. Even potentially destructive and aggressive energies, properly sublimated and channeled, can be harnessed into service as an element in the soul's quest for *ahavat Hashem*. Analogously, the admonition against being misled by straying after *levavkhem*, may be equally inclusive, urging us to beware not only of what tempts our darker visage but of what appeals to the child of

light in us, as well; of what may be grounded in positive virtue and yet, in sum, may affect *yirat shamayim* adversely, nonetheless. Paradoxically, at times we sow gentle breezes and reap the whirlwind.

The phenomenon is manifest in a number of areas – and this, with respect to values which may either clash with *yirat shamayim* or compete with it. A case in point, at the most fundamental level, is the premium upon the development of personality. We – more the *ben Torah* in us, than the modernist – are not content with training our children or ourselves to bring our faculties to bear upon coping with the quandaries of life and its vicissitudes. We strive to mold the self, proper – to maximize ability, to extract and exploit the potential immanent, by divine gift, in our inner core. We share the Greek passion for *paideia*, as an educational and civic ideal – and this, out of religious aspiration, as an end in itself, rather than merely as a means to inculcate or improve the capacity for dealing with issues. *Ba'alei hamussar* speak incessantly of the responsibility to build *kohot hanefesh* [traits of the soul], beyond activating or energizing them; and this emphasis is an integral part of our authentic collective tradition.

Moreover, we encourage, as part of this process, a stress upon dynamism and vibrancy: man as agent – *gavra* in contrast with object – *hefza*. This is reflected in the extraordinary emphasis upon will as the epicenter of the self; and, in the tradition of the Rambam, free will, postulated as both experienced reality and desideratum, and not just as a dogmatic tenet. Free will is the linchpin of the entire halakhic universe, the basis of the normative demand which confronts the Jew or Jewess at every turn. The exercise of choice, with respect to a plethora of minutiae is central as both means and end. In the process of energizing consciousness, we mold it. Not for us is the immolation of the will idealized in certain mystical traditions. The capacity for choice, is, to us, a quintessential aspect of that humanity which enables us to serve the Ribbono Shel Olam and submit to Him.

And yet, *alyah v'koz immah*. The course may boomerang. The capacity for chosen spiritual aspiration may issue, instead, in vaulting secular ambition. The more powerful the personality, the graver

the potential for rebellion, the stronger the passion for independence, the greater the reluctance to submit. The *kabbalat ol malkhut shamayim* of the docile may be less attractive or even significant, but it is probably more secure.

Moreover, an energized but undirected or misdirected will is a dangerous loose cannon. This prospect is graphically reflected in a remarkable passage in Yirmeyahu. In the wake of a passage full of dire prognosis, it is anticipated that *knesset Israel* will respond by inquiring how or why it has incurred divine wrath; and the *navi* is instructed, speaking on behalf of God, to expound the causes:

והיה כי תגיד לעם הזה את כל הדברים האלה ואמרו אליך על מה דבר ה' עלינו את כל הרעה הגדולה הזאת ומה עוננו ומה חטאתנו אשר חטאנו לה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ. ואמרת אליהם על אשר עזבו אבותיכם אותי נאם ה' וילכו אחרי אלהים אחרים ויעבדום וישתחוו להם ואותי עזבו ואת תורתִי לא שמרו

And it shall come to pass, when you will tell this people all these matters, and they shall say to you: "Wherefore has Hashem pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity and what the sin that we have committed against Hashem, our God?" And you shall say to them: "Because your fathers have forsaken Me, speaks Hashem, and they have pursued strange gods, and they have worshipped them and bowed to them, and Me they have forsaken and disobeyed my Torah."

This brief catalogue – including idolatry, the abandonment of God, and the obliviousness to Torah – would seem reason enough. And yet, the *navi* continues, there is a further overshadowing surfeit:

ואתם הרעתם לעשות מאבותיכם והנכם הלכים איש אחרי שררות לבו הרע לבלתי שמע אלי.

And you have done worse than your forefathers, each directed by the inclination of his evil heart, so that you didn't listen to Me.⁵³

Arbitrary will, evidently conceived as not merely the perpetrator

of specific sins but, rather, as the dynamic engine of rebelliousness impelling to sin, is placed beyond idolatry and the rejection of Torah, in toto.

Much the same message is projected in an earlier context, at the personal plane. Within the context of his farewell address, Mosheh Rabbeinu anticipates a prospective rebel whose self-assured response to threatened punishment will be insouciance:

שלום יהיה לי כי בשררות לבי אלך

Peace will be with me, as I shall pursue the inclination
of my heart.⁵⁴

The imprecations anticipated for him in the subsequent *pesukim* attest boldly to the gravity with which the Torah regards a life governed by *sherirut lev*. Hence, inasmuch as the stronger the “heart,” the greater the potential for just such a life, the bolstering of personality and of will, as its dynamic principle, engenders the risk of enabling rebelliousness. This is not to imply that such a result is inevitable. Properly channeled, a rich personality can be invaluable towards both sustaining fundamental fidelity and enhancing the quality of religious experience, its reverential component included. As the semantics of the adjective “strong-willed” attest, the danger is there, however, and it suffices to warrant the inclusion of our cherished development of personality and its volitional powers as a possible impediment to the advancement of *yirat shamayim*.

In a kindred vein, a similar scenario may be envisioned with respect to the intellectual sphere. Here, too, we deal with abilities much valued by ourselves, in the Torah world no less than in the academic. Even those who do not subscribe to Rambam’s equation of *zelem E-lokim* with intelligent *da’at*,⁵⁵ accord it a central place in the definition of humanity and recognize its contribution to religious existence. Explaining the position of the plea for *da’at* as the first of the petitionary *berakhot* in *shemoneh esrei*, the Yerushalmi observes: אם אין דיעה תפלה מניין – “If there is no reason, whence prayer?”⁵⁶ Hence, the overriding emphasis upon study as a value, and the development of the capacity and the desire to study as central to spiritual growth.

Moreover, this emphasis is not confined to passive learning and the accumulation of knowledge. It includes the ability, so plaintively sought in the *berakhah* preceding *keriat shema*, *lehavin u'lehaskil*, "to understand and to perceive."⁵⁷ Almost inevitably – particularly, in the modern context – this entails inculcating and encouraging a modicum of critical perspective, as regards both the reading of texts and the analysis of concepts, which, in turn, fosters a measure of independence.

Here, too, then, we risk encounter with a golem who may turn upon his creator and/or mentor; with forces which, once unleashed, may reduce an educator to the role of the sorcerer's apprentice. As the primeval serpent well knew – and this was crucial to his temptations, as appealing to spiritual pride, no less than to sensual appetite – *da'at* opens access to knowledge, and knowledge is power, not only in Bacon's sense, as enabling a measure of human mastery over man's natural environment, but as providing and possibly encouraging spiritual autonomy. That autonomy is, however, precisely what possibly distances man from the Creator, undermining *yirat shamayim* at its root.

Within the modern context, the phenomenon is all too familiar, probably requiring no explanatory exemplification. Nevertheless, I cite one incident which has stuck in my memory. Addressing a Mizrahi audience in the fifties, the Rav *zt"l* almost waxed lyrical as he sang the praises of critical analysis as a central aspect of the process of *lomdut*; expounding how, upon encountering an opinion of, say, Rabbenu Tam, the aspiring *lamdan* is not content with integrating the material, but confronts Rabbenu Tam with the need for a supportive rationale, etc. Then, evidently intuiting whence this trend could lead, he raised his voice, and, interceding, exclaimed:

רבותי, ציהט נישט קיין פאלשע מסקנות!

"Gentlemen, don't draw any false conclusions!"

He did not amplify and he did not qualify, but the brief interposition put the concern with maintaining the tensile balance between different and potentially conflicting values into bold relief. It is a concern

which any surveyor of current impediments to *yirat shamayim* inevitably shares.

The same pattern is evident in yet a third realm – the moral. Morality, natural or revealed, is central to our Weltanschauung, and its organic integration with the world of faith a primary tenet. It relates to the Scriptural description of the Ribbono Shel Olam – אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – “A God of fidelity without iniquity, righteous and upright is He.”⁵⁸ And, at the human plane, it constitutes a prime *telos* of personal growth and educational effort. Moreover, in this area, we are not content with assuring response to normative charges. We seek to mold ethical sensibility – a feeling for both justice and mercy, a sense of tragedy, compassion for suffering and deprivation. Yet, this very sensibility and its attendant scruples may make it difficult to understand, or to come to terms with, details or even whole areas of Halakhah which, *prima facie*, may be jarring, as inconsistent with it.

Similar considerations are germane with respect to an ethic of a different character. I have previously touched upon the issue of excessive worldliness, and noted its negative impact upon spirituality, in general, and *yirat shamayim*, in particular. The perennial question of how to relate to the world bears, however, a more fundamental aspect; and, at that plane, we – certainly, those of us with some modernist inclination – are basically positive. Despite significant nuanced differences, both the Rav and Rav Kook, the twin polestars of our *hashkafah*, shared this perception. The Rav, in particular, distanced himself from the polarities of James’s categories of world-acceptance and world-rejection, and insisted upon world-redemption. That, too, however, is grounded in fundamental affirmation. We categorically reject Augustine’s view of the natural order as *massa perditionis*, regarding that conception as inconsonant with the declaration,

וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד

And God surveyed all that He had made and, behold, it was very good.⁵⁹

– that evaluation remaining valid even after human lapse into sin.

Our admiration for the *Kad Hakemakh* notwithstanding, we certainly do not share its author's contention that meaningful *yirat shamayim* can only be attained by disengagement from the temporal world and refusal to ascribe any value to it.

Involvement we do not treat as a neutral option but as a sacred challenge, as part of our duty to discharge the universal mandate of *le'avdah u'l'shamrah*, to advance the divine goal – לא תהו בראה לשבת – יצרה – “He created it [i.e., the world] not as a waste; He formed it to be inhabited.”⁶⁰ And we both heed and take heart from the authoritative voice of the Rambam: שאין ראוי לאדם שיעסוק כל ימיו אלא בדברי חכמה – “It is not fitting for a man to engage all his days in anything but matters of wisdom and the development of the world.”⁶¹ Yet, here again, this charge, so appealing to us, ideologically and psychologically, may open the door to the excesses of worldliness, inviting the lament of Wordsworth's familiar sonnet: “The world is too much with us; late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; / Little we see in Nature that is ours.” That we assuredly reject. No Jew could accept the sonnet's subsequent preference for being “a pagan, suckled in a creed outworn.” But the concern over the loss of spirituality – “We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!” – we surely share.⁶²

In one sense or another, the foregoing quartet can be subsumed under the comprehensive rubric of religious humanism; and what has been said of each component, with reference to our commitment and the relevant caveats regarding the respective concerns, might be stated with an eye to the category as a whole. *Yahadut* is, in one sense, profoundly humanistic. This quality is reflected in at least three distinct areas. Perhaps foremost among them is the esteem accorded man, whether considered independently, as expressed in the doctrine of *zelem E-lokim*, or as regards his position within the created cosmic order. Second, we note the centrality accorded human needs and aspirations within the core halakhic corpus. Finally, the sensitivity to human welfare is manifested in the criterion for defining exigencies which warrant deviation from that corpus. “*Ha lamadta*,” as the Rambam explains with regard to *pikuah nefesh* overriding Shabbat,

שאין משפטי התורה נקמה בעולם אלא רחמים וחסד ושלוה בעולם

Hence, you have learned that the ordinances of the Torah are not [meant to serve] vengeance in the world, but, rather, [to serve] mercy, lovingkindness, and peace in the world.⁶³

And yet, that humanism, fraught with possibly dangerous overreaching, is guarded. Esteem is tempered by the contrast of frailty bordering on nothingness with transcendental majesty and power; and the danger of anthropomorphism is proactively anticipated by the preventive prohibition against graven images. Regard for human welfare, for its part, is constantly pitched within the context of man's servitude to God. And so the axiological balance is struck, charting a course subsequent generations would do well to follow.

We need to note, additionally, however, another recent impediment, regarded by its devotees not as a dilution of *avodat Hashem* but as its optimal realization; one which does not challenge basic commitment to Torah and *mizvot* but undercuts the specific strain of *yirah*, in favor of an overriding and almost exclusive concern with *ahavat shamayim*. As previously noted, the priority of *ahavah* to *yirah* as the motive force of the religious life is grounded in Hazal; and it is conceivable that some rishonim held that this superiority obtains even when we deal with the two as independent *mizvot*. However, at times, the relative neglect of *yirah* stems from the human psyche more than from textual and theological sources. The sense of proximity and warmth and the desire for it – in part, the basis of *ahavah* and, in part, its product – is far more comforting and reassuring than the sense of distance and recoil experienced in *yirah*; hence, the gap in emotional appeal. Many, C.S. Lewis has somewhere noted, do not want a Father in Heaven, but rather a Grandfather in Heaven. Oblivious to Hazal's critique of חברותא כלפי שמים, "familiarity with respect to Heaven,"⁶⁴ they are, in Carlyle's phrase, "at ease in Zion."

The phenomenon has numerous manifestations, ranging from great leniency with respect to halakhic issues concerning utterance of divine names or *berakhot* to pronouncements regarding the

respective identities of God and man which, to say the least, border on the blasphemous. Perhaps the most prominent, however, is the trend towards neo-Hasidic modes of worship, focused upon a quest for spirituality to which the strains of *ahavah* are most conducive. As I have written in a previous Forum volume,⁶⁵ I do not regard this quest as problematic per se; and, properly channeled and balanced, it can be quite positive. However, in the absence of such balance – and it is to such absence that we are often witness – the negative impact upon *yirat shamayim* can be grave.

Given the data, we – individually and communally, as *ovdei Hashem* and as spiritual mentors – are confronted with a serious dilemma. If values to which we adhere and attitudes we advocate contribute to the contemporary impeding of *yirat shamayim*, ought we change course or, at least, reduce the degree of our advocacy? Perhaps, one reflects, we need to reexamine and reorient our *hash-kafah*; or, falling short of that, acknowledge that, while we continue to regard it as valid and deeply Jewish, it is possibly insufficiently suited to meeting the challenge of contemporary conditions, intellectual and social.

Self-evidently, the upshot of such a possible assessment can, a priori, move us in one of two antithetical directions. One option, perhaps not so much focused on the values I have noted as with an eye to the impact upon practical halakhic observance, is to challenge the thrust of this paper – and, in a sense, of this conference. We have posited *yirat shamayim* as a major desideratum and, hence, have sought avenues to enhance and encourage it. We have not, by and large, correspondingly explored possible negative religious fallout. It is sometimes contended, however, that the persistent pursuit of such a sublime but abstract ideal may undercut halakhic commitment, as punctilious attention to minutiae may be disdained as paltry in comparison with lofty and comprehensive goals. Consequently, it is argued, religious stability and fidelity is better served by greater stress upon observance, even at the expense, conscious and subconscious, of concomitant diminution of harping upon *yirat shamayim*.

I acknowledge that this prospect is indeed possible, and, moreover, that it has, at times, materialized. Nevertheless, such a con-

tention, while well-motivated, is, from our standpoint, essentially misguided. It is grounded upon a Christian, and possibly antinomian, conception of the composite spiritual self and of the character of the halakhic order. Yahadut is not content with a self-image which assigns a premium to law, to the neglect of spirituality. It contends that, fundamentally and ultimately, the spiritual cause proper is advanced by normative response and discipline. Admittedly, it doesn't always work out as such, but that is part of our abiding faith: פקודי ה' ישרים – "The commandments of Hashem are right, rejoicing the heart;" – "לא נתנו המצות אלא לצרף בהן את הבריות" – "Mizvot were but given in order to purge [human] creatures."⁶⁶ Whatever our perception of local pitfalls, any grand spiritual strategy grounded upon the opposition of the harmony between catharsis and discipline is, from a Torah standpoint, objectionable.

The alternate reassessment, the possibility that cherished humanistic directions should be toned down in the interests of promoting *yirat shamayim* raises fewer issues of principle, but the prospect of the need for it is painful to contemplate; hence, the sustained hope and even faith that it can be averted. On this point, no one who knows me needs to be told where my predisposition lies. The values in question are such as I have imbibed from childhood; which during the span of over half a century, I have sought to internalize and disseminate. My instincts and aspirations, as both a striving *oved Hashem* and as a *mehanekeh*, are all very much in favor of retaining these emphases; and, as I survey the educational and sociological landscape, in Israel as well as in the Diaspora, I sense that the need for them has magnified rather than lessened.

And yet, there is a proviso. Ever mindful of Hazal's priority, *yirat het'o kodemet lehokhmato*,⁶⁷ both temporally and axiologically, we need to insure the proper balance between the components I have cited and the overarching ideal, both normative and experiential, of dominant *yirat shamayim*. It shall profit us little, as individuals or as a Torah community, if we build worlds but dilute the *unum necessarium*.

Ideally, therefore, we ought opt for sustaining and enriching our multifaceted spiritual and cultural heritage, while concurrently

taking heed that it flourish within the context of abiding and pervasive *yirat shamayim*. If I may invert Carlyle's comment upon the quest for happiness, we shall maintain the denominator but seek to increase the numerator.

We shall persist in our adherence to religious humanism, but in a spirit of utter humility, never lapsing into the mode of apotheosis which Toynbee rightly criticized as the fatal flaw and besetting sin of Greek culture. We shall be faithful to the spirit of the whole of the eighth *tehillah* – to the query of *אדם כי תפקדנו וכן אדם כי תפקדנו* – “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You think of him?” and the concluding declaration, *ה' אדנינו מה אדיר שמך* – “Hashem, our Lord, how mighty is Your name throughout the earth,” no less than the intervening catalogue regarding human majesty and dominion: *ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים... בל שיהיה תחת רגליו* – “You have made him barely lower than the angels... You have put all under his feet.”⁶⁸ We shall preach the dignity of man, but ever mindful, as were the great Renaissance humanists, of the potential for evil inherent in freedom and of the need to maximize striving towards realizing his sanctity.

We shall persist in cultivating moral sensibility, but with the profound sense that where we encounter difficult terrain, after we have walked the extra mile, we humbly but thoroughly submit to divine norm and wisdom. That is the gist of the crucial test of the *akedah*, the conjunction of responsive *hineni* with tremulous fear and trembling.⁶⁹ Recognizing that Avraham was commanded to sacrifice his judgment as well as his son, we note it was only this total readiness which earned him the designation of *yarei*:

כי עתה ידעתי כי ירא אֱלֹהִים אתה ולא חשכת את בןך את יחידך ממני
For now I know that you are a God-fearer, inasmuch as
you have not withheld your son, your only son, from
Me.⁷⁰

We shall continue to shy away from the perception of life, and of the world within which it is realized, as largely an interminable

minefield; viewing it, instead, as an arena of opportunity – in Keats' celebrated phrase, "a vale of soul-making." Hence, we shall encourage and celebrate human creativity, while constantly internalizing and instilling the awareness of its source: זוכרת את ה' א-לקיך כי הוא הנותן – לך כח לעשות חיל – "And you shall remember Hashem, your Lord, for it is He that gives you the strength to accomplish."⁷¹ We shall drill home the message that success does not negate dependence, and that total self-reliance is a snare and a delusion. טוב לחסות בה' – "It is good" – morally, psychologically, and, above all, religiously – "to rely upon Hashem."⁷²

Further, we shall not denigrate *yirah* in the interest of spiritual ease and psychological comfort. Rather, we shall live and act out of the profound sense that fear and joy, tremor and love, are, vis-à-vis the Ribbono Shel Olam, intertwined and reciprocally fructifying. This sense was one of the linchpins of the Rav's religious thought and experience; and, as such, its ample and nuanced elucidation served as one of the foci of *Uvikashtem Misham*. Moreover, it has been developed with reference to another spiritual quality – in certain respects, quite distinct from *ahavah*, and yet, in others, closely allied with it, so that it provides a measure of analogy: joy.

שמחה מיט יראה געפלאכטען אין איינעם – *mori verabbi*, Rav Hutner zt"l, was wont to sing on Purim,⁷³ אחוץ ביי אידען נישטא ביי קיינעם. One might entertain some question regarding the claim to exclusiveness, but the genuineness of this fusion within Torah is beyond doubt. And it was well formulated by one of the Rosh Yeshiva's polestars, Rav Avraham Eliyah Kaplan:

היראה לא צער היא, לא כאב, לא דאגת תמרורים. ומשל למה היא דומה? לרטט יראתו של אב על בנו הקטן האהוב לו, בשעה שהוא מורכב על כתפו והוא רוקד עמו ושוחק לפניו, להיות נזהר בו שלא יפול...יש כאן שמחה שאין דומה לה, עונג שאין דומה לו. והיראה הנעימה כרוכה על עקבם.

Yirah is neither anxiety, nor pain, nor bitter worry. What does it resemble? The tingle of the concern of a father for his beloved young son while he carries him on his shoulders, dances with him and plays with him, to be

careful of him lest he fall... You have here incomparable joy, incomparable gratification. And pleasurable concern is entwined with them.⁷⁴

The semi-frolic conjured up in the description may seem exaggerated. But the basic theme is essentially sound. It is a clear reflection of the conjunction implied in twin *pesukim*: עבדו את ה' ביראה; עבדו את ה' בשמחה – “Serve Hashem with fear;” “Serve Hashem with joy.”⁷⁵

Finally, we shall of course persist in immersing ourselves in serious *talmud Torah*, and revel in the dialectic of passive absorption and energetic creativity therein. We shall do so, however, pervaded with Hazal’s sense that its worth and even legitimacy is conditioned upon its conjunction with *yirat shamayim*, serving not only as a prelude and context but as a suffusive concomitant component;

מה להלן באימה וביראה וברתת ובזיע אף כאן באימה וביראה וברתת
ובזיע

Just as there [i.e., at Sinai], with trembling and fear, with tremor and trepidation, so here [the process of learning Torah] too.⁷⁶

Sans *yirah*, on their view, Torah study may be not only worthless but inimical.⁷⁷

It is a tall order: a large agenda, and an equally large proviso. *Yirat shamayim* is a key value in its own right and the key to so much else. The wisdom – and, to an extent, the right – of maintaining a rich and variegated spiritual and cultural life is, in great measure, conditioned upon the quotient of awe and awareness of divine presence which suffuses it. At the educational plane, perhaps a differential approach to programming should be more seriously considered, with the ability to maintain an appropriate level of *yirat shamayim* a central variable. At the personal and communal plane, we pray daily for divine assistance in neutralizing impediments to *yirat shamayim*. May we do our share, that we may be worthy of His.

NOTES

1. This paper focuses upon my assigned topic with reference to the specific context of Jewry, and accordingly utilizes much halakhic material. The core issues are, however, by no means insular, and I trust that much of the discussion, *mutatis mutandis*, has universal bearing as well.
2. See chaps. 5 and 9, respectively.
3. See, e.g., 2:6, 4:7, 7:7.
4. *Devarim* 6:13 and 10:20.
5. *Sefer Hamizvot*, assei, 4.
6. *Yesodei Hatorah*, 2:1.
7. See *Teshuvah*, 10:1–2, 5–6.
8. See *Yoma* 86b.
9. See *Sotah* 27b, 31a.
10. *Shabbat* 31b.
11. *Ketubot* 30a.
12. *Teshuvot Harambam*, ed. Y. Blau (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 715.
13. *Bereshit* 8:21. I find some difficulty in translating *yetzer*, which I have rendered as “desire.” J.P.S. has “imagination” while Artsroll, similarly, renders “imagery.” These, however, miss the passionate and/or moral element, so prevalent in Hazal’s use, entirely. The Septuagint has *dianoia* while the Vulgate, analogously, has *cogitatio*. These, however, strike me as too intellectualistic. I have therefore preferred “desire,” to be understood as the capacity to will rather than as a specific wish.
14. 7:29. The term חשבוניות, which I have translated as “complexities,” may also have ethical connotations of an element of deviousness.
15. *De’ot*, 6:1.
16. *Bamidbar* 15:39. In other contexts, the verb, תור, is neutral, denoting exploration. However, here it clearly implies spiritual deviation, and I have translated it, accordingly. The last term in the *pasuk*, זנים, can have narrow literal meaning, regarding lascivious sexual behavior – more specifically, adultery; see *Yevamot* 61b – or broader metaphorical import. I have rendered it more literally, but with the intent that metaphor should be read into the translation.
17. *Avodat Kokhavim*, 2:3.
18. See Rav Y.F. Perlow’s remarks in *Sefer Hamizvot LeRav Sa’adya Gaon*, 2:6b.
19. Regarding similar interpretations of such a construction in other contexts, see the Rambam’s *Sefer Hamizvot*, *Shores* 5, and the Ramban’s comments thereon.
20. *Devarim* 11:16. The apostasy anticipated in this *pasuk* is not quite identical with the modern sense of the term, abandonment of faith, as dual allegiance was, in biblical times, much more common, although not, as Eliyahu’s challenge amply attests, a legitimate halakhic option.
21. Ad locum. For possible antecedents, see the texts cited in *Torah Shelema*, ad locum; *Yerushalmi*, *Berakhot*, 1:5.
22. *Berakhot* 12b.

23. *Sifre, Shlah*, ch. 9, on *Bamidbar* 15:39. Commenting on this text, the Netziv notes:
 "אין לפרש שלא יהיה מין ממש שהרי כבר כתיב וזכרתם את כל מצות ה' קלות וחמורות אף כי עון מינות... אבל לפי הפשט ה"פ שלא ילמדו דברים הבאים לידי מינות המושכים את האדם... וכל לימוד הפילוסופיא וחקירה בדברים המסוכנים נקרא בשם זה" (עמק הנצי"ב, על אתר).
24. The interpretation of the *pasuk* may be intertwined with a specific halakhic issue, as to whether it contains a single injunction, with two alternate details, or a pair of independent prohibitions. The Behag, in his list of personal *mizvot*, only cites *aharei levavkhem*, and this has invited some discussion amongst aharonim as to whether two *issurim* might have been counted. See *Hakdomat Sefer Halakhot Gedolot*, in *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot*, ed. N.Z. Hildesheimer (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 45–46, and the notes thereon. However, the question may also depend on premises concerning the principles which govern the count of *mizvot*. See the Rambam's *Sefer Hamizvot*, *Shores* 9. In this connection, note that the Rambam cites both *aharei eineikhem* and *aharei levavkhem*, and yet only enumerates a single injunction.
25. Ad locum.
26. See *Menahot* 43b.
27. *Yesodei Hatorah*, 1:3.
28. *Netivot Olam*, "Netiv Ha'avodah," ch. 3. The link between servitude and service, as two senses of *avodah*, is pervasive in this *netiv*, and implicit in this passage.
29. *Tehillim* 123:2.
30. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1959), p. 107.
31. *Pesahim* 56a, s.v. *veganaz*.
32. See his *Perush Hamishnayot, Pesahim*, 4:10. Ordinarily, this commentary is of course confined to the mishnah. However, the Rambam states that the issue is so crucial and the view under discussion, [i.e., Rashi's], so grievously erroneous, that he cannot but denounce it.
33. *Devarim* 8:12,14; and cf. *ibid*, 6:10–12.
34. *Ibid*, 32:15.
35. *Mishlei*, 30:8–9. Cf. *Mesillat Yesharim*, ch. 1.
36. *Ibid*, 18:23. At the level of *peshat*, the *pasuk* is of course commenting upon ordinary interpersonal discourse. Hazal, however, applied it to *tefillah*, as well. See *Devarim Rabbah*, 2:3.
37. The epilogue, entitled under the heading, "here taketh the makere of this book his leve," follows the *Tales* and, in standard editions, is printed after them. Its sincerity has been much debated; but even if it be read as lip service, which I doubt, it stands as a sign of the times.
38. "Astrophel and Stella," sonnet 108.
39. *Kitvei Rabbeinu Bahyye*, ed. Rabbi C.B. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 192–93.
40. "Dover Beach."
41. *Baba Bathra* 75a.

42. "Lamia," 2:234–37.
43. *Bamidbar* 15:39.
44. *Devarim* 8:11 and 32:18, respectively.
45. Rashi, *Bereshit* 10:8.
46. In halakhic nomenclature, this term has a fairly defined meaning, denoting a situation in which a datum is left untended, unattended, and out of mind, for whatever reason. Thus, one is enjoined from *hesah hada'at* with respect to *tefillin* while wearing them. Or, even more rigorously, sacrificial food, such as *terumah* or *kodshim*, which is the subject of *hesah dada'at*, may not subsequently be eaten; and a parallel standard disqualifies a red heifer from serving as a *parah adumah* if it has been similarly ignored. In our context, however, I use the term in its broader attitudinal sense, as insouciance grounded in distance, the absence of attention reflecting, if not disdain, at least a lack of relation or need.
47. *Orah Haym*, 1:1. The *pasuk* cited is from *Tehillim* 16:5.
48. These issues have been discussed extensively in a recent book by Faranak Margolese, *Off the Derech* (Jerusalem, 2005).
49. *Sotah* 47a. Gehazi, whom Hazal regarded very negatively – see *Sanhedrin* 90a and 106b – is a more extreme example, but the principle has broad application. The depth of Hazal's feelings on the issue may be gauged from their readiness to single out Elisha for criticism.
50. *Kiddushin* 30b.
51. *Sifre, Ekev*, sec. 5, on *Devarim* 11:13. The remark is paralleled by adjacent comments which posit *karbanot* or *tefillah* as the referents of *avodah*.
52. *Berakhot* 54a.
53. *Yirmeyahu* 16:10–12.
54. *Devarim* 29:17. It is noteworthy that no modifying adjective appears here, willfulness as such being excoriated.
55. See his *Guide*, 1:2.
56. *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 4:4.
57. The phrase also recurs in the Rambam's characterization of Talmud; see *Talmud Torah*, 1:11.
58. *Devarim* 32:4.
59. *Bereshit* 1:31.
60. *Bereshit* 2:15 and *Yeshayahu* 45:18, respectively.
61. *Gezeleh v'avedah*, 6:11.
62. Some have suggested – in certain respects – not without justification that this facet is more acute in Israel than in the Diaspora, inasmuch as ideals of national service and visions of historical destiny compete with more narrowly religious commitments. On this view, the potential inherent in presence in *erez hakodesh* and its proximity to *shekhinah* may, for some, be counterbalanced by other factors. I believe that this is indeed the case; but the topic and its possible ramifications require fuller treatment than I can give here.
63. *Shabbat* 2:3.

64. *Berakhot* 34a.
65. See my contribution, "Law and Spirituality: Defining the Terms," in *Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law*, eds. A. Mintz and L. Schiffman (New York: Ktav, 2005).
66. *Tehillim* 19:9, and *Bereshit Rabbah*, 44:1, respectively. Cf. Rambam, *Guide*, 3:26; Ramban, *Devarim*, 22:6; and Maharal, *Tiferet Israel*, ch. 7, who, in contrast with the Ramban's moral thrust, casts the purgation in question in largely metaphysical terms.
67. *Avot* 3:9. The mishnah speaks of *yirat het* rather than *yirat shamayim*. The relation between the terms requires exploration, although, at times, they appear to be used interchangeably; see, e.g., *Shabbat* 31b. This issue lies beyond my present scope, however. It is noteworthy that the mishnah is not content with asserting that, while the wisdom will flourish, the religious dimension will be deficient. It states that the wisdom itself will, in due time, decay.
68. *Tehillim* 8:5–10. The intermediate description could be read as part of the question, i.e., the Psalmist marvels why, given the relative insignificance of man, he has been so graced. Even on this reading, however, the admiration for man's station is manifest.
69. The word, *hineni*, appears in the text before the reason for God's call has been specified. In light of the sequel, however, it can be understood as total readiness nonetheless.
70. *Bereshit* 22:12. The relevant issues are self-evident and they have spawned a substantial literature. I content myself with calling attention to a particularly stimulating and incisive chapter in Emil Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (Northvale, N.J., 1994), ch. 2.
71. *Devarim* 8:18.
72. *Tehillim* 118:8.
73. "Joy and *yirah*, intertwined as one / Other than by Jews is found in no one." The text was composed at a relatively early stage, but was printed in ספר הזכרון למרן בעל פחד יצחק זצ"ל (ירושלים, תשד"מ) קב-ג.
74. בעקבות היראה: דברי מחשבה (ירושלים תש"ך), יב.
75. *Tehillim* 2:10 and 100:2, respectively. Of course, the specific manifestations of the two qualities may, and often should, vary, depending on circumstances or temperaments; see the comments in *Midrash Shohar Tov*, p. 100. However, the encompassing conjunction is a fundamental value.
76. *Berakhot* 22a. The question of the proper mindset for Torah study is highly interesting and important, but requires further treatment than I can give here.
77. See, particularly, *Yoma* 72b and the comments of Rabbenu Bahyye on *Devarim* 30:15.

9

“Yet My Soul Drew Back”
Fear of God as Experience
and Commandment in
an Age Of Anxiety

Shalom Carmy

Fear without love – surely there is here a deficiency of
love; love without fear – there is nothing here at all.

(R. Yitzchak Hutner)¹

If we rabbis prayed properly, we would not be so afraid of
the synagogue presidents and boards of directors.

(R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik)²

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.

(George Herbert)³

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not
afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same flut-
tering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning.
I keep on swallowing.

(C.S. Lewis)⁴

I

They say that science has made it harder for people to fear God. Once upon a time, they say, illness was something over which people felt powerless, and so the sense of absolute dependence on God filled our spiritual horizon. Nowadays, we place ourselves under medical care first, and think of God second, if at all. Once we prayed for an adequate harvest. Today, when nature withholds her bounty, we either pay higher prices for tomatoes or eat something else instead.

Far from the fleshpots of Modern Orthodoxy, R. Yehezkel Lowenstein, addressing the Ponivezh Yeshiva in Bnei Berak only fifteen years after the Holocaust, seems to agree that his hearers are prone to false security:

Uprooting evil, is long and hard work, and it is possible only after recognizing the physical suffering that is liable to befall one because of his vices and sins. The reason one doesn't think of this is that human beings have pre-
sumptions, so to speak, about this world. One feels secure in his world and thinks it inconceivable that he will be harmed and will lose this world. Therefore he does not contemplate and fear physical punishment. One only lacks confidence in the world to come, and therefore we are more affected by promises about the world to come. For since we are not confident about the world to come, and we ask God to grant us the world to come, therefore

we are agitated and worried that we will not merit the world to come.”⁵

Has modern science indeed made us so secure? Leaving aside the unpredictable features of diagnosis and treatment even today, I want to ask, do scientifically controllable facts truly constitute the central reality for most of us? Are we really so assured that we have little room for God? Perhaps the opposite is true. Leave aside, again, the exceptional events that obsess some – terrorist acts, natural disasters and so forth – which, though most are sure they will never affect us, nonetheless happen. Can we honestly claim that our lives are free of uncertainty, in the areas that count? You work for a company, let’s say you even have job security and enjoy success.: A new boss, is appointed by people who know you not, nor have your interests at heart, a new set of priorities, and, from out of the blue, your situation is radically different from your reasonable expectations. At home, in an era of family instability and a culture of divorce, you wonder whether you are exempt from the failures that plague some of your friends. Because sheer physical survival is not your primary problem in life, these anxieties and tribulations are more important to you than they would have been in another era. No, science doesn’t bestow upon you an easy mastery over your life.

Moreover, the “once upon a time,” before modern life eliminated the fear of God, is earlier than you might think. Those moderns who chose to do so dismissed the fear of God without appealing to the marvels of omnipotent technology. Three centuries ago, Voltaire thought he had refuted Pascal’s evocation of the terror aroused in him by the vast empty spaces that the astronomy of his day had discovered by pointing to the bustle of burgeoning urban centers. “As for me,” he writes, “when I look at Paris or London I see no reason whatever for falling into this despair that M. Pascal is talking about; I see a town that in no way resembles a desert island, but is peopled, opulent, civilized, a place where men are as happy as human nature allows.”⁶ Happy city dwellers as we are, yet we know, as Voltaire did not know (or pretended not to know), that terrible loneliness

and abandonment are often experienced in the midst of all that is opulent and civilized. *Plus ça change* – the desire to evade fear and terror are perennial; the rationalizations change, the underlying reality remains the same.

Someone suggests that the age of science may even enhance our sense of divine presence and human dependence on Him. She cites the famous aphorism ascribed to the *Hafets Hayyim*, according to which all the inventions of modern science strengthen faith: the telephone, for example, demonstrates that what is spoken here can be heard elsewhere, thus reinforcing our sense of divine omnipresence. Others react that this may have been the way the *Hafets Hayyim* perceived the world, but is not typical of the average modern man in the street. I have a different problem: to me the thought that my private world can be listened in on, via up-to-date technology, suggests not only an analogy to the divine omniscience I am committed to, but also the very real threat of being spied on. Rather than enhance my fear of God, it brings to the fore my fear of the secret police.

Why doesn't the *Hafets Hayyim* seem to share my worry? Because he takes it for granted that his audience accepts nominal belief in the governance of God. God's involvement in human affairs, however, is not always clearly manifested. As R. Israel Salanter put it in *Iggeret haMusal* – human beings are bound by their intellect but free in their imagination.⁷ Comprehending the world through the imagination, the tangible present seems more real than invisible eternity. This principle explains many cases of weakness of will, what Aristotle called *akrasia*: the doctor, for example, who warns his patients but continues smoking. Just as one overindulges in food and drink, because the pleasures of the table are imminent while the morning after is remote, so the prospect of divine attention is not as vivid to us as it ought to be. If R. Yohanan ben Zakkai (*Berakhot* 28b) wished that his disciples fear God as much as they fear man, it is presumably because he knew that human surveillance is harder to ignore than the eye of God. For the *Hafets Hayyim*, the danger to faith is the feeling that "God does not see; God has abandoned the earth" (to quote Ezekiel 8:12); the telescope and the telephone reinforce our faith in the presence of things unseen and thus fortify our

belief in God. The fear of God central to this conception is perfectly encapsulated in Vayikra's repeated phrase, "and you shall fear your God, I am the Lord," appended to prohibitions like offering misleading advice, taking advantage of others, taking usury, oppressing the slave, or the injunction to honor the elderly, as interpreted by Rashi, since in these cases one can easily disguise one's motives, we are reminded that one cannot do so unobserved. Regarding these verses it may be worth adding R. David Zvi Hoffmann's suggestion that these sins involve the abuse of people who cannot defend themselves and thus depend on divine protection.⁸

I have no wish to undervalue this traditional Musar insight. My concern, however, in this essay is with fear of God, not exclusively with belief in divine omniscience and omnipresence. For many whose piety is superior to mine, the very awareness of divine presence is tantamount to the fear of God: "the lion has roared, who does not fear?" (Amos 3:8). There are great, unforgettable moments, when Amos's prophetic words correspond to our own experience. And then the Musar formula is correct: our awareness of God, like that of Amos, engenders an overpowering motive to obey Him: "God spoke, who will not prophesy?"

Yet our hearts do not always resonate in this manner. One reason is the one we mentioned, the one that troubled the *ba'alei Musar*: the failure of our imagination, or rather its failure to testify to what we know intellectually. I believe that there are other factors, and that we will neither understand ourselves, nor understand what fear of God is for us, and should be for us, unless we analyze these factors in all their complexity. If the *Hafets Hayyim* worried about the imaginative failure to fear, we should worry whether our fear is the wrong kind of fear.

Given our sense that piety has declined in the modern and post-modern age, and the general spiritual shallowness of a community that is both vulnerable to the dominant secular atmosphere and disinclined to serious self-criticism, one is tempted to regard our confusion about the fear of God as a purely negative phenomenon, the best cure for which is a heavy dose of emotionally loaded Musar preaching. Nevertheless, I believe that we would do well to

subject our ideas about fear of God to careful analysis in the hope that understanding will fortify our religious sensitivity.

There are at least three factors that complicate our conception of what it means to fear God properly: First, as we have noted, fear of God is in “competition,” so to speak, with other kinds of fear, fear of human beings, natural disasters, fear of our own potentialities. Sometimes these fears motivate us to act rightly, as when we refrain from sin or do our duty for the sake of the social or natural consequences; sometimes our fears prevent us from obeying God, because we are swayed by concern about the unpleasant consequences of acting rightly or abstaining from evil. Sometimes our concern for social or natural effects helps to constitute our positive relationship to God.

Second, the fear of God, in Jewish sources, refers to a range of normative experiences and motives. Jewish ethical and halakhic literature distinguishes between fear of punishment (*yirat ha-onesh*), on the one hand, and the reverence or fear, associated with divine sublimity or the numinous (*yirat ha-romemut*), on the other hand. Theological liberals and moral latitudinarians obsessively denigrate the former as a means to presuming the latter. However, as we shall see, both Halakha and common decency require a combination of both strands of experience. Third, there is a creative tension between the fear of God, in all its varieties, and other normative feelings that seem to contravene fear. The most notable of these is the love of God; others are the commandment to imitate Him and to cleave unto Him (*devekut*). In the list of 613 Biblical commandments, the *mitzvah* to fear God is not derived from the verses in Vayikra that link fear of God to specific prohibitions and injunctions, but from the passages in Devarim where fear of God is joined to these other experiential imperatives.⁹

Viewed comprehensively, the theme of *yirat haShem* (fear of God) and its kindred experiences and commandments comes close to being co-extensive with the Jewish moral orientation and with the Jewish experience of God. This terminological ambiguity threatens to make the investigation unmanageable because often the phrase *yirat shamayim* (fear of Heaven) and its cognates are used so broadly

that it becomes a synonym or synecdoche for Jewish piety, and this imprecision tends to blunt the acuity of any attempted analysis. Our goal is not to exhaust the literature. We intend rather to highlight some of the obvious elements of the mitzvah, including some that are regularly overlooked, some impediments to its fulfillment, and some ways it can be enhanced. Let us turn to the phenomenology and the practical implications of the fear of God and its relation to love.

II TYPES OF FEAR

Fear is inherently distressing. We dislike fear. The most natural response to fear, virtually by definition, is the desire to avoid it, either by disabling the cause of the fear or by fleeing the occasion of fear. In the face of this fundamental, universal, perennial fact, it seems superfluous to invoke technological progress or the rise of the modern metropolis to explain why many people avoid thoughts that encourage or mandate fear of anyone, including fear of God. Given the natural inclination to avoid fear, the first question that comes to mind, it seems, is not why people no longer fear God much, but why they would want to fear God at all. Why should anyone regard the experience of fear as valuable in itself? The modernist seems to have reason on his side in feeling that a deity who commands fear is not promulgating the kind of religion that he would care to patronize. To cultivate the experience of fear deliberately, to accept the commandment of fear as part of a divinely bestowed regimen, carries a flavor of paradox.

At least three significant strategies promise to dispel the air of paradox. The first understands fear of God as a healthy means to an end – namely, moral obedience. Precisely because fear impels us to avoid the source of fear, it exercises a potent influence on behavior. A child is taught to fear fire to deter him from playing with matches or putting her hand on the gas burner. So too the fear of divine disapproval or retribution, as already noted, serves to motivate flagging commitment, to turn away from sin and to sustain the effort necessary to do one's duty. Thus *Sefer haHinnukh*, to take a representative medieval work, states that the reason we are commanded

to fear God, which is clear to anyone with eyes to see, is that fear of punishment deters sin. From this perspective, God wants us to fear Him for our own good.

This approach is satisfactory up to a point. It provides a justification that agrees with everyday utilitarian ways of thinking about the instrumental value of fear. Just as adults accustomed to fire are not oppressed by their fear of it, so this kind of fear of God, once we internalize the norm, mellows into a sober caution of sin that no longer terrifies. There is even pleasure in recollecting the education in fear that makes us better able to conduct our lives. R. Nissim of Gerona applies the verse “Rejoice in trembling” (Psalms 2:10) to the sense of spiritual wholesomeness that accompanies the acquisition of this habit of mind.¹⁰

Yet because this approach to the fear of God focuses on the human inclination to sin, it is also problematic. If fear of God is merely a prophylactic, what place should it occupy in the ideal spiritual constitution? Augustine, forced to make room for the fear of God in the world to come, on the basis of Psalm 19 (“The fear of God is pure and everlasting”) explains that this fear cannot be the fear that frightens away from evil, but rather the fear that helps one to persist in a good. Fully conscious of the oxymoron, he proposes the term “serene fear” for the eschatological form of punishment fear, by which he presumably meant an intellectual knowledge that God’s wrath deserves to be feared without the occurrence of fear as an emotion.¹¹ Others, however, who oppose embracing fear of sin in any guise as a permanent ingredient in their spiritual outlook, would dismiss it as suitable only to those whose inherent motivation to act rightly is weak or undeveloped. The tendency to get beyond fear of sin is accentuated in our culture, which does not treat sin or moral failure with sufficient gravity. Hence, we don’t imagine ourselves in need of sharp and constant reminders of our moral and religious fallibility, and concern about such matters is judged obsessive and damaging to the self-esteem we are set to cultivate with an earnestness that borders on the ferocious.

Consequently the first strategy soon requires assistance from the second. One distinguishes between the lower fear of God, which

is merely the fear of punishment, and the higher fear, *yirat ha-romemut*, characterized by a sense of awe or reverence or sublimity; truly it resembles love of God more than the inferior kind of fear. Awe is patently different from ordinary fear: the intellectual underpinning of fear is the belief that one is threatened; awe entails the contemplation or encounter with what is overwhelming, majestic, and grand. Of course the distinction between higher and lower types of fear, well attested in the classic medieval literature, is indispensable for the phenomenology of God-fearing. Anyone skeptical about the pedigree of the distinction can find it in the aftermath of the encounter at Sinai (Exodus 20:17). Moses tells the people not to fear, for God's will is that "His fear be upon your faces, that you sin not." If the word *yir'a* has the same meaning throughout the verse, there is a straightforward contradiction: the people should not fear, because they should fear! Obviously there must be a distinction between the fear born of terror at the theophany and a more reflective fear that is the intended result of the experience.¹²

According to the verse just quoted, the goal of refined fear of God is to transform the raw experience of terror into an inner apprehension that precludes sinning.¹³ Indeed, we should beware the temptation to use the distinction between levels of fear to downplay fear of sin and punishment. Because fear of punishment is unpleasant and because we are so desperate to think well of ourselves, we are often tempted to ignore the fear of divine punishment. We rush ahead, organizing an accelerated graduation from the unsophisticated category of retribution-fear into the ranks of the elite whose experience of God is identical with a profound reverence. Apart from the likelihood of self-deception about our own spiritual state, there is also a danger that such easily achieved claims to reverence may remain little more than an æsthetic affair, like that experienced at the theater, attaching itself to religious images instead of Hamlet or Lear, where we reminisce or fantasize about reverence for God instead of fearing Him in the here and now.

For individuals who claim to have taken the fast track to *yirat ha-romemut*, the Halakha's stubborn adherence to *yirat ha-onesh* (fear of punishment) as a necessary component of the *mitzvah*

becomes a problem. Rambam provides an experiential and intellectual description of the encounter with God that engenders His love and His fear: love is the thirst to know Him, rooted in our consciousness of His infinite wisdom; while fear is finite man's movement of recoil before the Infinite. This account says nothing about guilt, sin or fear of divine judgment. In *Hil. Berakhot* 1:4 he teaches that the recitation of blessings of pleasure and mitzvot and thanksgiving serves to "remember the Creator always and to fear Him."¹⁴ Again, no guilt of fear of punishment. Moreover, in *Hil. Teshuva* 10, he disparages fear based on punishment as appropriate only to the spiritually immature.¹⁵ At the same time, the definition of fear in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* picks out fear of punishment as the primary characteristic of *Yir'a*.¹⁶ It is as if the Halakha insisted on catering to a lowest common standard instead of recognizing that standard's irrelevance to spiritually mature people.

It is terribly easy to satirize the self-serving ingredients in this outlook that disparages fear of punishment. The normative perspective of Halakha and simple self-knowledge confirm that we do not outgrow *yirat ha-onesh*. But the obstacle here is not only the element of self-deception. There is something misleading, on phenomenological grounds, with the way we oppose the higher fear to the lower fear. Again, the distinction itself is well founded. But the problem with distinctions is that too often, in exhibiting the differences among different categories, we lose sight of what they have in common. The primary sources – most notably *Tanakh* – present in the raw, and without alluding explicitly to philosophical distinctions, an undifferentiated experience of fear; the medieval classification, for all its validity, comes later and, to that extent is secondary.

The oracle of doom in Isaiah 2, for example, contains a dramatic portrayal of fear and terror in the face of the divine. It is possible to read this chapter as a story of sin and punishment. The prophecy begins with chastisement for sins of idolatry, avarice and, in the most comprehensive sense, pride and arrogance. The "day" of the Lord is manifested in a frantic desire to flee from God, to hide from His crushing presence; human pretences are humbled. The retributive reading would view this frightening scene as no more and no

less than the punishment inflicted upon the sin of pride. Yet the prophet is saying more than that – humility, the desire to flee and to hide is not only the punishment exacted by an angry deity for sinful arrogance. They are presented as the appropriate response to the overwhelming experience of divine Infinity and Mastery. The sense of awe and terror engendered by the consciousness of sin reflects the same reality that Rambam describes as a response to the magnificence of divine wisdom.

When R. Soloveitchik wishes to evoke the numinous, the sense of reverence and awe that is an integral part of religious experience, he cites Isaiah 2 among other Biblical passages:

To come close to God...is tantamount to self-effacement.
Contact with Him undermines the very existence of man.
The great fire engulfs the little candle. Infinity is not only
the womb from which finitude emerges but also the bot-
tomless abyss into which it plunges in its quest for the un-
attainable: "Enter into the rock and hide there in the dust
for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty."¹⁷

This blurring of the lines between fear of punishment and the encounter with divine Infinity, is not accidental. To consider God's grandeur and our own smallness necessarily imbues us with an overpowering awareness of the magnitude of our debt to Him and profound dismay at the thought that we have failed Him and offended against Him. Conversely, confronting our sinfulness deepens the awareness of our unworthiness to stand before Him. Thus ontological finitude and moral guilt reinforce each other. In George Herbert's "Love," the soul draws back, laden with both "dust" and "sin," alluding to Job's final confession of insignificance and unworthiness (Job 42:6) which emerges, as we recall, not from remorse for his sins, but as response to the divine *mysterium tremendum*.

The catastrophic mood of Isaiah 2 is rarely part of our mediocre everyday religious experience. Even the minority for whom it is not too intense may be unable to make anything of the puzzling notion of flight and hiding from God. We will return to this text later. For

the moment it is important to recognize that such imagery, and the powerful emotional response it precipitates, cannot be cleanly dissected into a fear of punishment, on the one hand, and the exalted fear of God's magnificence, on the other hand. Experientially, the two motives for fear are complementary, not contradictory. As we shall see, one of the strengths of R. Soloveitchik's teaching about fear and love of God is his insistence on the complex relationship between "lower" and "higher" types of fear and love.

If, as I have suggested, we invoke too eagerly the distinction between different motives for fear of God in explaining our everyday religious existence, appealing to a distinction not readily accessible to introspection, perhaps we correspondingly neglect the more evident distinction between immediate, imminent, even instinctive fear of God and reflective fear. In its unadulterated incarnation, the former does not depend on the beliefs of the individual who experiences fear, flinching from a quick serpentine motion, for instance, without first verifying whether the apparition is a snake or merely a piece of rope. Sometimes (as with a harmless snake or other phobias) fear declares itself even when we know there is nothing to fear: The amygdala, scientists hypothesize, reacts fearfully faster than the response mediated through the cortex that overrides the fear as groundless.¹⁸ Philosophers who view emotions like fear as essentially cognitive (and my own inclinations run in that direction) may feel compelled to deny such reactions the status of emotions. From this perspective, fear requires a propositional attitude towards the object that is causing the fear; a cat, on this account, cannot fear dogs, because it has no belief that the dog will attack, and can best be described as being in a "state of fear," a physiological condition free of reflection.¹⁹

Traditional commentators may have captured something like this semantic distinction when they tried to explain the difference between the biblical words *yir'a* and *pahad*. Rashi (Deuteronomy 11:25, following *Sifre*) defines *pahad* (when parallel to *yir'a*) as affecting those who are nearby, while *mora* describes the reaction of those far away; he then states that *pahad* is sudden, while *mora* is a long-standing worry. *Pahad* thus is caused by immediate percep-

tion, imminent rather than distant, sudden rather than given to reflection.²⁰

Many intelligent religious people would view this kind of instinctive fear as inferior to fear of punishment. Fear of retribution, at least, is a rational response to a potential threat. There is nothing irrational about an individual who chooses to reinforce his, or her, fear of God, either by meditating on the harm caused by sin, or by arousing sensitivity to the sacred and to the greatness of God along the lines urged by the Rambam and others. As R. Soloveitchik puts it: "*Pahad* and love are contradictory, *yira* and love are not contradictory."²¹ The experience associated with *pahad*, however, does not seem dependent on reflection. If suddenness plays a constitutive role, it bears a disquieting resemblance to being startled involuntarily by a loud noise or a snake. Aristotle taught that being startled is not the same as being afraid: being alarmed in such cases does not impeach a man's reputation for bravery.²² Whatever the case with courage, no Musar regimen I know advocates shouting boo at individuals as a dignified, reasonable part of their "working on" *yirat haShem*. Yet, if the goal is to shock the individual with a reminder of his psychic fragility and dependence on God, a sudden fright does the job as effectively, in the short run, as more sublime methods. Netziv says that God came to Miriam and Aaron "suddenly" (Numbers 12:3) in order to frighten them. Ibn Ezra cites a view according to which Jacob's entreaty for divine help (Genesis 49:18) was his frightened reaction to the image of a snake representing his son Dan. In this connection, it is worth remembering that the prophecy in Isaiah 2 speaks constantly of the *pahad* aroused by God's overwhelming majesty.²³

So far we have discussed the value of fear as a motive to obedience and as an opportunity for spiritual exaltation. Despite the initial expectation that fear of punishment serves only to spur obedience and that sublime fear addresses man's higher religious aspirations, we have seen that the phenomenological and psychological reality is more complicated. The overpowering fear of God that reduces the human being to confession of finitude and insufficiency cannot be separated from the knowledge of having fallen short in His service,

and awareness of inadequacy before the moral claim of the Infinite leads directly to *yir'at ha-romemut*.

To these practical and emotional motives one may add a third, intellectual rationale for fear of God. Emotions like fear are more than events in the human nervous system. As we know through our reasoning capacity, we also grasp reality through properly functioning emotional capacities. Those who truly crave the most important kind of knowledge, that is the knowledge of God, and who believe that knowledge is not merely, or even primarily, a matter of knowing the truth of all the right propositions, would desire to experience the fear of God in all its varieties, both *yirat ha-onesh* and *yir'at ha-romemut*. The inherently distressing features of the experience would not deter such individuals. Love of truth is sometimes strong enough to cast out the fear of fear.²⁴

Although I do not wish to ignore this philosophical thread in the quest for authentic fear of God, most of us, a large part of the time, prefer the easy life to the examined life. Therefore, it is unwise to assign dominant status to the pure desire for theological truth. As we shall see momentarily, when we discuss R. Soloveitchik's doctrine on love and fear of God, giving appropriate weight to the "lower," primitive, biological sources of religious phenomena has its pragmatic advantages as well.

III

LOVE VS. FEAR?

The commandment to fear God is routinely paired off with the commandment to love Him. Our present purpose is not to survey the extensive literature on the love of God, but better to elucidate the role of fear. As with the varieties of fear, we must guard against the theorist's inclination to overdraw the contrast between the two. As with the different levels of fear, we must also beware the impulse to praise love as a way of denigrating fear.

Offhand, the tendency to dispense with fear of God once one begins to speak of His love is demonstrably false and misleading. In the most basic sense, love is either an attraction to that which is loved, or the desire to promote what is loved. Fear, as the emotion

corresponding to love, is either the desire to distance oneself from what is feared, or to resist and destroy it. When Rambam speaks of the love and fear of God, love is delineated as attraction and fear as recoil. In theory, and in practice as well, one might be strongly committed to what one loves, and express that love by promoting it – caring for the welfare of a human being, furthering the success of an idea – without feeling any desire for closeness with it. And one may act against a person or idea and yet enjoy his company and feel attracted to the idea. In Rambam's account, the individual committed to God always loves God, if what is meant is the fulfillment of His will; yet there are moments where the worshipper experiences a powerful desire for His presence (love) and moments characterized by withdrawal (fear). Both are necessary.

At the outset we cited R. Hutner's dictum: "Fear without love – surely there is here a deficiency of love; love without fear – there is nothing here at all." Reflection on the classical ethical literature confirms his judgment. R. Bahye ibn Pakkuda's *Hovot ha-Levavot* is one of the most perfectionist of these treatises. He is impatient with spiritual aspirations willing to compromise the ideal. Yet, in the climactic section of the book (10:6), devoted to the love of God, when the subject is the marks identifying the lover of God, he lauds (following Exodus 20:17) "the signs of God's fear and dread upon his face." Interestingly, in this chapter the primary reason to prefer *yirat ha-romemut* to fear of punishment is that fear independent of considerations of reward and punishment is unconditional and therefore abiding. Ramban, commenting on the commandment of love in the first section of *Shma*, offers two reasons that fear-based chastisements in Deuteronomy persist, although one might think that love makes fear superfluous. One is that fear is still needed as a motivating factor; the other is that the truly pious person combines fear and love. Ramban betrays no sense that these two explanations are in conflict, because they are not.²⁵ Fear and love are intertwined.

Similarly, R. Kook asserts the Kabbalistic doctrine that the higher fear is above love alone, because only with the higher fear, whose source is *Bina*, does man understand the absolute nature

of commitment to God, and only then is total love possible. In an early sermon from 1892, he suggests that we do not recite Hallel on Rosh haShana because the ultimate judgment reflects a superior consciousness to the gesture of thanksgiving (=love) represented by Hallel. Along these lines he interprets the dispute about the permissibility of fasting on Rosh haShana: the ideal consciousness, integrating love and fear, has no place for fasting; for those who are not capable of comprehending this, fasting may be an appropriate way of marking the awesome day.²⁶

The psychological and spiritual realism that is a hallmark of R. Soloveitchik's thinking is fully in evidence in his presentation of love and fear in *U-Vikkashtem miSham*. In the earlier sections of the work, where he focuses on the juxtaposition of "natural consciousness" (*havaya tiv'it*) and "revelational consciousness" (*havaya gilluyit*) he emphasizes that the natural love of God is rooted in ordinary human biology and psychology: we are attracted to God because we expect Him to satisfy various needs. For the Rav, this is no reason to disparage the "lower" love; we are biological creatures and do not leave our creaturely needs behind us any more than we outgrow the fear of harm if we offend against Him. The Halakha instructs us to fear God, and it also tells us to bless Him at moments of enjoyment, in the appreciation of food and special natural phenomena.²⁷ The centrality of petition in halakhic prayer, which the Rav did so much to explicate, testifies that these aspects of the human condition are dignified and respectable elements in our dialogue with the Creator.²⁸

This natural self-interested outlook, however, cannot transcend its finite horizons. This occurs only when God breaks into our finite world with His commanding presence at Sinai. We are enjoined to remember the fear and trembling that accompanied that event and that continues until this very day as the divine commanding voice reverberates perpetually through our lives. Yet this God-man nexus, which exhausts itself in obedience to God, does not allow for a personal relationship. That is possible only when the human being identifies with the divine commandment (*devekut*). At this stage, both fear and love are transmuted from self-centered performances into gestures of genuine identification with the divine.²⁹ For our purposes,

the crucial lesson is that love of God is not an alternative to fear, nor is it a stage of religious consciousness inherently superior to fear.

Despite all the halakhic, existential and Musar evidence for the honorable status of the fear of God as a Jewish virtue and its compatibility with love, fear is often set against love. What is the basis of this negative judgment? We shall examine three types of factors: one kind of objection to fear is that, *pace* the substantiation offered above, fear is inherently inferior to love and should be so recognized. Or one may hold that fear is a valuable component of religious life but is marred by baleful side effects. Lastly, we must return to our opening question: do certain elements in modern life impede the cultivation of *yirat haShem*?

IV

LOVE BETTER THAN FEAR?

It is customary to laud the love of God as *lishmah*, something pursued for its own sake, free of instrumental calculations. This is what Hazal mean when they oppose the idea of Abraham or Job serving God from love with the alternative of serving Him from fear.³⁰ Rambam, in *Hilkhot Teshuva* 10, offers his magnificent vision of love of God as a kind of madness. Fear lacks a corresponding image of reckless commitment, and therefore suffers by comparison. It is disparaged as not being *lishmah*.

We tend to think of fear as driven by ulterior motives because we tend to identify fear with punishment-fear and love with unconditional love. As we have seen, however, fear is not always reducible to the calculus of self-interest. The highest praise for Abraham, the prototype of serving God out of love, is that he “feared God” (Genesis 22:14). Love, for its part, admits a variety of forms, some of which are as much *she-lo lishmah* as the inferior model of fear. Just as fear may be nothing but the desire to escape punishment, there is a love that is no more than the desire for benefit. The *Hovot ha-Levavot*, listing several levels of worship, classifies serving God for the sake of reward in this world and the next slightly below service motivated by fear of punishment in this world and the next.³¹ While unconditional commitment is superior to self-interested motivation,

and that distinction is often associated with the contrast between love and fear, it is important to recognize the interaction between love and fear in their various forms.³²

A more weighty theological formulation of the superior standing of love derives from Ramban's dictum that love corresponds to the positive *mitzvot* (*mitzvot aseh*) and that fear corresponds to the negative commandments (*mitzvot lo ta'aseh*). The halakhic principle that, in certain circumstances, positive obligations override negative ones indicates that, in the halakhic and theological arena, the works of love predominate over the imperatives of fear.³³ Explicating this principle R. Hutner develops the insight that positive obligations, rooted in love, differ from negative precepts, rooted in fear. The latter is simply a matter of obedience to God's will; the former additionally constitutes the idea of the *mitzvah*. R. Hutner's language here is opaque. At the risk of psychologizing the metaphysical, we may take him to mean that the life of the *mitzvah* creates a positive identity, while adherence to prohibitions does not.³⁴ If the goal of religious practice is to form a positive identity, then educating towards positive actions is more important than concentrating on the necessity of avoiding sin. In concrete terms: lighting Sabbath candles, from this perspective, is more positive than refraining from violation of the Sabbath prohibitions; being a philanthropist is a more positive expression than abstaining from the abuse of people exposed to one's power.

Sound familiar? R. Hutner goes on to observe: "the discerning person recognizes that among the people of our generation it is much easier to get them to make an effort to do something good than to get them to refrain from an improper act, and this demonstrates that even the general element of good in them, hovers in the air, because in the healthy process turning away from evil is the basis of doing good." Why modern people are that way is a question for later. The immediate moral is that any attempt to demote fear of God in the name of love founders because good intentions without self-discipline and the ability to turn away from evil lack substance.³⁵ Elsewhere, R. Hutner champions the integration of love and fear as expressions of different psychological powers. Love is

expansive in both the practical and intellectual spheres – it reflects man's desire to do and to know. Fear contracts the scope of human initiative – refraining from action and accepting the limits of human intellectual aspiration.³⁶

In view of R. Hutner's famous affinity for Maharal of Prague, his failure to engage Maharal here is telling. Maharal maintains that the virtue of fearing God does not come under the category of *imitatio Dei*, since God does not fear Himself. For that reason fear of God is lower than humility. Humility creates a community between God and man – God dwells with the humble; this cannot be said about fear.³⁷ R. Hutner, by contrast, holds emphatically that every component of human virtue, fear of God included, must be rooted in God's ways. With respect to fear of God, the model is His will to contract His creativity by completing His work on the seventh day and affirming a finite world.³⁸

V

IS FEAR OF GOD DEBILITATING?

The Talmud (*Megilla* 25b) discusses whether the curses and blessings and warnings in Leviticus 26 should be translated during public reading. Why not? Because dwelling on these matters could dishearten the people with thoughts of inevitable doom or motivate them to act out of fear of punishment or love of reward.³⁹ The fact that curtailing exposure to the word of God is even raised as a possibility implies that the concerns expressed are, in principle, legitimate. Although fear of God is a vital component of Jewish piety, allowing an intense emphasis on fear to flood the religious awareness is dangerous. Speaking of fear in general, R. Soloveitchik suggests that a modicum of fear is good, and too much is bad.⁴⁰

Does fear of God have side effects that would deter us from its uncritical encouragement? Modern academic ideologists would say yes. Here are two American social historians. Commenting on the changes wrought by nineteenth to twentieth century capitalism they write, "A fearful individual was no longer appropriately pious but rather risked being incapable of taking the kinds of initiatives, of displaying the kinds of confidence, desirable in the new world

shaped by republican optimism and business dynamism. Fear was dangerous, and the individual who deliberately sowed it was abusing authority.”⁴¹

The complaint about lack of initiative is echoed by R. Avigdor Nebenzal, who tells of a student whose childhood dream was to be a pilot, but who was eventually dropped from pilot training course, along with the other religious fellows. One of the officers explains that the religious were educated from childhood to obey, while the pilot requires the ability to improvise as well. Is the imputation true? R. Nebenzal, while rejecting the view that religion is inherently tied to lack of initiative, acknowledges the problem with respect to contemporary education.⁴²

The social historians go further than R. Nebenzal: they indict the traditional religious mentality of deficient confidence and optimism. No doubt defenders of traditional religion can point with pride to examples of entrepreneurial resourcefulness and realism in taking the measure of human beings and situations. And in the intellectual realm I hear a familiar voice retort: “Rabbenu Tam did not improvise? Rambam did not create? R. Hayyim of Brisk displayed no initiative?”

Whether confidence in modern society and optimism are unqualified virtues is also open to question. No doubt some traditionally religious people are timid investors and unduly pessimistic in evaluating people and situations. One wonders, however, whether, at least to some extent, the objections mask a discomfort less with the fear of God than with the fear of sin. It is likely that God-fearing people, tempted by the chance to exploit new social, economic, political or technological orders, hesitate more than others due to moral qualms or concern about unforeseen consequences. If sin is as grievous an affair as religion makes it out to be, then, when in doubt, caution is advisable. It is thus possible that conscience, from the modern point of view, makes cowards of religious people, and that this side effect, if it exists, must either be tolerated or circumvented.

Though there are times when we are indebted to practical boldness, the political record of recent generations indicates that caution

is often justified. In any event, our firm commitment to a life of *yirat shamayim* and *yirat het* should not blind us to the need to examine how these commitments affect us.

The great role model for such self-examination is R. Kook. He was profoundly concerned about the harm caused by fear to the Jewish life of his time. Mostly, he believed that “evil, wild fear” resulted from “continued exile and persecution by base and evil enemies.” The diminution of joy undermines individual elevation; even more so does it cripple the nation. “The first condition [of redemption] is removal of surplus fear from the collective soul, and particularly from the souls of the exceptional individuals...”⁴³ He knows that “the fear of punishment that enters the bones, to the point of pervasive cringing, prevents the spread of the holy light of love and reverence toward the sublime, and this causes spiritual and physical sicknesses, to the community and the individual,” and he believes that contemporary vulgar heresy (*kefira gassa*), which wrecks faith in divine providence, may serve as an antidote to excessive punishment-fear.⁴⁴ Passages like this abound in R. Kook’s writings. But so does the assertion that even under ideal circumstances, fear can have deleterious effects. Discussing repentance, he argues that Yom Kippur must be followed by the joy of Sukkot because the hard work of repentance is psychologically exhausting, like a necessary but difficult surgery, and requires joyful, pleasure-filled recuperation to restore a healthy psychic balance.⁴⁵

VI

CHEAP GRACE, HELLFIRE, SHUL PRESIDENTS – OBSTACLES TO FEAR OF GOD

So far we have considered only critiques and qualifications regarding *yirat shamayim* with a place in traditional Jewish thought. Before seeking distinctively modern aids to fear of God, let us deepen our understanding by thinking about some of the obstacles.

The most substantial of these is our spiritual slackness. Most of the time, reminders of our finitude and moral inadequacy are unwelcome. In our communities, equanimity about our spiritual attainments is strengthened by the low level of halakhic observance

among our fellow Jews and by the moral failings of society as a whole. Since we don't hold our fellow Jews responsible for their deviance, and they are therefore beyond divine chastisement, we naturally assume that we, who are superior to them, as we see it, are likewise above trembling before God's mysterious wrath. It is all too easy to congratulate ourselves for not being as other human beings, if I may coin a phrase. It makes no sense that God would demand of us more than we have given, or that we, of all people, ought to feel uncomfortable, let alone overwhelmed, by His presence.

Liberalized Protestantism, which, in a secularized form, passes for common therapeutic wisdom, smiles on what the German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace," "the grace we bestow on ourselves," the notion that human beings are saved by divine grace and therefore no unpleasant effort to change is required.⁴⁶ The believer has nothing to fear. Over two centuries ago, when Dr. Johnson contemplated the mournful possibility that he might be damned, and a nice clergyman wondered what he meant, he slapped him down by saying, passionately and loudly: "Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly." Even then, Boswell felt compelled to apologize: Johnson's temperament was melancholy, and on his deathbed, when it counted, he was more confident in his salvation; Christianity and tranquility must go together.⁴⁷ What would have been made of him today, or of R. Yohanan ben Zakkai (*Berakhot* 28b), who expressed deathbed uncertainty about his final destination, one can only imagine.

Hell, of course, is not in fashion, by which I mean not only the idea of eternal damnation, but the colorful panoply of future torments portrayed in works like the *Reshit Hokhma* or Dante's "*Inferno*." Not knowing what to say about hell presents a second obstacle to *yira*. Consider this recently reprinted anecdote: The Gra once remarked that it is wrong to view the descriptions of hell in the *Reshit Hokhma* as hyperbole. Whereupon one of his disciples fell into a prolonged illness, from which he almost died. When he recovered and took his master to task for precipitating the ordeal, the Gra repeated that the book should be taken literally, but softened the impact of these words by adding that if a human being knew how much suffering

in this world could alleviate the pangs of hell, he would not hesitate to suffer like Job all his days.⁴⁸

Why would this type of discourse fall flat in many places? We may gain constructive insight by identifying factors not evident in our previous discussion:

1. The media saturate us with numbing images of violence, both real and fictional. Increasingly lurid descriptions of pain and torment are necessary to sustain interest and arouse horror. Eventually these too pall. At the same time, because of medical and political advances, we are unaccustomed to, and therefore extraordinarily sensitive to graphic descriptions of pain. Earlier generations may have responded affirmatively or tuned out repetitive accounts of hellfire; they were unlikely to treat them as exercises in camp, or, alternatively, to be scandalized by their verisimilitude.
2. Counseling against hellfire sermons, the prominent nineteenth-century rabbi R. Yaakov Ettlinger writes: "Mentioning the punishment of hell and other things (and he is angry and rebukes and offends the audience), these things provoke hatred. But when he reproves them with the words of the Torah itself, saying: "Listen brothers, this is what God spoke," nobody can hate him, for everyone will recognize the truth...and this arouses love."⁴⁹ One could interpret this statement as counseling soft words and a mild tone. Hell is inadvisable because nineteenth-century German Jews don't care for it. R. Ettlinger's precise language suggests another reading: when the preacher speaks about hell, he is not citing mainstream biblical or halakhic sources, but relatively marginal and overwrought invective; as he fulminates away, the discourse has the idiosyncratic flavor of the preacher's wrath where he would do better to call upon the word of God. And the lesson to contemporary speakers is to avoid subjectivity when broaching unpleasant subjects like rebuke or fear of God.
3. Most significantly for a constructive analysis of the fear of God today is the change that has occurred in our conception

of what it means to experience the wrath of God. In the old preaching, sin was understood primarily as transgressions to be punished, the imagery was similar to that of conventional corporal punishment or torture.⁵⁰ Fear of God's rod was fear that He would visit upon us our iniquities. For many people today, the primary fear is that of meaninglessness. To fear God is to fear abandonment by God. The desolate soul is less frequently overwhelmed by God's numinous presence than by His thundering absence. In a word, the dominant emotion of spiritual apprehension is anxiety rather than fear.

The causes and scope of this change will not further occupy us here. One could view the development with dismay, as it testifies to an etiolated sense of responsibility: the individual for whom "turning away from evil" and fear of evil's consequences is not a pre-condition of doing good, is deficient in the old-fashioned conception of guilt. One may be justified in going against the grain of the modern temperament, attempting to reverse it by strenuously reaffirming the punishment model. Or one may recognize that, for better or for worse, new analogies, new ways of thinking about fear of God, are needed. The new can supplement the old, or at least, for those whose yearning for love is lacking in fear, help to build a bridge from spiritual numbness to sensitivity.

In an age of anxiety, our fear of others is also transformed. Here is a third challenge to the God-fearing life. We are less obsessed with whether we have done right than we are anxious about where we stand with others and how we measure up to their standards. At the outset we noted that fear of other people and subjugation to their judgment can be a barrier to the fear of God. By the same token, fear and reverence towards those whom we are commanded to respect, and who merit our reverence, is an important ingredient in attaining the fear of God.

R. Soloveitchik reports that a psychiatrist once told him that he would like to eliminate the "Impress Your fear" (*U-ve-khen ten pahdekha*) from the Rosh haShana and Yom Kippur prayers because fear is the primary cause of neurosis. The Rav responded that most

people are plagued by many fears: anxiety about one's career, status, wealth, popularity or fame; fear of illness, old age and vulnerability; great fears and little fears. Only the fear of God can transcend and cast out the multitude of petty fears.⁵¹ The fear of God liberates. If rabbis prayed properly, the Rav said on another occasion, they would not be intimidated by Shul presidents. Conversely, one may suggest, shaking off the yoke of petty fear frees us to fear the One worthy of our fear and awe.

The practical realization of this ideal is difficult. One strand in Jewish ethical literature seems to negate absolutely any notion of legitimate fear of unworthy objects. The *Hovot haLevavot*, for instance, praises the saint who sleeps in the open air, unprotected against wild animals, and who explains that he would be ashamed to show fear of anyone but his Creator.⁵² R. Bahye b. Asher states flatly that it is wrong to fear any human being except for those whose fear is commanded – parents, teachers and lawful political authority.⁵³ Nonetheless the Halakha recognizes fear of a belligerent litigant as an acceptable reason for a judge to excuse himself from hearing a case.⁵⁴ Samuel, aware of the likely threat from Saul, hesitates to anoint a king in his stead, and does not initially rely upon divine intervention to safeguard him.⁵⁵

R. Yeruham of Mir, one of the most eminent pre-Holocaust Musar instructors, teaches that great personalities, like Jacob preparing to meet Esau, relate their experience of fear to their situation before God, even while recognizing that, when threatened by another person or by a wild animal, the object of fear itself is the ordinary fear of the adversary.

Obviously Jacob's fear of Esau was not what we understand regarding the weak person's fear of the violent; surely Scripture does not speak about this and such fear would not be laudable in the holy Patriarchs. Jacob's fear was that he had become defiled by sin (Rashi to Genesis 32:11). Yet in the end, the expression of this fear was his fear of Esau and his four hundred retainers, a natural fear characteristic of every human being to fear a robber or a

wild animal...and that fear of Esau, that is part of every human being's nature, was for Jacob a fear of Heaven.⁵⁶

Most readers of these words do not align themselves with the radical school of *bittahon* (trust in God), which denies and frowns upon the efficacy of human effort and scorns all forms of worldly fear. The unreality we rightly or wrongly impute to this pious approach may lead us to abandon any orientation to *bittahon*. When the fear of God does not tower above all other fears, we exaggerate the potency of those threats and misinterpret the harm that adversity and hostility can visit upon us. We grant the Shul president from hell, of whom we would be less afraid, according to the Rav, if we prayed properly, an almost metaphysical supremacy over us. In truth, much of the time, he and his ilk may not have the power over us that he, or we, ascribe to him, and even if he does, we can, with God's help, overcome. Because members of an anxious community are especially prone to measure their happiness by the weather inside our heads, progress in *yirat shamayim* depends on our success, as individuals and as a community, in ridding ourselves of the bully's shadow, the snob's vulgar sneer, and the desire to be liked by the charming social manipulator. And that success, in turn, is measured by the degree to which we are able to place God and His service at the center of our existence: "The haughtiness of man will be prostrate, and the loftiness of man abased; and God alone will be exalted on that day. And the idols will pass away completely." (Isaiah 2:17-18).

VII

YOUR HEART WILL FEAR AND EXPAND

At the inauguration of the Hebrew University in 1925, R. Kook quoted Isaiah 60:5: "Then you shall see and brighten, and your heart will fear (*pahad*) and expand." Why fear at the moment of eschatological glory? Because novelty is not always an unmixed blessing. The same events may rightly cause shock and a contraction of the heart for some, even when a sense of expansion and satisfaction are also appropriate. The most realistic response to many new developments is not uncritical optimism but a fear that is nevertheless ready to ripen into joy.⁵⁷ Fear, the subject of this essay, is an inherently disturbing

experience. Much of our discussion has compounded the unease by elaborating upon the difficulty attendant upon the acquisition of fear of God as a virtue, the danger of the wrong kind of fear, the perennial and contemporary obstacles to fear of God. Yet the very difficulties we have confronted may also yield distinctively modern ways of fulfilling the commandment to fear God. In the spirit of the heart contracting and expanding, let us examine new practical, experiential and intellectual directions arising from our analysis.

Hazal, of course, recommended a number of practices as conducive to *yirat shamayim*: Torah study, respect for elders, and worship in Jerusalem during the Temple period.⁵⁸ R. Hutner, in particular, called our attention to the difficulty contemporary people, those who have a yearning to do good, experience in turning away from evil. In the light of his insight it would appear that by concentrating on those mitzvot that integrate love and fear, psychological expansion with psychological contraction, we could take advantage of the positive impulses and overcome the crippling defects. These include the observance of Shabbat (the paradigmatic *zakhor ve-shamor*), prayer and the culture of the synagogue. Educators indeed devote attention to these areas and successfully nurtured students show the results.

All the same, the most trying challenges of renunciation often take place in private. One reason that turning away from evil is so difficult is that our community is so fixated on moral reinforcement through public display that we are untrained in private struggle. None of our institutions confers honors on people who make the best of an intolerable job or make a blessing of an unmanageable family situation. There is no *Keter Perishut* award for homosexuals who remain celibate or for the insulted and injured who bury their anger and grief. These are quintessential scenes of *yirat haShem*.

What motivates us to succeed in these tasks? Fear alone? Sometimes. But fear is not sufficient, especially not for our generation. Maharal taught that *imitatio Dei* cannot apply to fear of God, and that fear therefore may not facilitate closeness to God. But *gevura*, in the sense of restraint and self-control, is a divine attribute.⁵⁹ The individual who renounces his or her imperious desires and embraces

the yoke of obedience and self-negation can imitate his Creator in that way. Whenever the lonely individual fulfills the commandment of fearing God through the gesture of heroic renunciation, he or she forges a bond of love with God as well. Maharal's *Netivot Olam* does not contain a treatise on *gevura*; the twenty-first century version must provide one.

Some of you may have felt that I devoted too much attention to biblical descriptions of human beings overwhelmed and virtually annihilated by the numinous presence of God. Many members in good standing of religious institutions know nothing of such experiences. For the rest of us such experiences are mostly associated more with a religious awareness of sin and guilt rather than with the religious *per se* (though in the light of our analysis this distinction may be factitious). In any event, such moments are rarely as intense as those portrayed in the Bible, and they are not frequent or prolonged. Whatever their value for phenomenology of religion, it is unclear how they translate into the world of our everyday life.

What can we learn from Isaiah 2, for example, beyond the exhortation of pride and other vices? The depiction of lowly man vainly attempting to flee from God, seeking out cracks and caves in which to hide, while mountains crash around him probably reflects the great earthquake during the reign of Uzziah.⁶⁰ Yet running away from God, in the literal sense, is impossible. Appealing to such language easily becomes a cliché.⁶¹ How can imagining the attempt enrich our grasp of what it means to fear God?

Appropriating the message of this prophecy identifies several elements that speak to all of us, and not only to those whose religious imagery is especially vivid. First, the desire to flee from God's presence, however absurd, is part of our experience. This is obviously true where we feel guilt and moral shame, as is the case in Isaiah 2. It is no less true when we are overwhelmed by an encounter that is too much for us, even in the aesthetic realm. And as we have seen, the experience of God's grandeur intrinsically communicates a sense of our unworthiness and finitude. Second, the realization that flight is impossible. The inability to escape God is an essential component of the experience of fear, whether it arises primarily from moral

or ontological inadequacy. The awareness that God is with us, no matter how far we fly, is often a source of overwhelming comfort, as magnificently expressed in Psalm 139. Sometimes it gives comfort even at times when God's presence and solicitude is the occasion of reproach, as in Jonah 2. In Isaiah 2, however, the impossibility of not being in His presence is depicted exclusively as the cause of terror.

Lastly, and most important from the point of view of spiritual education, there is the one verse that moves from the descriptive to the prescriptive. It happens to be the verse from this chapter quoted by R. Soloveitchik in *Worship of the Heart*: "Enter into the rock and hide there in the dust for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty" (2:10).⁶² On one way of interpreting the verse, the speakers are panicky sinners futilely seeking to elude divine detection (see Ibn Ezra, Radak, and Metzuddot). I believe the imperative form here is not accidental: the speaker is the prophet; he is saying that the proper response in the face of the *mysterium tremendum* is humility. The proud human being is to lower himself, and the physical expression of this is hiding in the cleft of the rock, making oneself less prominent, taking up less space.⁶³ "The reward of humility is the fear of God" (Proverbs 22:3). "Humility leads to fear of God" (*Avoda Zara* 20b). Shame (in the sense of modesty, though not necessarily sexual) is likewise the mark of the person who is afraid of sin: so the Talmud (*Nedarim* 20a) identifies the "fear of God on your faces" (Exodus 20:17) that follows the revelation at Sinai.

One reason that humility is a virtue especially appropriate to our generation is that it is manifested not only in how we walk before God, but also in our relations with other human beings. All of us succeed in deceiving ourselves, much of the time, about our standing before God, in particular regarding the intrinsically private aspects. Many are tone deaf when it comes to the kind of religious life that has occupied so much of this essay. The arrogant and vulgar can, of course, succeed in remaining oblivious to their impact on other human beings; when they are powerful or charming enough, the victims often connive to cover up the truth. Yet even the swaggering individual who has no shame before God may nonetheless be appalled by moments of insight when he or she realize how they

are perceived by others and how their behavior and attitudes debase their human environment. Democratic, anti-hierarchic trends in our society make it harder for us to cultivate honor, respect, and awe towards our superiors, but provide better opportunities to detect arrogance in our treatment of those dependent on our good will. As religious individuals and as members of observant communities, we ought to make the most of the advantages our age offers, as we seek to minimize the obstacles it places before us.⁶⁴

We began our discussion by puzzling over the difficulties that many modern people think they have achieving fear of God. We have discovered that the problems may be different than is commonly assumed. We have explored the variety of experiences subsumed under the fear and love of God, and the ways they are, and should be, inextricably intertwined. That our soul draws back from God's invitation is fear, born of dust and sin, finitude and guilt; yet it is a fear inseparable from love.

Let us return to our earlier insight that fear, in our culture, primarily takes the form of anxiety. We first made this observation when we listed some of the reasons that the apprehension of hell is no longer a powerful spur to religious obedience and awe, even among those who practice traditional religion. "We are afraid of pain but more afraid of silence," wrote W.H. Auden over sixty years ago.⁶⁵ Fear, in its traditional import, is identical with the desire to avoid or annihilate a threat. Anxiety, at one level, is an antipathetic experience. Yet to be anxious is to desire. Thus a fear informed by anxiety is a fear informed by love. It is a fear that even people who find it easier to summon up the effort to do something good than to refrain from an improper act (to recall R. Hutner's diagnosis) can aspire to.

John Donne, after reviewing the speculations of his time about literal interpretations of hell – fire, brimstone, the undying worm, and so forth, concludes: "when all is done, the hell of hells, the torment of torments is the everlasting absence of God, and the everlasting impossibility of returning to his presence... Yet there was a case, in which David found an ease, to fall into the hands of God, to escape the hands of men...; but to fall out of the hands of the living

God, is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination.”⁶⁶ David’s wish (II Samuel 24) to be chastised directly by God, rather than fall into the hands of men, is familiar to us as the opening verse of the daily *tahanun*. Perhaps, for the reasons just adduced, Donne’s evocation of the incident speaks to us today even more directly than it did four centuries ago. Our hell is the hell of silence and anxiety, not that of high tech tortures and gnashing of teeth. The greatest terror is not that God watches over us, counting our sins, and ordering our penalties, but that, responding to our estrangement from Him, He will leave us to our ultimately meaningless devices.⁶⁷

After the death of his wife C.S. Lewis was surprised to realize that grief feels like fear. Fear, in the shape that most beleaguers and challenges us today, very much resembles grief.

NOTES

1. *Iggerot u-Ketavim* (Brooklyn, 1991) p. 346.
2. *Morgen Journal*, January, 20, 1954
3. George Herbert, “Love (III)”
4. C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, 1963) p. 1.
5. Yehezkel Lowenstein, *Or Yehezkel*, Vol. 6, 12 (Benei Berak, 1996).
6. Voltaire, “On the Pensees of M. Pascal,” *Philosophical Letters*, trans. E. Dilworth (New York, 1961), p. 124. Cf. R. Kook, *Olat Reiyah*, II (Jerusalem, 1962), p. 122: “*Yirat het* (fear of sin) should be integrated with life. There are people who have *yirat het* but it is not strong in them; therefore, when they distance themselves from the clamor (*hamon*) of life and its tumult they fear sin, but when they connect themselves to life, in activities and business, *yirat het* withdraws from them.” For R. Kook, it is the distractions of life, not its pleasures, which bring oblivion.
7. *Iggeret haMusar*, ed. M. Pachter, *Kitvei R. Yisrael Salanter* (Jerusalem, 1972) 114ff.
8. Leviticus 19:14, 31; 25: 17, 36, 43. Rashi derives his interpretations from *Safra* and *Kiddushin* 32b; at 25:36 he explains that usury requires the reminder because the avarice involved is hard to control. For additional sources, see *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, s.v. *yirat haShem*, Volume 25:89–91.
9. See Deuteronomy 6:2, 13, 24; 8:6; 28:58. Rambam *Hil. Yesodei haTorah* 2:1 and *Sefer haMizvot*, Aseh 4.
10. *Derashot haRan* 10.
11. Augustine, *City of God* 14:9. If this explanation is unacceptable, he goes to suggest that the verse is not referring to the experience of fear at all, but instead to the everlasting character traits acquired through fear of God; (cf. R. S.R. Hirsch’s commentary, ad loc). For a more extended sermonic commentary by Augustine, see James O’Donnell, *Augustine: a New Biography* (New York, 2005), pp. 157–59.

It is worth noting that Radak interprets the verse as anti-Christian: the Torah's commandments are eternally binding.

12. See Malbim *ad loc.*
13. R. Kook (*Olat Reiyah*, II, p. 122) distinguishes fear of sin from fear of Heaven: "Fear of sin is sorrow and shame and incompleteness, when one gazes upon the majesty of supreme wisdom with downcast face, and sees that he cannot attach himself to it because he is defective, and he is mournful, so the defect of soul is sin, and the fear to beware of it is fear of sin. Fear because of the distance of the divine light from him, and the shamefacedness and sorrow, is fear of Heaven."
14. See also R. Soloveitchik, *Shiurim l'Zekher Avi Mori*, Vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1983), 179ff on God's "aweful" Name (*nora*). His illuminating comments on the *Hil. Berakhot* 1:4 passage are not yet published.
15. See also R. Hutner, *Pahad Yitzhak* on Yom Kippur (Brooklyn, 1978), chap. 18.
16. *Hil. Yesodei haTorah* 2:2 and *Sefer haMizvot*, Aseh 4.
17. R. Joseph Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart*, ed. S. Carmy (Hoboken, 2003), p. 71. Of course, Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* is part of the background of the Rav's discussion and my comments on it.
18. See, for example, Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain* (New York, 1996)
19. See, for example, Robert Gordon, "Fear," *Philosophical Review*, 89, pp. 560–78.
20. See Malbim to Isaiah 51:13, Micah 7:17 and Psalm 27:1 *inter alia*, stressing the imminent quality of *pahad*. Gra (Proverbs 3:25) argues for the element of suddenness, a view criticized (without mentioning his name) by Netziv to Deuteronomy.
21. *U-Vikkashtem miSham*, in *Ish haHalakha, Galuy ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem, 1979), p. 174. See p. 173, n. 13 on the negative and positive connotations of *pahad*
22. See, *inter alia*, Aristotle, *De Anima* 3:9.
23. Netziv to Exodus 4:3 (and see further his comments in Numbers and *Emek haNetziv* to the verse in Numbers) maintains that Moses' flight from the rod that had turned into a snake was purely instinctive. He further argues that this reaction was improper, despite the fact that it was not under his control, and that the fear God inflicted upon him in Numbers 12 is a kind of punishment for that flight. Although Netziv does not link his approach here to his rejection of suddenness as an ingredient in *pahad*, I believe that he may have stressed the difference between fear, which is potentially a valuable religious experience, and being startled, which is not. Verses like Proverbs 3:25 or Job 22:10, which refer to sudden fear, therefore are not describing a good experience. See also Netziv to Genesis 22:1.
24. A similar theme is sounded in Terry Eagleton's recent *Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic* (London, 2003). To Aristotle's ancient question, why tragedy, dealing with misfortune and horror, provides pleasure, Eagleton responds, if I may simplify his lengthy analysis, that people appreciate and enjoy tragedy owing to a fundamental desire for truth, willing to confront the worst in order to comprehend the world as it is. Reviewers have observed that this orientation shares more with Eagleton's erstwhile Catholicism than with his present neo-Marxist affiliation.
25. Commentary to Deuteronomy 6:5; cf. his remarks on 6:13 and 11:1 where Ramban

- says that the commandment of love ought to be, and is, commonly followed by the commandment to fear.
26. R. Abraham Yitzhak Kook, *Meorot haReiyah, Yerah ha-ETanim* (Jerusalem, 1995), p. 89.
 27. *U-Vikkashtem miSham*, 135ff.
 28. See *Worship of the Heart* and S. Carmy, "Destiny, Freedom and the Logic of Petition," *Tradition*, 24:2, (Winter 1990), pp. 17–37 and "Without Intelligence, Whence Prayer?" ed. A. Mintz and L. Schiffman, *Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law* (New York, 2005), pp. 455–88.
 29. See *U-Vikkashtem miSham*, *passim*. According to the Rav, even *imitatio Dei* is a fundamentally submissive gesture (18of). See further my "Cleaving as Identification: R. Soloveitchik's Account of "Devekut, *U-Vikkashtem Mi-Sham*" (forthcoming in *Tradition*, Memorial issue for Rabbi Walter Wurzburger, guest editor Reuven Bulka).
 30. See Mishna *Sota* chapter 5, Bavli 31a, and E.E. Urbach, *The Sages*, chapter 14.
 31. *Hovot haLevavot* 3:4, categories 7 and 8. R. Bahye does not appear to see much difference between the two. He writes that the person who hopes for reward (level 7) lacks any conception of God's exalted nature. Perhaps the one who fears punishment is more advanced in this respect; more likely R. Bahye applies the same criticisms in both cases and simply chose not to repeat the detailed diagnosis.
 32. I wonder whether we are consciously or unconsciously influenced by the temporal asymmetry between love and fear. Ancient philosophers like the Stoics contrasted love, not with fear, but with hate. Love and hate are both oriented to the present; hope and fear are attitudes towards the future. Thus the structure of hope and fear, as these terms are commonly used, entails calculation about the future, while love and hate are more easily understood as ends in themselves. The use of these terms in Jewish thought and Halakha is not rigidly committed to this convention. While Rambam treats love and fear of God as immediate responses to contemplation and experience in *Hil. Avodat Kokhavim* 3:10 he makes the conventional temporal differentiation: worshipping idols out of love means enjoying them aesthetically and the like; worshipping out of fear means fear of reprisal by idolaters for failure to worship.
 33. Ramban to Exodus 20:8. For further discussion see *Hatam Sofer to Bava Kama* 9b (Jerusalem, 5743) and notes *ad loc.* and R. Yosef Engel, *Tsiyyunim laTorah* section 24. See also R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Woman's Obligation in Levirate Marriage," in E. Daum *et al*, *Maamar Yevamim* (Alon Shevut, 2004), pp. 11–25, and particularly 19ff on a possible distinction between agent-based and act-based clashes between positive and negative mitzvot.
 34. R. Yitzchak Hutner, *Iggerot u-Ketavim*, 346ff. One could extend this insight about the distinctive nature of positive commandments by pointing to the principle according to which involvement in one *mitzvah* (*osek be-mitzvah*) exempts one from other *mitzvot*, and the philosophical idea that the ideal observance of one commandment with pure intent can bestow upon the soul eternal life; see Rambam's

- Commentary to Mishna *Makkot*, end of chapter 3, and R. Yosef Albo, *Sefer haK-karim* 3:29 (note that Albo located this chapter within his discussion of Torah rather than in Part 4, where he addresses questions of reward and punishment).
35. Compare the argument in my "Use It or Lose It: On the Moral Imagination of Free Will," in Y. Berger and D. Shatz, eds. *Judaism, Science, and Moral Responsibility* (Lanham, 2006), pp. 104–54, especially 126–33. There I contrasted R. Dessler's idea of freedom, based on triumphant inner struggle, with R. Kook's doctrine, for which freedom is deepest self-expression. Like a good modern, I let R. Kook get the better of the discussion. One important principle of R. Dessler's account survived all critical scrutiny: freedom is possible only when the individual has had the experience of successful self-control, and self-control is normally manifest, not in creativity, but in the capacity for renunciation.
 36. See *Pahad Yitzhak* on Pesah (Brooklyn, 1970), chapters 50 (pilgrimage to the Temple as a joyous occasion that requires gestures of withdrawal and reverence) and 54 (the delight of Sabbath is rooted in the injunction to abstain from creative work, and the positive imitation of God requires acceptance of His "dark," unknowable and hence not given to imitation, side).
 37. See Maharal, *Netivot Olam*, *Netiv ha-Anava*, chapter 1. See also *Gur Aryeh* to Deuteronomy 10:12 and n. 34 in the Hartman edition (Jerusalem, 5754), about the compatibility of closeness to God with fear of God.
 38. *Pahad Yitzhak* on Pesah, chapter 54.
 39. See Rashi and Maharsha *ad loc* and *Hovot ha-Levavot* 10:6. For the sake of conciseness I have conflated different versions of the Talmudic text.
 40. *U-Vikkashtem miSham*, p. 173.
 41. Peter Stearns and Timothy Haggerty, "The Role of Fear: Transitions in American Emotional Standards for Children, 1850–1950," *American Historical Review*, 96, pp. 63–94.
 42. R. Avigdor Nebentzal, *Sihot leRosh haShana* (Jerusalem, 5748), p. 67.
 43. "On Fear," *HaPahad*, in *Eder ha-Yekar* (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 119–21; likewise, "On Literature" in *Maamrei haReiyah* (Jerusalem, 1984), 502ff.
 44. See *Orot haKodesh*, IV, 32–33, pp. 421–22.
 45. *Olat Reiyah*, II, pp. 367–68, and *Orot haTeshuva* 9:10.
 46. See Bonhoeffer, "Costly Grace," *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, 1963), pp. 35–47.
 47. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, June 12, 1784. For background, see Stephen Miller, *Three Deaths and Enlightenment Thought: Hume, Johnson, Marat* (Lewisburg, 2001).
 48. Zeev Grinvald, *Moreshet Avot, Bereshit* (Jerusalem, 1992), p. 24.
 49. *Minhat Ani* (Jerusalem, 1966) to *Vayelekh* (129b). Thanks to my student Ephraim Meth, who thought this sermon would interest me.
 50. For rabbinic hell imagery, see Saul Lieberman, "Of Sins and Their Punishment," *Texts and Studies* (Hoboken, 1974), pp. 29–51.
 51. R. Soloveitchik, *Al ha-Teshuva* (Jerusalem, 1975). pp. 140–41.

52. *Hovot ha-Levavot* 10:6. One could moderate the import by suggesting that the saint does not deliberately act recklessly but that, finding himself exposed, his trust in God enables him to sleep serenely. However, the simple sense of the story is that the saint is totally indifferent to worldly danger.
53. *Kad haKemah s.v yir'a*, in *Kitvei Rabbenu Bahye* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 192–96 and Commentary to Deuteronomy 20:1.
54. *Sanhedrin* 6b. The commandment “Do not fear any man” (Deuteronomy 1:17), addressed to the judge, applies once the judge discerns which party is in the right or hears the case. For that reason R. Bahye b. Asher does not appeal to this verse, as the Halakha would undermine his case. Instead he uses the prohibition of fear in war, despite the obvious rebuttal that fearlessness is forbidden in battle for tactical psychological considerations, not for ethical or theological reasons.
55. 1 Samuel 16:2. See *Pesahim* 8b.
56. R. Yeruham Leibovitz, *Daat Hokhma u-Musar* (New York, 1967), p. 23.
57. *Maamrei haReiyah* 306–308.
58. See *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Vol. 25, pp.85–86.
59. For the ethical meaning of *gevura*, see R. Soloveitchik’s “Catharsis,” *Tradition*, 17, 2.
60. See Jacob Milgrom, “Did Isaiah Prophesy During the Reign of Uzziah?” *Vetus Testamentum*, 14, 164–82, 178–82.
61. Francis Thompson’s melodramatic confession “The Hound of Heaven,” with God pursuing the desperate sinner through the lurid, labyrinthine demimonde streets of late nineteenth century London, is one instance where the figure of speech comes to life.
62. In *U-Vikkashtem miSham*, 158, R. Soloveitchik quotes more extensively from this prophecy.
63. Francine Prose’s recent novel *A Changed Man* describes the moral rehabilitation of a half-hearted neo-Nazi who drifts away from that way of life without a clear project of repentance and regeneration but ends up growing into a responsible person. Readers of the book may notice how often the hero and other sympathetic characters arrange their bodies so as to take up less room.
64. See Corey Robin, *Fear: the Political History of an Idea* (Oxford, 2004). Robin cites studies to the effect that our late capitalist culture is rife with behavior that systematically humiliates employees. The most dramatic examples involve strictly regulated bathroom breaks in low paying factory jobs and ridiculous techniques used in training middle management executives. I am more familiar, and more concerned about, less drastic and less creative practices.
65. W.H. Auden, “For the Time Being,” lines 124–25.
66. George Potter and Evelyn Simpson, eds., *The Sermons of John Donne* (U. of California Press, 1962) Vol. v, p.266. I have modernized the spelling.
67. C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, is a fine dramatization of this point.

10

*Lechu Banim Shim'u
li Yirat Hashem*

*Alamedchem: Come,
Children, Listen to Me;
I Will Teach You How
to Revere the Lord. If
Only It Were So Easy*

Kenneth Auman

We are all familiar with the phenomenon: A Yeshiva high school graduate spends a year of Torah study at a Yeshiva in Israel, and returns home transformed. His parents and community hardly

recognize him. The cool teenager of last year, with his casual approach to life has been replaced by a serious and intense personality. Whereas in former years he might have ambled into *shul* on a Shabbat well after the service had begun, sat in the rear with his friends, and paid scant attention to the *davening*, he now is there at the start of the service, *davening* earnestly, clearly in serious conversation with his Maker. Very often the family and community, when they recover from their initial shock, are favorably impressed with the transformation, and feel that all in all, the change was for the better. They may not approve or agree with all of his newly held views – he may now espouse a world outlook that they consider to be excessively parochial or perhaps provincial – but they are willing to forgive him for this because of the many improvements in his character that they perceive. What they often cannot fathom, however, is why the “newfound religion” is often accompanied by a dramatic change in external attire as well, with white shirts and black suits replacing the much more casual dress of last year. And of course the ultimate symbol of the new look is the black fedora now sitting where the small knitted *kippah* formerly perched.¹

The family and friends are at a total loss when attempting to understand the religious motivation behind the change of attire. They can understand the *zehirut be-mitzvot* [care in observance of mitzvot] and the focus on *limud ha-Torah* [study of Torah] as outgrowths of the newly increased religious commitment, but they utterly fail to comprehend the need to dress in a manner that represents a Judaism quite different from their own. They are willing to admire increased commitment to *shmirat ha-mitzvot* [observance of mitzvot], but at the same time feel that this commitment ought not be paired with a mode of dress so foreign to the normal styles of American youth.

So what indeed is the idea behind the rather modern concept² in the Yeshiva World that legislates a style of dress that cannot be classified as halakhically required?³ Does dressing in a particular manner somehow serve to inculcate *yirat shamayim*? If it does, how is this feat accomplished, since the particular mode of dress promoted is in a sense arbitrary? I raise these questions neither

to criticize the Yeshiva World nor to defend it, but rather by way of introducing the difficult issues that we hope to address – issues inherent in understanding the concept of *yirat shamayim* not in a vacuum, but as a cause and as an effect in terms of changing people's behavior, hopefully for the better. A discussion of such issues, if it is indeed to be real, i.e., apply practically to our lives, must take into account the different models and philosophies within Orthodox Judaism that co-exist, sometimes peacefully but always uneasily with each other.

While this paper primarily addresses itself to what is generally called the Modern Orthodox community, we cannot view any one part of the Orthodox community as an island unto itself. There is often movement between the different groups, one example of which was described above. And within the large metropolitan areas of the United States that house the large Orthodox communities, members of the different subgroups dwell in close proximity, and cannot but be influenced by each other. The lines of distinction between the various subgroups in Orthodoxy are fuzzy rather than sharp, and there are entire segments of certain communities that could in fact be viewed as extensions of other communities.⁴ So we will be referring to and contrasting various subgroups in our comments. Furthermore, rabbis and *mechanchim* [Jewish educators] of all stripes agree that there is a great need to inculcate *yirat shamayim* within the members of their very varied constituencies. They are also in agreement that there is no sure proof formula or quick fix to enhance *yirat shamayim*.

Any discussion of attempts – be they successful or not – to inculcate *yirat shamayim* in a given population must begin by formulating a working definition of *yirat shamayim*. The term “working” is used advisedly, for the purpose of this particular paper is not to analyze or define rigorously the concept itself, but rather to discuss practical or real life issues that arise from attempts to educate or inspire the public towards *yirat shamayim*. In attempting to develop such a working definition, we must take into account that which we ideally seek to develop or bring out in people. In this regard we try to negotiate between two extremes. On one side there is the specter of

a *yirah* that consists of superstitious or pagan fear (as opposed to the *yirat ha-onesh* described by the classical sources⁵) of being punished by a vengeful deity who was angered by the individual's transgressions. This type of *yirah* effectively puts a damper on any attempt at forging a meaningful relationship with God. After all, who wishes to be close with a vindictive, angry deity? At the other extreme is no *yirah* at all but rather the image of God as a grandfather, who is at our service, and who nods approvingly at all our actions. This religious placebo type of approach obviates the need for any rigorous self-discipline or desire to improve one's *shmirat ha-mitzvot*.

Our working definition, therefore, should focus not on what *yirat shamayim* is or is not, but rather upon what it seeks to create. For our purposes we will speak of *yirat shamayim* as a motivational feeling, a genuine desire to create a relationship with God through the strict discipline of, and the joy and satisfaction in, *shmiraat ha-mitzvot*. While such motivation inherently assumes certain basic knowledge, e.g., God's omniscience and intimate awareness of our thoughts and actions, it is primarily a feeling – a desire, which creates the motivation. This type of feeling internalizes the aforementioned basic knowledge to make it an essential part of one's personality and behavior. This internalization of knowledge to create a strong feeling is expressed by the author of the prayer *Nishmat* with the phrase, "*kol atzmotai tomarna Hashem mi kamokha*," roughly translated as, every fiber of my body cries out, O God there is no one like you."⁶ It is not merely the mind or the intellect that acknowledges the uniqueness and greatness of God, but every fiber of one's being, creating an emotion far more powerful than something limited to the mind.

Defining *yirat shamayim* as a motivational feeling emphasizes that our discussion refers to promoting greater *mitzvah* observance as an outgrowth of this feeling. Increased *mitzvah* observance for other reasons may or may not be laudable, depending upon a number of factors.⁷ External manifestations implying piety that are inherently not *mitzvot*, such as the particular style of dress described above with regard to our born-again yeshiva student do not enter into our discussion at this point, although they raise interesting issues that will have to be clarified later on in this discussion.

Our working definition of *yirat shamayim* highlights for us the basic problem encountered when attempting to inculcate *yirat shamayim*. If *yirat shamayim* is indeed primarily a feeling or desire that becomes part of one's character, it cannot be "taught" anymore than happiness can be taught to a melancholy person. One can beautifully instruct the melancholy individual in the religious principle, "Who is truly wealthy? He who is happy with one's lot,"⁸ or if he himself believes it, in the Hassidic teaching, "It is a great *Mitzvah* to be constantly in a state of happiness,"⁹ but no amount of education will raise his spirits. We would rather recommend therapy to enable the emotions to feel what the mind already knows. And therefore the question for us is: what therapy can we employ to inculcate *yirat shamayim*?

For example, how does one "teach" what to feel when entering a *Bet Knesset*? Or, how does one "teach" *kavannah* [intent] in *tefilla*? One can explain the meanings of the words, one can explain the themes that they express, but these explanations in and of themselves do not guarantee *kavanah*. One can explain all the *halakhot* of *kedushat bet ha-knesset* [sanctity of the synagogue], but this does not teach one how to feel God's presence in the synagogue. The Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik of blessed memory, remarked in one of his *tshuva drashot* that he felt that while he had achieved some degree of success in passing on the legacy of Torah study that he received from his father and grandfather to his own students, he did not achieve a similar level of success with regard to transmitting the emotions that were as much part and parcel of his ancestors' heritage as their Torah learning. The meticulous analyses of Rav Chaim he had transmitted, but not Rav Chaim's feelings of encountering the holy on Yom Kippur.

Maimonides, in discussing the criteria for a Jewish king, evidently assumes as well that *yirat shamayim* cannot be taught. He states (*Hilkhot Melachim* 1:7): Once the king has been anointed, he and his descendants are forever entitled to the throne – for the monarchy is an inheritance...But this is true only if the son is his father's equal in knowledge and *yirah*. If he possesses the requisite *yirah* but lacks the knowledge, we appoint him to the position, and

we instruct him (in the knowledge). But one who does not possess *yirat shamayim*, even though he has great knowledge is not appointed to any position of authority...

The possibility that the candidate who lacks *yirat shamayim* can be instructed in it is not entertained by Maimonides. There is evidently no easy way to instill *yirat shamayim* in him who lacks it. Yet Maimonides, as he continues his discussion seems to imply that while humans cannot easily implant *yirat shamayim* into others, God Himself can, and indeed does so upon occasion. Maimonides continues, "Once David was anointed, he acquired the crown and it is for him and his sons for eternity...but he only acquired it for his meritorious descendants...but nevertheless the monarchy will never depart from his descendants; the Holy One Blessed be He promised him so as it states, 'If your descendants forsake my Torah and follow not in my laws I shall punish their sins with a rod, and with plagues their wrongdoings, and I will not remove my kindness from him.'" In other words, should the descendants of David lack the requisite *yirat shamayim*, they will be afflicted in different sorts of ways and these afflictions will motivate them to rekindle their religious feelings.¹⁰

The notion that *yirat shamayim* cannot be taught in conventional fashion appears to be contradicted by the simple sense of two biblical verses in two different contexts. In *Dvarim* 14:23, in discussing the laws of *Maaser Sheni*, separating a tithe that must be transported to Jerusalem and eaten there, the Torah offers as the rationale for this commandment, "So that you will learn to fear God your Lord all the days." The implication is that one can indeed learn to fear God. And the Psalmist implies this as well in the verse we quoted in the title to this paper, (Psalms 34:12) "Go children, heed me, I shall teach you the fear of God."

Most traditional biblical commentators, however, understand the term *tilmad*, in the first verse quoted above, which is usually translated as, "you will learn," to mean something else. After all, how does eating food, even sacred food, in Jerusalem teach one anything? Ibn Ezra and Hizkuni translate *tilmad* as, "you will habituate yourselves,"¹¹ and Rashbam appears to take it as, "you will be inspired."¹²

Nahmanides alone, amongst the medieval commentators accepts the literal interpretation, i.e., learning, and he understands it as referring to learning about the commandments themselves rather than the attitude of *yirat shamayim* about which we are speaking.¹³

With regard to the above mentioned verse from Psalms, “I will teach you the fear of God,” it is striking that in the subsequent verses in that chapter, there is no mention of how this teaching is to be accomplished. It is as if the Psalmist sets us up and then does not deliver. The message then, here too, is consistent with our sense that there is no easy way, or no way at all to provide instruction in *yirat shamayim*.

Herein lies the challenge of the *Rav*, the pulpit rabbi, or the *Mechanech*, the religious educator, vis-à-vis *yirat shamayim*. The rabbi or educator is oriented to regard teaching as the *modus operandi* of choice for communication between himself and his “clientele.” After all, Torah is communicated primarily through instruction. It comes as a rude awakening to the novice that simply giving a *shiur* is not necessarily going to make all that much difference in the religious lives of his congregants or students. The newly ordained rabbi, full of enthusiasm will most likely work very hard to create interesting educational programs, and yet he may discover, as time goes on, that while his congregants find these programs to be of great interest, no significant changes have taken place in their religious or spiritual lives. This initial disappointment has the potential to develop into cynicism as the young yeshiva student evolves into the polished pulpit rabbi or veteran *mechanech* over a number of years. Rather than reach for the skies as he did in his youth, the middle aged rabbi-educator might give up entirely, believing that nothing he will say or do will make any difference in the quality of the religious lives of his congregants-students. This self-perception of rabbinic ineffectiveness is a not insignificant factor in contributing to rabbinic burnout. And even when burnout does not occur, the failure of the religious leader to elevate the spirituality of his flock will negatively impact on him impairing his ability to function as a *Rav* or *Mechanech*.

There are two somewhat contradictory strategies that ought

to be employed when the religious educator inevitably realizes that despite his or her best efforts, he is seeing very few results. One strategy is to attempt methods of communication other than the standard teaching to which he is accustomed. The biblical text cited above, "So that you will learn to fear God your Lord all the days," can be instructive. We noted that while most of the commentators avoided understanding the word *tilmad*, as learning, they did take it to mean effecting a positive change in attitude – either by becoming habituated to *yirat shamayim* or by being inspired to it. Both habituation and inspiration can be important tools in the rabbi's or educator's communication arsenal.

The Talmud relates the story of the mother of R. Nahman b. Yitzhak who was told of potentially evil tendencies in her newborn son. To counteract these tendencies she kept his head covered at all times, and insisted (presumably as he grew older) that he do the same telling him, "Cover your head in order that you have fear of heaven."¹⁴ The idea of covering the head to induce *yirat shamayim* is an example of habituation. The constant wearing of the head covering serves to internalize the external message of God's constant presence in the world.

Similarly, one who observes the *halakhot* of proper behavior in the synagogue consistently will eventually internalize the concept of *kedushat bet ha-knesset*, leading to the ability to feel the presence of the Divine upon entering the synagogue. Two individuals entering *shul*, one reciting *Ma tovu* immediately, and then rigorously adhering to the prohibition of *sihat hulin*, idle conversation, while the other upon entering immediately striking up conversations with friends, experience the synagogue in significantly different ways. For the former, it is a truly religious experience. He is far more likely to feel the Divine than is the latter. But the issue for us is, how does one motivate one's charges to accept the necessary changes in behavior?

The other branches of Orthodoxy have used habituation to great advantage. Both Hasidic and Yeshiva Judaism have promulgated codes of dress for males that are difficult to justify on purely halakhic grounds. It is very difficult to make the case for the exis-

tence of a halakhic requirement to wear a *streimel* or a black hat on *Shabbat*, or white shirts and black suits at any time.¹⁵ Yet these codes of dress are strongly enforced or encouraged. They serve as a type of uniform; those who wear it identify with a certain philosophy or social group. Feeling part of a group provides strong incentive to follow the behavior patterns of that group as a whole. And if that group sees its philosophy as a true expression of *yirat shamayim*, adherence to the dress code is the first step to that ideal.¹⁶ This can explain the phenomenon described in our opening scenario – the born-again yeshiva student who dons the black hat – wearing that hat is a statement of allegiance to an ideology that sees itself committed to *yirat shamayim* at its most intense.

A major synagogue in the New York metropolitan area began a campaign a few years ago to eradicate *sihat hulin* [idle conversation] from the synagogue. The campaign was spearheaded by the rabbinic, professional, and lay leadership of the congregation, and has resulted in dramatic change in the synagogue environment and experience – all for the better. Innovative approaches were employed to achieve this turnaround, and while it is still too early to know whether the change will be permanent, what has been accomplished to date is impressive. A typical (unfortunately) large, Orthodox synagogue, where incessant chatter normally drowns out the sound of prayer, has become a model of proper and appropriate behavior.¹⁷ Indeed behavior can change, and habituation can be successful, albeit with great expenditure of time and effort, utilizing proper leadership.

In this particular case, the initial motivation was the result of two factors: the realization that the level of chatter in the synagogue had reached crisis proportions, and the knowledge that a smaller synagogue in the neighborhood was making a name for itself with its extremely spiritual, beautiful, and quiet service. However it was only through the extraordinary efforts of the rabbis, the executive director, and the *shul* administration, that habituation was achieved. Some of the effort involved motivational talks from the pulpit, but the major work was done on a different level – through meetings with small groups of members, through streamlining and shortening the

service, through reordering the service to create a feeling of greater flow, and through the public posting of the names of all those who pledged to refrain from *sihat hulin* in the synagogue.

The realization that we must often think out of the box and become innovative is both encouraging and daunting. It highlights for us the strengths and weaknesses of rabbinic authority in the modern era. Today's rabbi cannot rule by fiat. In the case of the aforementioned decorum project, had the rabbis decided to approach the problem with the premise that they could impose their will upon the congregation by the use of disciplinary measures, e.g., publicly castigating violators or issuing bans and *issurim*, they would have undoubtedly failed, and perhaps even endangered their own positions within the congregation.¹⁸ With innovative thinking, on the other hand, by creating a partnership with the congregation, they succeeded beyond their own expectations. The rabbi today may have less "power" than the rabbi of yesteryear whose word was law, but he does have considerable moral authority and influence. He can use this influence to move people to behavior that will habituate them towards *yirat shamayim*.

Returning to our term *tilmad*, which sparked our exploration of habituation, we noted above that Rashbam understood it to mean, "be inspired." This provides another method for us to analyze: what has the potential to inspire our people towards greater *yirat shamayim*? Or to phrase the question differently, are there role models available that can be models of inspiration to emulate their *yirat shamayim*? Are there individuals currently alive to whom we can point and reasonably expect people to look to them as models for proper behavior? Or are there famous figures from the past who can serve as inspiration?

My experience has been that people within the Modern Orthodox community are not overly impressed with tales of the righteous or *Maggid* type presentations. Perhaps due to the fact they have a greater secular orientation than those in the *Haredi* community, they tend to react cynically to the types of stories wherein everyone always was and continues to be a *tzadik*. Furthermore they tend to prefer more intellectual discourse, albeit not overly halakhically

technical. Those who are impressed by *sipurei tzadikim* can be inspired by them; those who react cynically cannot. Therefore what may very well be an effective tool in the *Haredi* world will not be successful in the Modern Orthodox one.¹⁹

It is perhaps these two different reactions to *sipurei tzadikim* that can account for the significantly different reactions exhibited in different parts of the Orthodox world to the biography of the early years in the life of R. Yaakov Kamentzky that was published a few years ago. The book, entitled *The Making of a Godol*, by his son, Rabbi Nosson Kamentzky, created a controversy shortly after it was published. It was criticized in the *Haredi* community by many (though decidedly not by all) and was even the subject of a ban, yet it is my impression that it was received much more favorably in the Modern Orthodox community. Precisely those points that troubled the *Haredim* – finding fault with *gedolim* or portraying them with the character traits that are common to most human beings – is what appealed to the Modern Orthodox. The point here is not to criticize or defend *The Making of a Godol*. Nor are we interested in commenting on the negative reaction to the book. However what is worth noting is that Rabbi Nosson Kamenetzky may well have hit upon a type of biography that does have the potential to inspire the relatively cynical Modern Orthodox community. While this community may scoff at the notion of stories of human beings portrayed as angels acting in heroic manner as having any relevance to them (or indeed any credibility at all) they will not similarly dismiss stories of ordinary human beings rising to great heights. This genre of biography – honest assessments of how ordinary people became great – might indeed serve to inspire even the more cynical amongst us. Perhaps some experimental work ought to be done with these types of biographies to determine whether or not they can be utilized effectively in promoting and inspiring *yirat shamayim*.

But it is not only the deceased that we ought to turn for inspiration. Another important difference between the *Haredi* and Modern Orthodox worlds is their respective willingness to place great leaders (currently alive) on pedestals. The consequence of placing them on pedestals is accepting their authority; for the *Haredim*

this is second nature. Whether it is the *Rebbe* for *Hasidim*, or the *Rosh Yeshiva* or *Posek* for the *Yeshiva* world, his pronouncements are accepted by his constituents with utmost seriousness. For the Modern Orthodox, this is not the case at all. We, in good democratic tradition, are reluctant to cede our autonomy by subjecting ourselves to someone else's jurisdiction. While this approach might make for good democracy, it does not make for good Judaism, and it prevents us from having living roles of *yirat shamayim* to whom we can look. It prevents us from being able to point out to our children wonderful role models. (And when our children often discover these role models on their own, they fault us for not having exposed them to these role models.)

The religious leader can attempt to counter this tendency to equalize by emphasizing the greatness of particular individuals. He can by his own behavior reinforce this message as well. If his congregation sees that he places his own teachers and mentors on a pedestal, perhaps they will be moved to do so as well, thereby having appropriate role models for *yirat shamayim*. Furthermore, the religious leader should attempt, by his own personal conduct, to be a model of *yirat shamayim* that can be emulated. This is no simple task, for it requires a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, the leader ought to be beyond reproach in every aspect of his personal conduct, both *ben adam lamakom* and *ben adam lachavero*. But on the other hand, he must appear as "normal" to his people – otherwise they will not view him as a realistic model for their own behavior.

To summarize: Rather than merely teach his followers, the leader can attempt to both habituate and inspire them towards *yirat shamayim*. He can promote certain desirable models of behavior, and he can provide role models for emulation. If he is even minimally successful, his teaching will fall upon newly attuned ears. He will have created a method of impacting upon others in a positive manner, and at the same time made himself feel good about his own work and accomplishments.

There is a second strategy that the young teacher or rabbi can employ if he begins to feel disillusioned when he perceives his teaching falling upon deaf ears. This strategy appears to be antithetical to

the models of habituation and inspiration that we have developed above. Instead of reaching for the stars only to be devastated by failure, perhaps the rabbi or teacher ought to lower his expectations. Perhaps he ought to measure spiritual improvement in millimeters rather than in inches. Perhaps he ought to follow the teaching of *Hazal*: *pruta upruta mitztarefet lecheshbon gadol*,²⁰ [penny after penny adds up to a large sum] and realize that over time millimeters will add up to inches. The young rabbi would do well to take the long term approach and begin his tenure softly rather than come out swinging.

The teaching of the *Mishna* in *Avot*, “It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to exempt yourself from it,”²¹ perfectly expresses the tension inherent in attempting to inspire and habituate on the one hand, and lowering one’s sights on the other. One must never despair of attaining the lofty goal of instilling *yirat shamayim*, yet one must be realistic enough to realize that it is a long, almost never ending process. And when even minimal improvement in his congregants’ lifestyles and behavior seems light years away, the rabbi can garner additional comfort from the fact that our prophets of old who were certainly capable and able, were not generally able to effect positive changes in the general Jewish populace during the entire period of the first Temple. At times they even despaired, but ultimately they never abandoned their mission.

The basic premise upon which we have been operating is that instilling *yirat shamayim* is more of a motivational than an educational process. To this end, we have focused upon the term *tilmad* in connection with *yirat shamayim* in line with those commentators who eschew the literal interpretation. Nevertheless, education does indeed play a role in the overall process, as a precursor to the inspiration or habituation that we have discussed. We might say that while education is not necessarily the method of choice for imbuing *yirat shamayim*, it is indeed a prerequisite for the process. Therefore Nahmanides’s understanding of *tilmad* which is quite literal should be understood in this light. Our rabbis teach, *Lo am ha-aretz hasid*,²² the ignorant cannot be truly pious or righteous, which in our context means that one must possess a minimal amount of knowledge as to

what is required Jewish behavior before being motivated to behave Jewishly. All the motivation in the world cannot be defined as *yirat shamayim* if that motivation does not lead one along the path of Torah and *Mitzvot*. And one who truly possesses *yirat shamayim* will be motivated to study further to learn what is required of him or her. Education therefore is both a prerequisite and a result of *yirat shamayim*. The true *yerei shamayim* will make sure to have before him a clear idea of what is expected of him, by engaging in Torah study. We must therefore devote some attention to the issue of education and Torah knowledge as it impacts upon practice.

Let me state at the outset that my observations in this regard are just that – observations. They do not constitute a sociological study of the Modern Orthodox community, but consist of my informal observations coupled with discussions with other *Rabbanim* and *Mechanchim* over the years. There is no doubt that a rough correlation can be drawn between levels of education and levels of observance in the Orthodox community. In general, the higher the level of knowledge, the more meticulous is the level of observance. Today's Orthodox community is significantly more learned than that of fifty years ago, and the level of observance has increased as well. While some might decry this as part of the oft vilified “move to the right” within contemporary Orthodoxy,²³ we laud it as a sign of greater commitment. Nevertheless, there is a significant divergence of levels of practice within similarly educated groups. Some people simply ignore what they are taught and practice the same Judaism that their less educated parents and grandparents did. The difference between those who assimilate their education into their practice and those who do not can be described as a function of different levels of *yirat shamayim*.

Hazal referred to a phenomenon similar to what we are describing, terming it being *moreh heter* [self-serving leniency]. Even though one has knowledge as to what the ideal course of behavior ought to be, he convinces himself that such ideal behavior is not really necessary. This phenomenon is particularly evident when the optimum standard of behavior is only observed by the few, while being ignored by the many. The power of *hora'at heter* was so great

in the eyes of *Hazal* that they did not deem individuals who violated prohibitions based upon it to be willful violators, but rather considered them as accidental transgressors.²⁴ In Talmudic times *hora'at heter* was generally based upon lack of knowledge; today it is often based upon attempting to evade the consequences of knowledge. In other words, if an individual learns of a particular requirement of *halakha* of which he was previously unaware, and notes that this particular requirement is not observed by a great number of people, he will be *moreh heter* by arguing that since it is ignored by so many, it must not be truly required.

While *hora'at heter* is by no means unique to the Modern Orthodox community,²⁵ it does have its own particular manifestations within this community. Today's Modern Orthodox community descends to a great extent from prewar American Jewish Orthodoxy. This group, for reasons to be discussed below, did not obey certain areas of Jewish law. Many of the neglected areas related to aspects of *tzniut* and appropriate behavior between the sexes, but included aspects of *hilkhot Shabbat* and other areas as well. This laxity of behavior did not indicate a lack of commitment on the part of the Orthodox Jews of those times; to the contrary, those Jews were extremely dedicated to their concept of *shmirat ha-mitzvot* and sacrificed a great deal to observe *Shabbat* and *kashrut*, for example. However, many areas of *halakha* were beyond their mindset of required *mitzvot*. Their vision of Judaism and its requirements was not based upon extensive learning or knowledge and therefore had significant gaps in it. Furthermore the desire to be as American as possible tended to cause certain *halakhot* to be unpopular since these *halakhot* ran counter to the norms of prevailing society at that time.

The advent of the postwar refugees and the subsequent development of the Hassidic and Yeshiva communities lessened the ability of the general Orthodox populace to be *moreh heter* with regard to many neglected *halakhot*. After all, significant numbers of observant Jews were now keeping *halakhot* that had heretofore fallen by the wayside. For this reason, many of the descendants of the prewar American Jews began to keep many of the areas of *halakha* that

their parents had neglected. And many of the parents changed their behavior as well, due to the education that their children received or due to the increased knowledge that they themselves had acquired.

However, a not insignificant number of the new generation continued to be *moreh heter*. They were comfortable with the “abridged version” of Orthodoxy that they had inherited, and were resistant to change, notwithstanding the education that they received. But as we stated, being *moreh heter* was now more difficult than before, since significant numbers of Jews were in fact observing these *halakhot*. What therefore began to develop was an ideology of *hora’at heter*.²⁶ It went something like this: Modern Orthodoxy differs philosophically from the newcomers’ Orthodoxy in a number of ways. It is more open to general culture and secular education; it is more open to Zionism and viewing the State of Israel as a religiously positive development; it is more open to working with nonobservant Jews whenever possible. These beliefs are adopted by way of sincere conviction rather than convenience. Hence, the other aspects that accompany Modern Orthodoxy as well, the laxity with regard to particular *halakhot* are also adopted by way of sincere conviction rather than convenience. They represent our way of being modern and observant at the same time. With this type of reasoning, sociological reality became ideologically justified.²⁷

This type of *hora’at heter* renders its protagonists impervious to change through education; if a previously unknown *halakha* is learned, it can be written off as being only for the “other” Orthodoxy with its different non-modern ideology, rather than for the Moderns. Just as *lehavdil*, a nonobservant Jew might state, “We Reform Jews need not observe *kashrut*,” our Orthodox protagonists might state, “We Modern Orthodox Jews need not observe the prohibition of *kol isha*.”

Notwithstanding the ability to be *moreh heter*, major strides have been made in recent decades to improve *halakhic* observance. There is today a much wider acceptance of many *halakhot* such as *bishul akum*, carrying on Shabbat, *tzniut* [modesty], and serious Torah study on a daily basis. On a communal basis as well, *halakhic* standards have been raised over the decades. For example, the

overwhelming majority of Modern Orthodox synagogues no longer sponsor social dances or New Years' parties although there are many individuals who continue to do so. Another example is that communal *kashrut* standards have risen significantly over the years.

What emerges from this description is that education does indeed play an important role in fostering increased Torah observance. The ability of people to be *moreh heter* is indeed a problem, but the past decades demonstrate that the problem is not insurmountable. What *Rabbanim* and *Mechanchim* ought to emphasize is that the ideology of Modern Orthodoxy not be misused as a defense against increased fealty to *halakhic* norms and strictures. Rather Modern Orthodoxy should be presented as a philosophical-ideological movement, not one which promotes laxity in observance.²⁸ And the religious leaders should, to whatever extent possible, not be ashamed to portray themselves personally as ideological adherents of Modern Orthodoxy – their halakhic pronouncements then cannot so easily be written off as religious fanaticism.

In conclusion: The barriers to fostering *yirat shamayim* are formidable. The religious leader staring at those barriers is faced with a number of different options. He can view the barriers as impenetrable and close up shop either literally or figuratively. He can attempt to bring down those barriers by the use of the rabbinic battering-ram, resulting in his defeat due to the lack of true force available to him. Or he can slowly, over the years wear down the barriers ever so slightly by a combination of humor, understanding, compassion, and insight, resulting ultimately not in the destruction of those barriers but in creating cracks through which the light of Torah and *yirat shamayim* will be able to shine with greater and greater strength, ultimately rendering the barriers useless.

NOTES

1. Not every young man who goes through this process adopts the *Haredi* mode of dress. Many remain firmly rooted in the principles and mores of the modern Orthodox community, albeit with heightened Torah observance.
2. The current mode of dress for Yeshiva students appears to have developed on these shores. There are many extant photographs of prewar yeshiva students who do not appear to have been dressed in any kind of uniform dress or headgear.

3. See below p. 9 and note 17.
4. There are large communities of ostensibly Yeshiva world Orthodoxy located in places such as Brooklyn, Queens, Monsey, and Passaic whose members are all professionals and are actively involved in the world at large. While they send their children to non-Zionist *yeshivot*, their own views on subjects such as Israel are not all that different from many in the Modern Orthodox camp.
5. *Mishne Torah Hilkhos Tshuva* 10:5. *Tosafot* to *Yebamoth* 48b s.v. *She'ein osin*
6. *Shabbat* morning prayers
7. The Talmud in *Psahim* 50b and in a number of other places quotes R. Yehuda in the name of Rav who urges people to be involved in *Torah* and *mitzvot* even for ulterior motives. The *Tosfot* there s.v. *kan*, based upon a contradictory passage of the Talmud in *Brahot* 17a. state that learning for the sake of self aggrandizement or to portray someone else in a negative light is wrong, and the "ulterior motives" discussed here are merely lack of wholehearted commitment. On the other hand, in *Sotah* 22b the *Tosfot* (s.v. *Prosh*) feel that all types of ulterior motives should be encouraged other than those who at the very outset of their learning are committed to violating the *mitzvot* and engage in *Torah* study for purely intellectual pursuits. Yet a third view is found in *Tosfot* to *Brahot* 17a s.v. *ha'oseh* where they differentiate between selfish ulterior motives (minimally acceptable) and ulterior motives designed to harm others (unacceptable). Also relevant to this discussion is the Talmudic statement in *Rosh Hashanah* 4a that if one gives charity with an ulterior motive in mind (e.g., the merit of the charity will cure his sick child) he is considered perfectly righteous. This becomes relevant in discussing individuals who may observe *mitzvot* without much religious conviction for purely social reasons (i.e., to be part of a particular social group) or to give others the impression that they are very righteous.
8. *Avot* 4:1
9. *Likutei Etzot* of R. Nahman of Breslov, *Helek Simcha*, Paragraph 30.
10. We all witnessed a phenomenon along these lines in the wake of September 11th, when there was a religious revival of sorts in the New York Metropolitan area. Though it was short lived, it does point to the fact that catastrophes do have the potential to awaken dormant feelings of religiosity. See *Megillah* 14a, *Gedolah hasarat taba'at* [greater was the influence of removing the ring] that indicates that the specter of impending catastrophe can be a powerful motivational force as well.
11. Ibn Ezra presents two interpretations. His first is probably in line with that of Nahmanides and the second, which he prefers, is that *tilmad* here is akin to Hosea 10:11, *egla melumada*, a trained or habituated heifer. Hizkuni concurs, and adds an additional verse that supports this interpretation, *Pereh limud midbar*, a wild donkey accustomed to the wilderness (*Yirmiyah* 2:24).
12. Rashbam states, "When you will see the place of the *Shekhina* and the *Kohanim* at their worship and the *Leviim* upon their platform [singing] and the Israelites at their stations." This is clearly an inspirational rather than educational process.

13. He states that "The *Kohanim* and the Judges who stand there before God, [those who are] the teachers of Torah will teach him to fear Him and will instruct him in the Torah and the *Mitzvot*." Nahmanides appears to understand fear of God in the context in which it is used in this verse to be instruction in *Torah* and *Mitzvot* so that they can be properly observed.
14. *Shabbat* 156b. See also *Kiddushin* 31a that R. Huna b. R. Yehoshua never walked four cubits with his head uncovered stating, "The Divine Presence is above my head."
15. Other than the requirements of *tzniut* [modesty], there are no guidelines that *halakha* establishes to govern the particular style or mode of one's dress. Of course, there are certain restrictions that preclude particular types of clothing. The prohibition of either sex wearing garments meant for the opposite one will impact upon what a person cannot wear, but does not impose any particular requirements of what one must wear. Similarly, the prohibition of *hukat akum* (if indeed it applies at all to Western style clothing – see for example *Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah*, Vol.1, no. 81) might be restrictive in terms of particular styles of clothing, but does not mandate any particular style.
16. There are no guarantees. There have been reports of individuals in Hassidic garb sighted in places that should not be mentioned, let alone visited. But the mere fact that such sightings cause a sensation indicates in general how the dress code does work positively. For a fascinating argument against exclusivity in clothing, however, see the commentary of *Netziv* to *Vayikra* 21:6 in both his *Ha'amek Davar* (s.v. *kedoshim yihyu*) and his *Herchev Davar* (note 1)
17. Telephone interview with Rabbi Kalman Topp, then acting Rabbi and currently Rabbi of the Young Israel of Woodmere, Woodmere, New York.
18. See the well known comments of *Hazon Ish* to *Yoreh Deah* 2:16 and *Even Ha-Ezer* 118:6 that coercion in the modern age is not only ineffective, but counterproductive.
19. There are for example immensely popular inspirational speakers in the *Haredi* world who draw large crowds, but who are virtually unknown in the Modern Orthodox world. On the other hand, if one looks at the rosters of the scholars in residence of Modern Orthodox synagogues, one will find popular speakers there who are virtually unknown in the *Haredi* world. It is not merely from whence the speakers come, their styles and content are entirely different.
20. *Sotah* 8b.
21. *Avot* 2:16
22. *Avot* 2:5
23. See below page 18.
24. *Sanhedrin* 26b, *Hanhu kvura'e*..., *Hoshen Mishpat* 34:4.
25. There are types of behavior popular in both the Hassidic and Yeshiva communities which are widespread, and run counter to halakhic requirements. The continuation of these types of activities is a manifestation of *hora'at heter* as well.
26. I do not believe that this ideology developed deliberately. It was probably a subconscious reaction to the change of events described.

27. More than twenty years ago, when I was in the process of interviewing for a rabbinic position, one interview began with the following question: "Rabbi, what do you think of Modern Orthodoxy?" I responded by presenting my views on the importance of viewing one's self as part of the larger world, and being involved in it. After my lengthy presentation, the questioner responded, "But Rabbi, what do you think of mixed swimming and women wearing pants?" For years I referred to this as two different ways of viewing Modern Orthodoxy – the philosophical-ideological, and the sociological. I now believe, however, that the one is an outgrowth of the other, and that the philosophical was used to justify the sociological.
28. We, of course, are referring to leniencies for which there is no halakhic basis. There are leniencies with regard to certain *halakhot* that are followed by many in the Modern Orthodox camp that do indeed have halakhic justification, such as using non-*halav yisrael* milk on the basis of government inspection, mixed seating at weddings, shaving on *Hol Hamoed*, or women studying Talmud. Furthermore, as mentioned above, there are leniencies without much halakhic basis that are prevalent in other groups as well.

11

A Nation Under God: Jews, Christians, and the American Public Square

Meir Soloveichik

JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND A “NATION UNDER GOD”

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia found himself on foreign soil, at an international legal conference in Rome. Shocked by what had occurred, the participants at the conference gathered around a television to watch President Bush address the nation and the world. “When the speech had concluded,” Scalia recounts, “one of the European conferees – a religious man – confided in me how jealous he was that the leader of my nation could conclude his address with the words ‘God bless the United States.’” Such invocation of God, the conferee assured the Justice, was absolutely unthinkable in the conferee’s country, “with its Napoleonic tradition of extirpating religion from public life.”¹

In Scalia’s mind, the sentiment illustrated the fact that while one

may instinctively group the United States with the democratic states of Western Europe, in truth, the former differs profoundly from the latter. Americans, Scalia argued, continue to remind themselves that while they live in a democracy, indeed the oldest democracy on earth, it is not, and never has been, a secular one:

We have done that in this country (and continental Europe has not) by preserving in our public life many visible reminders that – in the words of a Supreme Court opinion from the 1940s – “we are a religious people, whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.” These reminders include: “In God we trust” on our coins, “one nation, under God” in our Pledge of Allegiance, the opening of sessions of our legislatures with a prayer, the opening of sessions of my Court with “God save the United States and this Honorable Court,” annual Thanksgiving proclamations issued by our President at the direction of Congress, and constant invocations of divine support in the speeches of our political leaders, which often conclude, “God bless America.”²

Should Jews join Scalia in affirming that the United States is a religious nation, whose very governmental institutions proclaim the existence of God? Should we affirm a political philosophy that insists on religious freedom, but also on the importance of government-affirmed faith? And if America’s religiosity derives from a predominantly Christian population – if the United States remains, in the words of G.K. Chesterton, “a nation with the soul of a Church”³ – can Jews, given our profound theological disagreements with Christians, join them in affirming that all Americans comprise a nation that is under God, a religious nation whose values, and even legislation, bespeak that religiosity?

My answer to these questions is affirmative, and my argument will be derived from two sources. I will begin by examining the writings of the Rav that relate to interfaith dialogue. In his discussion of this subject, R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik addresses not only the

obligation of man to improve the moral and physical welfare of the world, but also the unique role that religious Jews and Christians share in fulfilling this charge. The Rav, I will argue, provides us with a model of a society in which people can disagree profoundly about theological questions, while at the same time insisting that a basic biblical conception of God and morality ought to be acknowledged by society. I will then turn to the writings of the American Founding Fathers, wherein we find an astoundingly similar perspective. I will conclude by arguing for our responsibility, as Jews and as human beings, to maintain the way that America has historically seen itself.

“CONFRONTATION” AND “ON INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS”

In his 1963 essay “Confrontation,” the Rav argued that Jews live a dichotomous existence. We are, in this world, simultaneously *ger vetoshav*: “[W]e belong to the human society and, at the same time, we feel as strangers and outsiders.”⁴ On the one hand, we are members of humanity. As such, we are obligated to fulfill God’s charge to our ancestor Adam: “The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it.”⁵ In fulfillment of this charge, Jews are obligated to join our fellow human beings: “We are determined to participate in every civic, scientific, and political enterprise. We feel obligated to enrich society with our creative talents and to be constructive and useful citizens.”⁶

On the other hand, the Rav writes, we are unique; as Jews, we are part of a chosen nation, an individual faith community:

We Jews have been burdened with a twofold task: we have to cope with the problem of a double confrontation. We think of ourselves as human beings, sharing the destiny of Adam in his general encounter with nature, and as members of a covenantal community which has preserved its identity under most unfavorable conditions, confronted by another faith community. We believe we are the bearers of a double charismatic load, that of the dignity of man, and that of the sanctity of the covenantal

community. In this difficult role, we are summoned by God, who revealed himself at both the level of universal creation and that of the private covenant, to undertake a double mission – the universal human and the exclusive covenantal confrontation.⁷

The Rav famously continues by stating that when it comes to the strictly theological issues that define our faith, as a covenantal community, no public, communal dialogue should take place between Orthodoxy and Christianity. When, however, the issues to be discussed are those that relate to both Jews and Christians as human beings, seeking to enhance the welfare of humanity, dialogue is not only permitted but encouraged. The confrontation between Judaism and Christianity, Rav Soloveitchik argued, should “occur not at a theological, but at a mundane human level.”⁸ In these matters, he wrote, “religious communities may together recommend action to be developed and may seize the initiative to be implemented later by general society.”⁹

The practical implication of these instructions is a dichotomous relationship with religious Christians. On the one hand, religious Jews resist dialogue on issues that relate only to the Jewish people as a covenantal community. On the other hand, religious Jews, together with the rest of the world, are obligated to seek what the Rav calls “the dignity of man,” and we therefore engage those outside our covenantal community in what the Rav refers to as a “universal confrontation.”

Many readers of R. Soloveitchik’s essay conclude that he banned Jewish-Christian communication that is even loosely linked to religious beliefs. Moreover, “Confrontation” is popularly understood to imply that Orthodox Jews are to see Christians irrespective of religion, as human beings, descendants of Adam, enjoined to work together for the welfare of the world. In this universal task, it is often assumed, religious Christians have no more or less to contribute than their secular brethren, and our dialogue with religious Christians on issues relating to enhancing “human dignity” is thoroughly unrelated to religion.

Mostly overlooked in this discussion is a series of guidelines on interfaith dialogue authored by the Rav that groups religious Jews and Christians together and apart from the rest of world, uniting religious Jews and Christians by insisting that they communicate with each other in a basic moral language that is religious in nature, based on an ethics predicated on belief in God and in the distinctiveness, and spiritual nature, of the human being. Originally published as an open letter in the *Rabbinical Council of America Record* and printed as an addendum to "Confrontation," the Rav's instructions on the matter lapsed into obscurity, largely omitted in discussions, Orthodox or otherwise, of Jewish-Christian relations.¹⁰ Entitled "On Interfaith Relationships," it has recently been republished in *Community, Covenant, and Commitment*, a collection of the Rav's correspondence.

Rav Soloveitchik begins "On Interfaith Relationships" by reiterating his insistence that communal dialogue of a strictly theological nature is not to take place: "In the area of faith, religious law, doctrine and ritual, Jews have throughout the ages been a community guided exclusively by distinctive concerns, ideals and commitments."¹¹ Our love of and dedication to God, the Rav continued, "are personal and bespeak an intimate relationship which must not be debated with others whose relationship with God has been molded by different historical events and in different terms."¹² Theological dialogue should be avoided, for then the Jew and Christian "will employ different categories and move within incommensurate frames of reference and evaluation."¹³

R. Soloveitchik then adds two extraordinary paragraphs about the context in which interfaith dialogue *is* to occur, delineating exactly how such dialogue is to proceed. It is clear from this passage that the dialogue permitted by the Rav is still very much linked to religion. Every word in these two paragraphs is crucial, but I have italicized those phrases and sentences that will provide the framework for our discussion:

When, however, we move from the private world of faith to the public world of humanitarian and cultural endeavors,

communication among the various faith communities is desirable and even essential. We are ready to enter into dialogue on such topics as War and Peace, Poverty, Freedom, *Man's Moral Values, the Threat of Secularism*, Technology and Human Values, Civil Rights, etc., which revolve about religious spiritual aspects of our civilization. Discussion with these areas will, of course, be within the framework of our religious outlooks and terminology.

Jewish rabbis and Christian clergymen cannot discuss socio-cultural ethicists in agnostic or secularist categories. *As men of God, our thoughts, feelings, perceptions and terminology bear the imprint of a religious world outlook. We define ideas in religious categories and we express our feelings in a peculiar language which quite often is incomprehensible to the secularist.* In discussion we apply the religious yardstick and the religious idiom. We evaluate man as the bearer of God's likeness. We define morality as an act of *imitato Dei*, etc. In a word, even our dialogue at a socio-humanitarian level must inevitably be grounded in universal religious categories and values. However, *these categories and values, even though religious in nature and Biblical in origin represent the universal and public* – not the individual and private – in religion. To repeat, we are ready to discuss universal religious problems. We will resist any attempt to debate our private individual commitment.¹⁴

Let us now analyze the most significant features of this important and underappreciated statement.

MEN OF GOD

The first extraordinary phrase in R. Soloveitchik's statement is the statement that Jews and Christians are both "men of God" who, to some extent, share a "religious outlook." In order to understand the singularity of R. Soloveitchik's attitude to interfaith dialogue, as well as to the Christians participating in this dialogue, his ap-

proach must be contrasted with that of R. Moshe Feinstein, who saw any form of communal interfaith engagement as a violation of *hitkarvut la-avodah zarah*.¹⁵ In contrast, R. Soloveitchik clearly saw the possibility of Christians and Jews speaking about God and to some extent meaning the same thing, albeit within the context of a strictly moral discourse.

This does not mean, God forbid, that the Rav would say that Judaism and Christianity are equally true or are equally valid expressions of a larger truth. In “Confrontation,” the Rav made clear that part of his opposition to theological communal dialogue was his concern that the deep theological disagreement between faiths would become blurred. A faith, wrote the Rav, by definition insists “that its system of dogmas, doctrines, and values is best fitted for the attainment of the ultimate good,” and that “equalization of dogmatic certitudes, and waiving of eschatological claims, spell the end of the vibrant and great faith experiences of any religious community.”

Jews disagree fundamentally with Christians about many things, not least among them whether one of the people alive during the period of the second *Mikdash* also happened to be divine. Moreover, it is a given that for Jews to acknowledge a human being as God would be a violation of the prohibition of *avodah zarah* [idol worship]. Jews must be wary lest, in the interest of communal relations, this great theological disagreement is diluted.

That very thing occurred when, in September 2000, a Baltimore-based institute for interfaith dialogue issued a statement titled “*Dabru Emet*: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity.” The statement enumerated a series of theological beliefs shared by Jews and Christians, and insisted that such a statement was essential given the dramatic change during the last four decades in Christian attitudes toward Judaism. Signed by over 170 rabbis and professors of Jewish Studies, *Dabru Emet* received much publicity in the media and was published as an ad in *The New York Times*. It was no doubt in large part due to the Rav’s ban on communal interfaith dialogue that most Orthodox rabbis refrained from signing this statement, and I believe that the incident proved the prescience of the Rav’s concerns.

Dabru Emet described the first theological commonality shared by Jews and Christians in the following manner:

Jews and Christians worship the same God. Before the rise of Christianity, Jews were the only worshipers of the God of Israel. But Christians also worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, creator of heaven and earth. While Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews, as Jewish theologians we rejoice that, through Christianity, hundreds of millions of people have entered into relationship with the God of Israel.¹⁶

No mention is made of the question of incarnation, or of the fact that Jews believe that such an event never occurred. All we are told is that “Christianity is not a viable choice for Jews.” The statement is an example of what the Rav was worried about: a blurring of theological distinctions between two faith communities.

Nevertheless, despite disagreements that fundamentally divide the Jewish and Christian communities, it is *to some extent* true that both religious communities worship the same God. Dr. David Berger’s reflection on *Dabru Emet* is most astute:

Let us now turn to the actual content of *Dabru Emet*. “Jews and Christians,” it asserts, “worship the same God.” This statement, I believe, is simultaneously true and false... *Avodah zarah* almost always refers to the formal recognition or worship as God of an entity that is in fact not God. For one who denies the divinity of Jesus, classical Christianity is clearly included in this definition...

Even medieval Jews understood very well that Christianity is *avodah zarah* of a special type. The Tosafists assert that although a Christian pronouncing the name of Jesus in an oath would be taking the name of “another god,” it is nonetheless the case that when Christians say the word “God,” they have in mind the Creator of heaven and earth. Some later authorities took the continuation

of that *Tosafot* to mean that this special type of *avodah zarah* is forbidden to Jews but permissible to gentiles, so that a non-Jew who engages in Christian worship commits no sin...In the final analysis, then, virtually all Jews understood that Christian worship is distinct from pagan idolatry because of its belief in the Creator of heaven and earth who took the Jews out of Egyptian bondage, revealed the Torah at Sinai and continues to exercise his providence over the entire cosmos. Some asserted that the association (*shittuf*) of Jesus with this God is permissible for non-Jews. Virtually none regarded such association as anything other than *avodah zarah* if the worshipper was a Jew. Do Jews and Christians, then, worship the same God? The answer, I think, is yes and no.¹⁷

This is, I think, perfectly articulated. Even if one views *shittuf* [syncretism] as no violation of the first of the *shevah mizvot benei Noah* [seven Noachide commandments], tremendous differences between Jews and Christians exist; this is a disagreement over which Jews have been willing to die. While Christians believe in God, they also assume that a human being that once lived on this earth was that God, and they worship God, as well as that human being, with that assumption in mind. At the same time, even if one assumes that *shittuf* is impermissible for *benei Noah*, certain conceptions of who God is will always be shared by Jews and Christians. In that sense, both Jews and Christians can invoke the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and, *to some extent*, mean the same thing. Both believe in an Almighty who identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Both believe that this God created man in His image and commanded him with a moral code. And both agree, at least to some extent, that this moral code is derived from the *Tanakh*. That they share this moral language makes both Jews and Christians “men of God,” and gives them a common way of speaking about morality.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO THE SECULARIST

The next phrase in “On Interfaith Relationships” that I wish to

discuss is one that the Rav uses to describe this moral language that Jews and Christians share. For the Rav, in the post-enlightenment age, Jews and Christians are united by this moral language, for, as R. Soloveitchik puts it, this language is understood by them and not by the secularist, who espouses a non-biblical worldview. R. Soloveitchik's description of our moral language as "incomprehensible" to others brings to mind the famous first chapter of Alisdair Macintyre's book *After Virtue*, perhaps the most influential work on ethics written in the last century. Macintyre asks us to imagine a society in which much that was once known about the sciences is forgotten:

All that they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance; parts of theories unrelated either to the other bits and pieces of theory which they possess or to experiment; instruments whose use has been forgotten; half chapters from books, single pages from articles... Adults argue with each other about the respective merits of relativity theory, evolutionary theory and phlogiston theory, although they possess only a very partial knowledge of each.... Nobody, or almost nobody, realizes that what they are doing is not natural science at all. In such a culture men would use expressions such as "neutrino," "mass," "specific gravity," "atomic weight" in systematic and often interrelated ways which would resemble in lesser or greater degrees the ways in which such expressions had been used in earlier times before scientific knowledge had so largely been lost.¹⁸

Macintyre applies this allegory to the state of moral language today. "What we possess," Macintyre writes,

...are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we

continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.¹⁹

In the acrimonious moral debate in America, writes Macintyre, ethical terms are thrown around that have been shorn of their original meaning.

How did this come about? Once, human beings located morality in something other than their own personal preferences. But the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the rise of ethical theories that located ethics not in the divinely ordained nature and destiny of man, but in humanity's own pleasures and desires. Emotivism claimed that ethical claims are mere manifestations of our personal preference, and utilitarianism grounded ethics in the alleviation of suffering. Thus, ethics became divorced from everything that it had once been about.

Religious Jews and Christians, then, have a more complete picture of morality than secular society. For they understand, in the words of Stanley Hauerwas, that

[M]oral authenticity seems to require that morality be not a matter of one's own shaping, but something that shapes one. We do not create moral values, principles, virtues: rather they constitute a life for us to appropriate. The very idea that we choose what is valuable undermines our confidence in its worth.²⁰

It is for this reason that, for the Rav, Jews and Christians can engage in moral discourse with one another, but rigid secularists are, in some sense, outsiders to this conversation. For when "men of God" speak of moral obligations, they locate the authority of ethics over their lives in something wholly other than themselves.

It is this common moral language of Jews and Christians that, R. Soloveitchik informs us in "On Interfaith Relationships," is "religious in nature and biblical in origin." As examples of shared biblical moral terms, the Rav refers to the fact that Jews and Christians "evaluate

man as the bearer of God's likeness," and "define morality as an act of *imitato Dei*." Jewish and Christian ethicists, the Rav tells us, cannot speak without referencing religious, biblical categories such as these. In contrast, the secularist often approaches ethical questions with entirely different categories, dictating an entirely different approach to ethical questions. In order to examine this further, let us examine two moral issues to which great attention has recently been given in political discourse.

Let us begin with the concept of the sanctity of human life. Jewish and Christian ethics, the Rav notes, affirms as a given that man is created *be-zelem Elokim*. It is only because of this axiom that we assume human beings to be inviolable, no matter their state of health or ability. This viewpoint can be contrasted with that of perhaps the most influential philosopher of ethics today, Peter Singer, professor of bioethics at Princeton. Singer locates human inviolability in one's ability to be aware of one's surroundings. As a corollary, newborn children, or coma patients, can be terminated, while sheep or pigs live lives equally precious as that of humans. "The day had to come, just as the day had to come when Copernicus proved that the earth is not at the center of the universe," Singer told the *New Yorker*. "It is ridiculous to pretend that the old ethics still make sense when plainly they do not." In Singer's opinion, "The notion that human life is sacred just because it's human life is medieval."²¹

Singer is not alone; there are many prominent bioethicists who think as he does, and who therefore advocate treating coma patients as organ banks, advise the legalization of assisted suicide, and argue for the morality of euthanasia. The prominence of such an approach in academia today illustrates a point about ethics stressed by both R. Soloveitchik and by Alisdair Macintyre. We have reached a point where both religious and secularist ethicists speak of "human dignity" but are not remotely referring to the same thing. As Robert George, a prominent American Catholic philosopher, put it,

[S]ecularism rejects the proposition central to the Judeo-Christian tradition of thought about issues of life and death: that human life is intrinsically, and not merely

instrumentally, good and therefore morally inviolable. It rejects traditional morality's condemnation of abortion, suicide, infanticide of so-called defective children, and certain other life-taking acts.²²

A similar phenomenon can be found regarding the religious and secularist conceptions of marriage. When the Torah tells us that marriage results in a state of *ve-hayu le-basar ehad*, it refers both to the physical union of heterosexual marriage and, as Rashi suggests, to the procreative aspect of the marital act. Christians and Jews, writes Robert George, believe in marriage as the union between a man and a woman, "ordered to the generating, nurturing, and educating of children, marked by exclusivity and permanence, and consummated and actualized by acts that are reproductive in type, even if not, in every case, in fact." In contrast, writes George, marriage, for secularists,

is a legal convention whose goal is to support a merely emotional union – which may or may not, depending upon the subjective preferences of the partners, be marked by commitments of exclusivity and permanence, which may or may not be open to children depending on whether partners want children, and in which sexual acts of any type mutually agreeable to the partners are perfectly acceptable.²³

It is for this reason, George continues, that for the secularist, "same-sex 'marriages' are no less truly marriages than those between partners of opposite sexes who happen to be infertile."²⁴ In today's society, a battle rages in the body politic as to whether homosexuals should be allowed to marry each other. For many (including myself), the notion is nonsensical; marriage *by definition* refers to something wholly different than a relationship involving two men. For the secularist, "marriage" is shorn of its original meaning and now means something fundamentally different from what it means to a religious person.

Interestingly, Peter Singer has now begun to argue that the denial of man having been created in God's image has important implications not only for medical ethics but for sexuality as well. If animals are our moral equals, then bestiality ought to be embraced as well. The following report from the *Daily Princetonian* is worth reading:

Peter Singer has a nasty way of pushing everything to the extreme. His arguments on abortion try to induce the reader to believe that unless you think all contraception is immoral, you should support abortion up to the time of birth and then infanticide for 30 days afterwards, just for good measure...But Princeton's favorite ethicist has gotten tired of defending killing disabled babies and has now started defending something completely different: bestiality...Singer says that although the Judeo-Christian tradition maintains a gulf between men and animals, this may be just a Western construction. "We copulate, as they do," Singer insists. The vehemence with which people react to bestiality "suggests that there is another powerful force at work: our desire to differentiate ourselves, erotically and in every other way, from animals." Anyone who has read Peter Singer's other works knows that once the debate is framed this way, the die has been cast. In Singer's world, we're not that different from animals: animal experiments are only okay if we'd also do them on disabled humans. And dogs and pigs are more sentient, and therefore more valuable, than infants or the demented old.²⁵

Such are the views of this molder of young minds, one of the most influential bioethicists in the world. It is not an illogical argument as long as the premise of the concept of *zelem Elokim* is discarded. And it is an argument that we ought to expect to hear from many quarters in the years to come, at least across Europe, as the public recognition of any sexual relationship deemed "meaningful" by the

participating partners leads to public celebration of polymorphy and, perhaps ultimately, bestiality.

We are now able to understand R. Soloveitchik's description of the moral language that Jews and Christians share as being often "incomprehensible to the secularist." Our moral perspectives are rooted in religion, in categories that are "biblical in origin;" the secularist, on the other hand, approaches concepts such as "human dignity" and "marriage" in a fundamentally different way, and applies them in a way that no traditional Jew or Christian could ever contemplate.

THE THREAT OF SECULARISM AND THE PUBLIC SQUARE

We have seen thus far that the moral language of the religious Jew is fundamentally "religious in nature," and not secular. We also know that entering the public square, seeking to enhance the moral and spiritual welfare of the world, is something obligatory upon the Jew, a fulfillment of humanity's commanded stewardship of creation. What role should a Jew's religious beliefs play in this endeavor?

The last time the Orthodox Forum discussed this issue was in 1994, with the conference's papers published in *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*. In his comprehensive essay, Marc Stern delineated the various approaches of American intellectuals to the separation of church and state. For example, he writes, Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic theologian, "vigorously condemns the differentiation of government and religious culture" and insists that "the Court has erred in treating the Establishment Clause as demanding a secular society." Mr. Stern makes clear that he believes this position is in error. He then writes that for most other scholars, what is required is "a sort of schizophrenia for the deeply religious person, a putting aside of who one is in order to participate in public life." Mr. Stern then adds, in parentheses, the following:

It should be noted, however, that Rabbi Soloveitchik, in much of his work contemplates these two distinct and

clashing pulls, the secular and the religious, the particular and the universal. Far from regretting or condemning the clash, he regards it as a natural part of man's lot.²⁶

The truth, in fact, is that R. Soloveitchik, in distinguishing between particular and universal, does not distinguish between religious and secular in the same way. He in no way means that a Jew can sever himself from basic biblical principles, or even adopt a moral-political language that is fundamentally secular. Jewish advocacy relating to fundamental moral issues can not be divorced from basic religious conceptions of human nature, destiny, and obligation, from our own beliefs that are "religious" and "biblical in origin." Religious Jews and Christians, the Rav makes clear in "On Interfaith Relationships," cannot discuss issues such as life, death, sexuality, and procreation from a purely secular perspective; on the contrary, any discussion of these questions at "a socio-humanitarian level must inevitably be grounded in universal religious categories and values." When the Rav adds that even our engagement on the "socio-humanitarian level is inherently religious," he means that the religious Jew, as well as the religious Christian, advocates for moral policies while at the same time utilizing the Bible as the ultimate frame of reference. In so doing, they invoke values that, for R. Soloveitchik, are "religious in nature" but at the same time "universal and public." They are biblical values that belong in the public square, necessary, from the Jewish perspective, for the moral welfare of society.

Now the Rav's reference to the "threat of secularism" can be understood. The Rav referred to the attempt to strip moral discourse of its religious nature and render our ethical language into a tongue wholly foreign to Christians and Jews. Combating the "threat of secularism" is, for the Rav, part and parcel of man's moral stewardship of the world; it is an endeavor in which religions Jews and Christians are natural allies.

Yet even as the Rav argues for the universality of basic biblical beliefs, and that this universality can unite faiths in their public engagement, he also insists, both in "Confrontation" and in "On Interfaith Relationships," that each faith's unique covenantal commit-

ments are a private affair, incommunicable to others and on which no other faith dare intrude. In so doing, the Rav makes the case simultaneously not only for a public religious morality but for the free exercise of religion within society. This vision – of the public and private in religion – is quite similar to an ethos articulated by many of the men who were crucial to the creation of the United States.

THE FOUNDING FATHERS AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RELIGION

In his extraordinary book on the American Founding Fathers, entitled *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*, the philosopher Michael Novak notes that if the religious conception of morality was essential for any civilization, the Founders felt that it was all the more crucial for the system of government that they themselves pioneered. If the power of the state was to be vested in the will of the people, then nothing prevented the populace from running morally amok except their own self-restraint. To put it another way: if *ein melekh ba-America* [if there is no king in America], then only religion can prevent a society in which *ish kol ha-yashar be-einav ya'aseh* [a man does that which is right in his own eyes]. Religion, as John Adams saw it, was integral to the success of democracy:

We have not government armed with power of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, reverence, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution is made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.²⁷

In a land in which the people write the laws, they are all too apt to begin to assume that they are themselves the source of the moral law, that morality is founded upon their will. Such a society can lose sight of the fact that democracy itself is predicated on the fact that human beings are created in the image of God and therefore endowed with

rights. When the people are the authors of the legislative law, then only fear of God can prevent them from violating God's law. Jefferson, one of the least religious of the Founders, singled out fear of God as essential for the preservation of the democratic system, and that, without a religious conception of human dignity, democratic rights could be easily discarded. "And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? That they are not violated but with his wrath?"²⁸ Jefferson wrote these words regarding slavery, but in the age of Peter Singer, they remain as relevant as they once were.

It bears stressing that the Founders were well aware that reason was a method by which moral rules could be intuited and lived by for rare individuals; but they insisted that an ethics secular in nature provided no foundation, on a larger level, for a moral society, and ought not be endorsed by the government. As one example, we need only read George Washington's Farewell Address:

Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. Of all the dispositions necessary for the prosperity of a polity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.²⁹

In other words, for Washington it is conceivable that one can, by use of reason, live a moral life; but such cases are rare, and a secular morality cannot be the material from which the moral fabric of society is woven. For Washington, and other Founders, the religiosity of the American polity is not in any way contradictory with democracy – it is the very foundation of it.

Furthermore, the Founders saw agreement on the importance of religious values as something that could unite people of diverse theological beliefs. Michael Novak writes the following about the

Founders' fascination with the *Tanakh*, what they would call Hebrew Scripture:

Practically all American Christians erected their main arguments about political life from materials in the Jewish Testament...In national debates, lest their speech be taken as partisan, Christian leaders usually avoided the idioms of rival denominations – Puritan, Quaker, Congregationalist, Episcopal, Unitarian, Methodist, and Universalist. The idiom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was a religious *lingua franca* for the founding generation.... The language of Judaism came to be the central language of the American metaphysic – the unspoken background to a special American vision of nature, history and the destiny of the human race.³⁰

How is one to foster unity amidst religious diversity in America? The Founders' solution was to seek the same balance struck by the Rav – not to seek homogeneity among faiths, not to blur distinctions or ignore disagreements, but rather to find a language at once religious and universal through which they could all communicate, values that could be jointly utilized to work for the betterment of society. The language of the *Tanakh* provides a basic moral-religious language through which the citizens of the United States can remain loyal to their respective faiths while at the same time work together for moral goals that are, in the Rav's words, universal in nature but "biblical in origin." The United States from its very outset insisted that all human beings are created equal, entitled to equal rights; yet at the same time it also insisted that the notion of human equality can only be truly protected when the government itself insists that these rights are "endowed by our Creator," and that they remain the "gift of God."

RELIGIOUS AMERICA, SECULAR EUROPE

In order to appreciate the Founders' insistence that the preservation of human rights rests with linking the democratic idea to religion,

let us, in the manner of Scalia, compare the United States to Europe. The difference between American religiosity and European secularism is not of recent vintage. "In France," wrote Alexis de Tocqueville almost two centuries ago, "I had seen the spirits of religion and freedom almost always marching in opposite directions. In America I found them intimately linked together in joint reign over the same land."³¹ Both Europe and America were enormously impacted by the Enlightenment, but they responded differently. Europe saw faith as the cause of religious wars, and therefore the enemy of tolerance and freedom. But the United States insisted that religion and reason were not irreconcilable, that they complemented each other, and that freedom without faith would be disastrous. "Regarding religion," Michael Novak has noted, "Europe and America took different paths. As the nineteenth century dawned, Europe put its trust in reason alone, America in both faith and common sense."³²

This difference is made manifest in the way Europe and America have applied the two categories that we discussed earlier: marriage and human dignity. Homosexual marriage, or at least something close to it, is now legal in many European countries. In the United States, on the other hand, no state legislature has, on its own initiative, enacted homosexual marriage, and over two-thirds of the state legislatures have voted to define marriage as being exclusively between a man and a woman.

But the most striking difference between the United States and Europe can be seen in the way the concept of human dignity is applied on the respective continents. Peter Singer's views have, in the United States, been considered acceptable only in the halls of academia; but the Europeans have come much farther in embracing his views governmentally. Euthanasia is now legal in several European countries, and Holland is on the verge of legalizing the euthanizing of infants. In England, doctors have now asked a court to allow them to end the life of a child against the direct demands of a child's parents:

Doctors yesterday asked the high court for permission to turn off the ventilator keeping a 17-month-old boy alive, even though there is evidence that he has some awareness

of his surroundings. The boy, who the court has ordered must not be identified, is not in a persistent vegetative state. He can follow a teddy bear moved in front of his face with his eyes. His parents argue that he responds to them and has a quality of life, but his doctors say it is impossible to know what he is suffering.³³

A democracy claims to grant a right of life and liberty to all, but how these rights are applied depends on where a government locates the source of these rights. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed the conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Jefferson's question has been answered in our day and age.

AMERICA: SECULAR OR RELIGIOUS?

Stern, in his essay in *Tikkun Olam*, quotes approvingly Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's contention that whenever government acts "it should do so without endorsing a particular religious belief or practice that all citizens do not share."³⁴ Any law, for O'Connor, must have a "secular purpose." This is because the United States is, for Stern as well as for O'Connor, a secular democracy. He then adds that Orthodox groups who have recently argued, like Neuhaus, that the United States is not fundamentally secular, are in error:

American Jews – and Orthodox Jews – have done astoundingly well under secular democracy, far better in most ways than they did under the not-so-secular regimes of Eastern Europe. Western culture is not by any means an unmitigated good, nor is it possible to ignore the challenge it poses. But the secular nature of the political structure should not be a problem for Orthodoxy. On the contrary, it is the very secular nature of the government that is responsible for the ability of Orthodox Jews to participate on equal terms with our fellow citizens and to do so free of any serious threat of religious persecution.³⁵

In fact, however, America is *not* a secular democracy, but rather one

that, from its very beginning, has acknowledged what the Rav called “the universal and public” in religion, a term with which most of the Founding Fathers would have had no disagreement. It is nothing like the “not-so-secular regimes of Eastern Europe,” but nor is it anything akin to the currently very secular democracies of Western Europe within whose boundaries even the governmental invocation of God’s name is considered out of place. If Jews truly seek a society suffused with secularism, such a country exists: it is called France. But it is not, nor has it ever been, the United States of America.

The best illustration that America is not a “secular democracy” is that noted by Scalia at the beginning of this essay. The fact that the United States government, as well as the state governments, engage in legally mandated invocations of the Divine. This is one example of governmental activity that *has no secular purpose*; that it has been done for centuries is the ultimate illustration that O’Conner is incorrect. In order to illustrate this point, one need only consider a well-publicized Supreme Court case from last year. Michael Newdow, a California atheist, argued that the Pledge of Allegiance, recited in his daughter’s public school, was unconstitutional, as it described this country as being “a nation under God.” The Bush Administration, of course, argued for the constitutionality of the Pledge, but its solicitor general, Theodore Olson, took somewhat of a disingenuous approach in its presentation before the court. Olson argued that the Pledge’s reference to God is in no way an endorsement of religion, but rather is “descriptive” of the Founders’ state of mind. “The Pledge’s reference to ‘a Nation under God,’” Olson argued, “is a statement about the Nation’s historical origins, its enduring political philosophy centered on the sovereignty of the individual.”³⁶ The Pledge’s mention of God, Olson told the Court, has a secular purpose; it is one of many “civic and ceremonial acknowledgments of the indisputable historical fact that caused the framers of our Constitution and the signers of the Declaration of Independence to say that they had the right to revolt and start a new country.”³⁷ Olson also argued that the Pledge’s reference to God serves “the secular values of promoting national unity, patriotism, and an appreciation of the values that defined the Nation.”³⁸

Of course, there is no question that Olson, a conservative, believes that the Pledge is constitutional even if it has an obviously religious nature. But the Solicitor General was forced to engage in such constitutional contortions because he knew that if he wanted to save the Pledge as is, he had to convince an O'Connor-controlled court that had long insisted that Government can never endorse religion. The justices themselves were well aware that the country would be outraged if the Court removed God's name from the Pledge, and therefore found themselves trapped in a cul-de-sac of their own jurisprudential creation. Not wanting to abolish the Pledge as is, but also unwilling to admit that America has long endorsed religion in its civic life, the justices attempted to buttress Olson's position. Justice Stephen Breyer suggested to Michael Newdow that the reference to "God" could include some sort of generic goodness that even Newdow could acknowledge. "So do you think," Breyer asked, "that God is so generic in this context that it could be that inclusive, and if it is, then does your objection disappear?"³⁹ Newdow responded, essentially, that Breyer was being disingenuous: "I don't think that I can include 'under God' to mean 'no God,' which is exactly what I think. I deny the existence of God."⁴⁰ It was quite a spectacle – the most prominent jurists in the country being dissected by an obscure atheist with the plain meaning of the English language on his side.

Leon Wieseltier, writing in the *New Republic*, noted that Newdow's insistence that the Pledge is religious in nature was compelling. The two words comprising the phrase "under God," Wieseltier noted, "make a statement about the universe, they paint a picture of what exists. This statement and this picture is either true or false. Either there is a God and we are under Him – the spatial metaphor, the image of a vertical reality, is one of the most ancient devices of religion – or there is not a God and we are not under Him."⁴¹ Since 1954, when the words "under God" were added in order to distinguish the United States from the atheistic communists, "the Pledge of Allegiance has conveyed metaphysical information, and therefore it has broached metaphysical questions. I do not see how its language can be read differently."⁴²

Nor can I see it any other way. The Pledge is undeniably

religious, and so is the prayer before the opening of the Supreme Court, and so is the public prayer delivered every day by the House and Senate chaplains before the government begins its business. And the fact that such invocations have been taking place from the founding of this nation indicates that America, while free, is in no way secular. That God is mentioned in the Pledge indicates that there are some laws that have no purely secular purpose. After all, one cannot make a non-God-related case for a governmental invocation of God. I find myself, for once, in complete agreement with Justice David Souter: "I will assume that if you read the Pledge carefully, the reference to 'under God' means something more than a mere description of how somebody else once thought," he said to Newdow. Rather, Souter continued, the Pledge is nothing other than an argument that citizens ought to see this country in a religious way: "The republic is then described as being under God, and I think a fair reading of that would be: I think that's the way the republic ought to be conceived, as under God. So I think there's some affirmation there. I will grant you that."⁴³ Of course, it is quite likely that the fact that Souter believes the Pledge to be religious in nature is a reason for that justice to vote to strike down the Pledge, in defiance of the history and traditions of this country.

And what of the American Jewish advocacy groups? The Anti-Defamation League bit the bullet and supported God's expulsion from the Pledge, as they seek His expulsion from the rest of the public square. The Associated Press described the approach of other Jewish groups:

In the biggest surprise, the American Jewish Congress, one of the most militant separationist groups, joined conservative religious organizations in asking the Court to retain the God reference. Marc Stern calls this the "most uncomfortable" decision the American Jewish Congress has faced during his 27 years as a lawyer there, but political realities left no choice. Victory for "under God" is inevitable, Stern figured, so his group should offer a path to approval on narrow grounds. Further, he feared that if

“under God” is banned, public fury might cause a “train wreck” – a constitutional amendment undermining the Supreme Court’s separation rulings since 1947. Seven Orthodox Jewish organizations, meanwhile, made an openly religious appeal for the pledge. “Jewish tradition teaches that human recognition of God is the hallmark of civilization,” they said. The pledge expresses peoples’ universal acknowledgment that “man’s destiny is shaped by a Supreme Being” but doesn’t endorse any one religion.⁴⁴

The Orthodox groups have it exactly right, and with O’Connor no longer a Justice, perhaps the court will return to a more authentically American approach to religion’s place in this constitutional order.

In the essay cited earlier, Wieseltier went on to scorn the desire of American religious groups to be governmentally acknowledged. “The need of so many American believers to have government endorse their belief is thoroughly abject” wrote Wieseltier. “How strong, and how wise, is a faith that needs to see God’s name wherever it looks?”⁴⁵ In response, Richard John Neuhaus noted that the public invocation of God’s name is meant as a reminder that fear of God is essential to our national success:

Perhaps some Americans do feel a need to have their faith stamped with a seal of government approval, which is abject. I expect most Americans, however, think we should publicly acknowledge that this is a nation under God not for the sake of their faith but for the sake of the nation. Ours, they believe, is a nation under God, as in “under judgment,” and we ignore or deny that truth at great peril. In sum, they agree with Mr. Wieseltier, and with Mr. Newdow for that matter, that a reference to God is a reference to God, the government’s brief notwithstanding.⁴⁶

The Jewish people, as God’s representatives here on earth, are uniquely obligated to ensure that society continues to define itself as one under God; but the truth is that the Rav’s writings indicate

that this is also a universal obligation, incumbent upon all “men of God.” How diverse religions can remain true to their faiths while at the same time working together to engage and impact the world with our shared religious values is precisely the subject about which the Rav wanted us to engage the Christian community. Orthodox Jews have long adhered to the Rav’s restrictions in engaging in interfaith dialogue of a theological nature, but little dialogue has taken place between religious Jews and Christians on the distinctly biblical morality that we share. Perhaps the publication of “On Interfaith Relationships” will encourage Orthodoxy to respond to this charge.

NOTES

1. Antonin Scalia, “God’s Justice and Ours,” *First Things* (May 2002), p. 20.
2. Ibid.
3. GK Chesterton, “What is America” in *What I Saw in America and The Resurrection of Rome: 21 Collected Works of GK Chesterton*, (1923)
4. *Tradition* 6:2 (1964), section 1:4.
5. Genesis 2:15.
6. “Confrontation,” *Tradition* 6:2 (1964), 1:4.
7. Ibid. 2:1.
8. Ibid. 2:3.
9. Ibid.
10. I am most grateful to my teacher, R. Shalom Carmy, for showing me “On Interfaith Relationships” many years ago, and thereby greatly impacting the way that I view interfaith dialogue.
11. R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Community, Covenant and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications* (Ktav, 2005), p. 259.
12. Ibid., p. 260.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 261.
15. See *Iggerot Moshe, Yoreh De’ah* 3:43.
16. “*Dabru Emet*” can be accessed at <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0011/articles/documentation.html>.
17. David Berger, “*Dabru Emet*: Some Reservations about a Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity.” The paper is available online at <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0011/articles/documentation.html>.
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19. Ibid., p. 2.
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- 6, 1999), available online at http://www.michaelspecter.com/ny/1999/1999_09_06_philosopher.html.
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25. The article is available online at <http://www.dailyprincetonian.com/archives/2001/03/08/opinion/2591.shtml>.
26. Marc D. Stern, "Jews and Public Morality," *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Jason Aronson, 1997), p. 000. <need page number>
27. Quoted in Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (Encounter Books, 2002), p. 71.
28. Cited by Novak, p. 33.
29. Ibid, p. 30.
30. Ibid.
31. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer (Doubleday, 1969), pp. 292–93
32. Novak, *On Two Wings*, p. 39.
33. "High Court Asked to Decide Fate of Baby on Respirator," *The Guardian* (March 7, 2006).
34. Cited by Stern, "Jews and Public Morality."
35. Ibid., p. 200.
36. Quoted in Leon Wieseltier, "Under God and Over," *The New Republic* (April 5, 2004), p. 22.
37. All quotes are from the transcript of oral argument available at http://supremecourtus.gov/oral_argument/argument_transcripts/02-1642.pdf. The quote in text is at page 23.(hereafter Newdow transcript)
38. Brief of the United States in *Elk Grove USD v. Newdow*.
39. Newdow transcript at 35.
40. Ibid. at 36.
41. "Under God and Over," p. 24.
42. Ibid.
43. See note 37, *supra*.
44. "Does it Matter if 'Under God' Remains in the Pledge," Associated Press, available online at <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/analysis.aspx?id=12856>
45. Ibid.
46. Richard John Neuhaus, "The Public Square," *First Things* (June/July 2004).

12

Civil Religion Is An Obstacle to Serious *Yirat Shamayim*

Marc D. Stern

Being opposed to government support for *yirat shamayim*, or, in more, but not precisely identical, secular terms, having government formally acknowledge God's sovereignty, is like being against motherhood. Nevertheless, I am.

Yirat shamayim is not within the competence of secular government in the United States – not as a matter of either *halakha* or *hashkafa*; not as a matter of political theory and not as a matter of practice. Aside from theoretical objections to American government involving itself in *yirat shamayim*, as a practical matter such involvement will either favor Christianity, be endlessly divisive – all to no good end – or, more likely, be so thin and contentless as to be meaningless. Inevitably, this official *yirat shamayim* will undermine more serious and meaningful *yirat shamayim*.

I

Our topic today is not separation of church and state as such. A government might be utterly indifferent to promoting religion and yet provide funding for religious and public schools on a purely secular theory of equality or freedom of choice. That is largely the situation in Holland. Conversely, following Roger Williams, a government could be motivated by the deepest of religious convictions to remain utterly aloof from religious matters in order, to paraphrase Williams, to protect the garden of the church from the wilderness of secular life.¹

In the overlap between public and private activity – say a privately-sponsored religious display on public land – a variety of responses are possible, dictated by sometimes conflicting legal doctrines such as the right of government to control its own property and rights of speech or equality, none of which necessarily reflects a conclusion about government's attitude towards religion.² Our topic and that of separation of church and state have no necessary connection.

I also do not address the much mooted question of whether religious principles held by citizens may be invoked to motivate government action. The answer is complex, and was addressed in a prior Orthodox Forum.³ In short, religious groups and citizens are free to endorse or oppose legislation based on their religious beliefs. Legislatures must have at least some plausible secular motive for acting, but these are not examined closely by reviewing courts, who find a religious purpose only where the practice is inherently religious, like prayer or creationism, or where there is no arguably secular justification for a policy.⁴

The claim that liberals have foisted on the nation a secular naked public square, advanced by Fr. Richard John Neuhaus and Stephen Carter⁵ is greatly exaggerated, though there are some few who advocate what Neuhaus and Carter fear most. It is not, however, the prevailing political tradition as illustrated by effective religious support for, or opposition to, abolition, prohibition, nuclear weapons and, lately, intervention in Darfur and protection of the environment.

There are, again, visions of church-state separation which would systematically ban any government acknowledgement of the special place of religion in the American polity no matter how mild, including phrases like “In God We Trust” on the currency or on public buildings, or even in presidential inaugural addresses. (A complete catalog of such expressions is conveniently found in one of last year’s Ten Commandments cases, in a biting dissent by Justice Scalia.⁶)

These expressions do not now communicate any serious or substantial religious message. By dint of ritualized, rote repetition and a wholly secular and patriotic context, these expressions have lost any significant religious import and do little, if anything, to further and deepen *yirat shamayim*. In the case of the president’s inaugural address, the religious sentiments expressed are properly understood as personal expressions without official significance.

Not all such challenges can, however, be dismissed as trivial. The challenge to the inclusion of the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, initiated by an atheist, was widely reviled but received the strong endorsement of as sober and balanced a scholar of religion and state law as Professor Douglas Laycock,⁷ who has also urged broad protection of religious liberty and equal funding for religious institutions.

At the other extreme, government is not free to intentionally disparage religion.⁸ Government acknowledgments of religion that overtly and openly favor one faith over others are generally conceded to be unconstitutional. In the extreme ranges of evangelical Christianity there are those who would permit even open official endorsement of Christianity (sometimes referred to as Judeo-Christianity). Such sectarianism is presently conceded to be unconstitutional by the two Justices whose views call for the sharpest departures from current law⁹: Justice Scalia, and (at least as involves the federal government) Justice Thomas.

There is a middle group of cases, such as those involving official displays of Ten Commandments, which are not as overtly denominational as crosses, crèches, and the like,¹⁰ which partake of some but not all of the characteristics of more generic religious references

that make them constitutional. This middle category is freighted with far more contemporary religious meaning than generic counterparts. Their constitutional status is therefore less certain and more hotly and frequently contested.

That this middle group may be constitutional does not mean any particular manifestation is constitutionally mandated. When government speaks for itself, it remains free to steer entirely clear of all religious acknowledgments.¹¹ The argument is sometimes made that official silence about religion is tantamount to hostility towards it.¹² Demagogues make the argument frequently, but it has no serious purchase in the courts or legal scholarship.

In a pair of cases involving Ten Commandments displays, one in Texas, and the other Kentucky, the Supreme Court closely divided over when such displays are constitutional. The reasoning is illuminating. In the first case, a bare majority rejected the contention of Justice Scalia that the Constitution tolerates generic endorsements of Judeo-Christian religion even when intended to promote religion because such displays were not illegal when the Constitution was written and hence could not, on an originalist reading of the Constitution, be unconstitutional today.

More than somewhat inconsistently, in the second case, the Court upheld a Ten Commandments display on the grounds of Texas' capitol. The majority could not reach agreement whether the display was constitutional because it was one of the tolerably religious kind (the view of a four-person plurality), or because (as swing Justice Stephen Breyer held) in the context in which the Commandments were displayed, one among many purely secular displays, their meaning was largely secular. A Ten Commandments display in a religious context, however, would have been unconstitutional. Reconciling these cases has become something of an academic and judicial cottage industry that need not detain us. Lower courts have basically read the two as a green light for such displays.¹³

What should be of concern is the origin of the displays, at least before they were appropriated by politicians as a simple and cost-free means of expressing disaffection, or exploiting voter disaffection, with the Supreme Court's path in church-state cases. The

ancestor of almost all Ten Commandment displays was one created by a Minnesota juvenile court judge in the early 1950s. Disturbed by the number of delinquents who came before him who he believed lacked a moral compass, he came to the conclusion that if these delinquents only knew of the Ten Commandments they would comport themselves properly. He thought erecting public Ten Commandments – supposedly ecumenical, really Lutheran – monuments would do the trick.

Cecil B. DeMille, the producer of the then soon-to-be-released movie, *The Ten Commandments*, read about the Minnesota judge's local project and exploited it for his own commercial purposes, subsidizing the erection of dozens of Ten Commandments monuments across the country.¹⁴ Neither the commercial exploitation of the Commandments, their political expropriation by ambitious politicians, nor assigning to them totemic value as a prophylactic against juvenile crime, is a serious religious purpose nor one calculated to promote meaningful religious responses. To treat such displays as if they aid religion is at best to confuse totem with substance. This sort of confusion will not readily be cabined to manifestation of official civil religion. It is inevitable that these flaws will leach into the private religious domain.

In one case presently pending in New Jersey, a football coach is insisting on his right to join with his team in a traditional pre-game prayer. He describes the prayer as a secular tradition without religious significance. This is gibberish. A prayer is either religious or it is not a prayer. It cannot be both. That a lawyer, in all seriousness, can claim his client offers a secular prayer is indicative of the confusion created by civic religious exercises.

The question before us is, in the end, different than the legal dispute. It is whether, from the point of view of Orthodox Jews, there is some important reason to encourage governmental expression making assertions about God, and His relation to the United States.

II

None of the endorsements or acknowledgements of God and His relation to America spring from nowhere. Opinion polls have

long shown that Americans overwhelmingly believe in God and in America's special place in His scheme for the world. They have done so in such numbers for a very long time.¹⁵ Those numbers have not wavered whether the wall separating church and state is at any particular moment built up high or torn down low.

Those numbers did not change in any substantial way when prayer in the public schools was held unconstitutional. They did not jump when religious clubs were permitted to meet after school in public school buildings, when school tax deductions were upheld or aid to religious schools barred. They appear, in short, to be independent of what government does. Neither do they have any discernable impact on murder or abortion rates, extra-marital sex, drug use, poverty or any other issue confronting the nation. Other polls show that the high rate of belief does not even translate directly into as minimal a religious commitment as weekly church attendance.

The level of religious belief in the United States is substantially higher than anywhere else in the developed world. The difference is especially marked in comparison to Europe, where some state churches are still formally established but in which secularism reigns supreme. For purposes of this paper, I assume, counterfactually, that the polls documenting American belief in God are fully accurate and do not reflect any tendency to provide the pollster with what the respondent thinks is the socially appropriate answer. The manifestations of official expressions of belief in God reflect this apparent religious consensus.

The fact that American citizens overwhelmingly profess a belief in God will have all sorts of social impacts – from the plethora of flourishing religious institutions to a general governmental practice of accommodating religious faiths, something the Supreme Court has referred to as being in the best of the American tradition even as it refuses to mandate it. In this country, but not in France, England,¹⁶ Turkey, or Mexico, religion is not confined to the private home. We do not ban head scarves or yarmulkes from official buildings or public schools. Even public officials have some right to act in accordance with their own religious traditions. Unlike Finland,¹⁷ religious schools are free to teach more or less as they please, includ-

ing claims of exclusive insight on truth. Religious groups comment freely on public issues. None of these depends in any measurable way on whether “In God We Trust” is on the coinage.

III

Put in other terms, what is at issue is the importance, value and meaning of “civil religion.” The term was first coined by Jean Jacques Rousseau, and popularized in modern American discourse by sociologist Robert Bellah in a path-breaking article entitled *Civil Religion in America*.¹⁸ Bellah describes the elements of the American civil religion by reference to the views of Benjamin Franklin and the Declaration of Independence. Franklin said:

I never was without some religious principles. I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity; that he made the world and govern'd it by his Providence; that the most acceptable service of God was the doing of good to men; that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded either here or hereafter. These I esteemed the essentials of every religion; and, being to be found in all religions we had in our country, I respected them all, tho' with different degrees of respect, as I found them more or less mix'd with other articles, which, without any tendency to inspire, promote or confirm morality, serv'd principally to divide us, and make us unfriendly to one another.

As to the Declaration and civil religion, in Bellah's summary, it contributed much to the civil religious tradition:

[t]here are four references to God [in the Declaration]. The first speaks of the “Laws of Nature and of Nature's God” which entitle any people to be independent. The second is the famous statement that all men “are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights.” Here Jefferson is locating the fundamental legitimacy of the new

nation in a conception of “higher law” that is itself based on both classical natural law and biblical religion.¹⁹ The third is an appeal to “the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions,” and the last indicates “a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence.” In these last two references, a biblical God of history who stands in judgment over the world is indicated.

Note that the religious sentiments expressed in the Declaration, drafted by Thomas Jefferson – whose religious views were far from orthodox Christian, who did not believe in miracles, and would today be called at best a deist – make no immediate demands on believers.

Bellah further argues that civic religion “provides a transcendent goal for the political process.” Bellah insists that civil religion is not just a means of fooling believers about government’s intentions, but that it possesses real significance in elevating government’s goals from the mundane to the transcendental.

That assumption is challengeable on two grounds beyond the historical: first, that transcendence is not the likely result of civil religion; and that in any event democracies are better off without transcendence as a responsibility of government. Politics is the art of dealing with the here and now in the framework of larger ideals – the general welfare, individual liberty, happiness, the common good and equality. It is hard enough to navigate the give and take of politics without transcendence intruding. If Bellah means only that politicians should not get lost in day-to-day servitude to polls and fads – fine. But the transcendence of which he speaks is likely to take a far more substantive form, and give rise to irreconcilable conflicts: claims of Divinely-mandated human restraint versus claims of Divinely given equality of rights versus rational morality, as in the case of gay rights. This does not mean that transcendence has no place in the communal order. It does. Spiritual giants are free to supply it. Spiritual giants are rare; faux spiritual giants are a dime-a-dozen and, when given political power often dangerous to boot. And the few genuine giants we can point to generally never had the responsibility to govern. Many probably lacked the capacity to do so.

Washington's Farewell address, often cited by advocates of a governmental role in supporting religion, suggests a wholly non-transcendent, prosaic – and I think more realistic – description of the reason for government invocations of faith: that of keeping the unruly masses in line:²⁰

Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

Note that in his list of advantages, the patrician Washington places protection of property first, and that in this he foreshadows Marx's view of religion as the opiate of the masses. Nothing in Washington's address compels government to provide the religious backing for morality.

This pragmatic analysis of the social advantages of civic religion emerged again in the nineteenth century drive for public education and the insistence of Horace Mann and others that those schools provide a daily "nonsectarian" reading from the Bible, practices devised by Brahmin Unitarians and aimed at civilizing (and weaning away from the Catholic Church) the unruly and uncivilized children of Irish immigrants, and domesticating them for factory work.

The current infatuation of American conservatives with government sponsorship of religion, otherwise inconsistent with their insistence on limited government and minimizing its influence over education and values, is likely explicable by the same sentiment: religion will somehow tame the unruly forces of disorder unleashed by feckless liberals in the horrible 1960s.

It is fair to question whether American civil religion fills a religious role at all, or, instead, fills a primarily patriotic one. Obligatory

public references to God have traditionally been interwoven with patriotic occasions – the Pledge of Allegiance, Presidential Inaugurations, the convening of courts, and the like. Is the nation endorsing religion, or religion the nation, by these usages? The identification of religion with patriotism surely does religion no good, reducing it to a handmaiden of the political status quo.

The “prophetic tradition” does not, as the religious left would have it,²¹ require incessant and mindless criticism of the status quo. But *yirat shamayim* surely requires independence both of the status quo and its critics. Here is the Rav, a staunch supporter of the State of Israel in one of his *teshuva drashot*:

Bondage to the state can also become idolatry. Were all the great men of the world to ask me to sign a declaration pledging my unreserved loyalty to the state which fulfills the highest ideals of Jews today, I would by no means be willing to do so. Subjugation of this kind is tantamount to idolatry!

Only one kind of bondage is permissible and that is to the Holy One, blessed be He, to the Torah He has given to us to guard our ways and to the set of spiritual values with which He presented us. If the state assists us in accepting this bondage, then we would be justified in professing devotion to it; but if the state interferes with these loyalties, there could be no room in my heart for any love for it.

This ideal of Judaism is epitomized in the (Rosh-ha-Shana) *Malkhuyot* prayer. Family, friends, the state – none of them are absolutely binding. The only oath that can utterly bind us is allegiance to the Holy One, blessed be He...²²

I can still feel the electricity in the room as the Rav said this in the presence of, and directed at, the Israeli consul general. The depth of commitment that the Rav demanded is not abetted by superficial

recitation of religious mantras and combining them with patriotic declarations.

IV

Franklin's civil religion, adopted by Bellah, dismisses all religious doctrines other than his generally humanistic ones because they do not "inspire, promote, or confirm morality" and serve simply to divide. This dismissal of religious particularism and ritual, and of religious doctrines other than the abstract and universalistic ones Franklin enumerates (hardly unique to Franklin in the American civil religion tradition) today comprises the bedrock of civil religion and much of main-line Protestantism. It is not what Orthodox Judaism needs today when the dismissal of ritual, religious, sexual, moral, and religious particularism is all too prevalent, certainly among non-Orthodox American Jews.

In the American experience, as religion moves into the public sphere it loses its particular aspects and becomes generic. This was true of Bible reading and prayer in the public schools in the nineteenth century; and the observance of Christmas in the early twentieth century, later broadened to include Chanukah, aided and abetted by Chabad's relentless menorah campaign.

The outcry this past year (2005) over the exclusion, or secularization of Christmas in public places, including both public schools and malls, is typical of the battles over civil religion. Some of the criticism was simply pure demagoguery²³ useful for political purposes. Some was trivial – fights over Christmas trees – and some was legitimate. There was, however, no organized war against Christmas, no organized campaign to remove the religious element of Christmas. If, in fact, merchants choose to emphasize secular aspects of Christmas (the Christmas tree, Santa Claus, gift giving) over the holding's more religious aspects, they are not necessarily secular humanists or closet Marxists. They are responding to the perceived desires of their customers.

Those complaining of the plot against Christmas seem oblivious to the changes in the American religious demographic – the

growth in the numbers of Americans who are atheists, Moslems and adherents of eastern religions. A merchant emphasizing the Christian elements of Christmas runs the risk of offending his non-Christian customers. And why should Jewish merchants be expected to observe Christmas as a Christian religious holiday?

This “protect Christmas” campaign struck a chord with evangelical Christians, who until recently opposed the celebration of Christmas as unbiblical. It even received the endorsement of an Orthodox (?) rabbi. Rabbi Daniel Lapin of Toward Tradition called a press conference to announce that Jews should in fact welcome Christmas religious celebrations of the incarnation of God in human form. None of this has much to do with serious religion.

V

So far I have discussed Bellah’s claims about civil religion as being about claims for transcendence of the political system. Bellah notes that American civil religion makes another claim: that of God’s special providence for America.

That Jews should be grateful for the blessings of the United States is so obvious as to be a cliché. It is a matter of regret that European rabbinic leaders did not discern these possibilities in the fifty years before World War II.²⁴ Nevertheless, as far as I can see, the Orthodox community pays only lip service to that sense of gratitude. More crucially, the claim of special providential protection for the United States leads in contemporary political life – and in other times as well – to simple, often dangerous, arrogance; arrogance not consistent with *yirat shamayim*, understood as a reflection of human modesty and fallibility in the presence of an omniscient and omnipotent God.²⁵

Confidence that God is with us trumps, indeed pre-empts, rational policy analysis. Absent prophecy, man is left only to act on a rational basis free of unprovable assertions about God’s will. Politics is, or ought to be, primarily about rationally-based human decisions to improve the world. Lincoln was right in his second inaugural address: political man cannot with certainty discern God’s will in

political affairs,²⁶ he can only exercise “firmness in the right as God gives us to see right.”

The Declaration of Independence is a more serious challenge to my thesis, given its social and political prominence in American life, and particularly given its role in Lincoln’s hands at Gettysburg at reshaping American democracy into a more egalitarian nation. But here too, even a cursory reading discloses yawning gaps to be bridged. Jefferson’s “Creator” or “Judge” – note, not a personal God – is that of a deist politician giving the public as much of what it wanted to hear as was consistent with his own religious beliefs, not the personal God of Orthodox Judaism. Retaining a belief in an omnipotent personal God is difficult enough in today’s scientific and materialistic age, without celebrating official pronouncements that contradict that premise.

A belief in Jefferson’s impersonal God surely does not count as a manifestation of *yirat shamayim*. Neither should a belief in God that carries with it no moral responsibility or, still worse, substitutes, in TV evangelist mode, oral confessions of faith for serious and painful moral and religious obligation. It is not surprising that the strongest support for official acknowledgement of God come from those whose religion is all about proclamation of faith, and not about *mitzvah*.

A Jewish campaign against civil religion would be neither wise nor prudent. At the height of Jewish communal agencies’ pursuit of strict separation of church and state under the leadership of my mentor Leo Pfeffer, Jews never sought to challenge the most common manifestations of civil religion – “In God We Trust” or “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance.²⁷ Undoubtedly this is partially because success was unlikely, but equally because it would have done Jews no good to be seen as leading a campaign against these generic and popular religious references. I would not do so now. A systematic campaign against civil religion would smack of, to use Justice Goldberg’s felicitous phrase, “an untutored devotion to the secular.”²⁸

But I would equally not embrace these manifestations, seek to widen the circle of the permissible, much less encourage them. Their

existence is no boon to faith. On the contrary, superficial formulaic assertion of belief in God, coupled with a pledge of allegiance to the United States, is far from the “fear of heaven” of the creator and judge of all the earth. It comes close to forbidden *shituf* (equating) of God and the United States.

VI

Maimonides counts belief in God and fear of heaven²⁹ as two separate *mitzvot*. He is followed in this division by most of those who enumerate the *mitzvot*. And the *monei ha-mitzvot* (enumerators of the Commandments) are clear that the fear of God has some component beyond just an abstract fear of God. The same is true of *ahavat ha-Shem* and *emuna ba-Shem*. They disagree exactly what that something extra might be. Whatever it is, it is not American civil religion.

This is assuredly true of Maimonides’ ideal form of *yirat shamayim* as formulated in the second chapter of *Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah*,³⁰ the fear of God’s greatness arising from a contemplation of God’s created universe. It is no less true of R. Eliezer mi-Metz’s³¹ formulation that *yirat shamayim* is a subjective attitude of submission to God, an attitude to be injected into the performance of each *mitzvah*, hence the fact that it is the first commandment listed in a work named “the book of those who fear [God].” It is equally true of the description of the *mitzvah* found in the Rambam’s *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, simple fear of God’s punishment for sin.³² And it is decidedly true of R’ Yonah’s interesting conceptualization (reported in his name in the commentary of his students to R’ Yitchok Alfasi³³ on Tractate *Berakhot*), that the essence of *yirat shamayim* lies in avoiding any doubts about compliance with *halakha*.

Nor does civil religion share much with the Netziv’s view based on the *Midrash* that *yirat shamayim* compels an unflinching, unbending and unwavering commitment to God’s service.³⁴ For the other end of the political spectrum, it is fair to say that advocates of civil religion have not defined *yirat shamayim* as R. Y.Y. Weinberg did, “as the fear of the ethical sin, which is hated and repulsive in the eyes of God.”³⁵

The Netziv alternatively ascribes to the *Talmud Bavli* (*Sahendrin* 56b) the view that *yirat shamayim* consists precisely in refraining from the unnecessary, one might say, promiscuous, invocation of God's name.³⁶ American civil religion under the influence of popular Protestantism most often manifests itself in precisely such references. "In God We Trust" or like sentiments appear on the currency, in courtrooms, in classrooms as a routine solemnizing formula with which to begin public meetings and the like.

For us, the invocation of God's name is, or should be, a rare event outside of traditional liturgical forms. In the Temple, when the proper name of God was mentioned by the high priest on Yom Kippur, the people prostrated themselves with fear and reverence. No one does that in the Supreme Court when the crier calls out "God save the United States and this Honorable Court." We do not carry objects bearing the *shem ha-Shem* on them into bathrooms.³⁷ I've never encountered piles of currency bearing the motto "In God We Trust" outside public bathrooms in religious facilities, as one presumably would if Jews ascribed serious religious significance to these slogans.

The Founders of the Republic did not contemplate a department of *yirat ha-romemut*, nor official enforcement, or even encouragement of, *la'tzet y'dei kol ha-de'ot* (to satisfy every view of the *halakha*), nor of education toward performance of *mitzvot* (even secular ones such as those involving support for the poor) out of a fear of God's punishment. We even lack a vocabulary for expressing how these ideas might be advanced by government. All of these conceptions of the *mitzvah* (with the exception of Rabbi Weinberg's, whose formulation apparently partakes more of homiletics than *halakha*) focus on the individual and his own personal attitude toward God. There is no communal element in any of these descriptions. Each refers to a person's own attitude toward God, and his fear of sin. The *Sefer ha-Hinukh* postulates no communal enforcement of the *mitzvah* of *yirah*.

VII

It is questionable the extent to which any but the most ideal of Jewish societies could do much to *compel* real *yirat shamayim*. Community

pressure of necessity focuses on externalities. Experience shows that social pressure to comport with a supposed *yirat shamayim* norm is more likely to generate at worst recalcitrant, and, at best, rootless – *yirat shamayim*, being neither fear of God’s grandeur nor sin, but religious affectation and the display of ego-boosting insignia devoid of internal meaning and commitment. The ubiquitous sign of male *yirat shamayim* – the broad-brimmed black Borsalino accompanied by the white on white shirt – is often a mark of mindless social conformity, not *yirat shamayim*. A community in which all or most of its members have internalized real fear of God, however conceptualized, will behave differently than one that has not. As the sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow puts it, “Religion is embedded in social norms, in cultural values and understandings, and in arrangements of resources and power that fundamentally shape it and cause it to be the way it is.”³⁸ But it will do so not because as an organized community it compels adherence to these norms, but because they are part of each individual’s core beliefs and consequently part of a deeply-woven social fabric.

I do not mean to adopt the distinctly non-Jewish idea that only ethics generated by the individual are valuable. *Yirat shamayim* (fear of God) is, in the end, also a *commandment*, not just a feeling or philosophical obligation. We (in the absence of *gilui Shekhina* (Divine Revelation))³⁹ cultivate *yirah* not mostly because we are persuaded by direct experience, logic or some internal conviction to do so, but primarily because we are commanded to do so. That we are commanded does not mean that we can or should delegate to government, even democratic government, or the general society, the responsibility of *yirah*. *Chovot ha-levavot* [obligations of the heart] do not readily lend themselves to external coercion. They are the product of quiet, painstaking, internal, individual, work.

Nachama Leibowitz points out⁴⁰ that the Pentateuch four times refers to people acting out of a fear of God or its absence – Abraham describing the absence of such fear amongst the people of Gerar as justifying his identifying his wife Sara as his sister; Joseph’s rejection of Potiphar’s wife’s advances because, he pointedly told her, he feared God; the Egyptian midwives refusing Pharaoh’s order to kill

Jewish children because they feared God; and Amalek attacking the Jews when they did not fear God. In none of these cases was the problem that a government or other external force failed to enforce *yirat shamayim*. In the case of the midwives, the internally-generated fear of heaven impelled them to defy the all-powerful government, not defer to its religious sentiments. At a minimum, these biblical examples are authority for the proposition that *yirat shamayim* can exist without official sanction, and still fulfill an important social and moral role.

Rabbi Soloveitchik, in an address to an RCA convention, once argued that pure rationality does not ensure compliance with social and moral norms, only a religious sanction can accomplish that.⁴¹ Even if this were true (and, with all the hesitancy that is appropriate for someone as inconsequential as me disagreeing with the Rav, I think it is not), it does not follow that the religious sanction must be governmental, especially if it only takes the form of trivial cheerleading for God, as in “In God We Trust” or “One Nation Under God.” Such trivialities cannot and do not guarantee moral behavior.

Proponents of government endorsement of religion in the name of avoiding a “naked public square” need also to explain how they will deal with citizens who have no faith, a growing sector of the population. Newdow’s objection that “under God” imposes religion on him, is after all, not much different than the claim that “under Jesus” would impinge on the rights of Jews. Some years ago, one of the critics of the naked public square, Father Richard John Neuhaus, argued that atheists cannot be good citizens.⁴² He is simply wrong, as the evidence of our eyes tell us, unless one insists, circularly, that religious belief is an indispensable element of good citizenship.

VIII

Officially atheistic societies, such as those under Soviet or Chinese Communism or Hitler’s Germany, perpetrated mass murder on an unprecedented scale. The Rav, who had seen Nazism first hand in Germany and whose visceral disdain for communism was well known, quite possibly was reacting to Nazism and communism when he urged religion as a guarantor of moral behavior. But religious

societies, where fear of God is often the glue that binds the society together, are often no less brutal (if sometimes less technologically adept or systematically ruthless) in the name of enforcing religious norms than their secular counterparts. At a minimum, then, fear of God is no insurance policy of moral political behavior. Sociologists debate the effect of religious participation on individual and social behavior.⁴³

The Crusaders, the Spanish Inquisition, al Qaida, Hamas and the deeply religious messianic and murderous lunatics who today lead Iran in pursuit of nuclear weapons aimed at Israel, all claim or claimed to fear God, and act in furtherance of that fear. All are, have been, or, God forbid, would be, perfectly prepared to commit mass murder in His name. In His name, Jewish extremists justify violent attacks on Jewish soldiers and police representing a state which is the culmination of Jewish millennial yearnings of two thousand years.

Rigorously secular states like Norway or Holland (except for their God-fearing Islamists) do none of these things. Fear of God doesn't seem to make a difference; the substance of morality does. Norway would likely not be a more law-abiding society if it (or its citizens in large numbers) were suddenly converted to Islam, or the Judaism of the furthest reaches of the settlers' movement? Would Hamas be more or less dangerous if it turned entirely secular and gave greater weight to pragmatic considerations favoring creation of a Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace with a Jewish state?

Biologists as a group do not believe in God, let alone fear Him.⁴⁴ Yet they are not as a rule murderers or thieves. If that were the only choice who wouldn't prefer a country of biologists to one of Islamic religious fanatics? The biologists' apostasy is surely a serious deficiency, but is it a more imminent problem than suicide bombings or religious civil war – such as threaten Iraq or Nigeria?

There are instances when the fear of God may be the most secure line of defense – some cases of abortion and some end-of-life issues fit this category. But it has to be a certain kind of fear of God. There are religious groups, groups which purport to “fear God,” who differ with *halakha* on these issues, just as there are atheists

opposed to (all, most or some) abortions and physician assisted suicide. Within the Orthodox community, there are sharply different views on end-of-life issues. Government can take a wide range of positions on these issues for solid secular reasons. We are free to urge it to do so.

Even the threat of God's punishment is not realistically within government's power. In the Revolutionary War era, Pennsylvania's constitution limited competence to testify to those who believed in an afterlife, but that restriction long ago was dropped with no noticeable adverse impact on the judicial system. As a practical matter, modern governments can enforce some level of compliance with law and morality; it cannot effectively change internal attitudes about religion or towards God.

Compliance with government's rules is enforced by fear – fear of imprisonment, fines, civil penalties, exposure, even surreptitious surveillance – but not fear of God. Where these earthy inducements are not available, government stays its hand. Americans have no legally binding moral obligations whose performance is dependent on *ve'yareita me'Elokhekh* (you should fear your God) or *aniha-Shem* (I am God),⁴⁵ as are a whole string of *mitzvot* governing interpersonal relations. None of these means of government enforcing its initiatives have anything in common with fear of God's wrath, let alone His grandeur. Nor does civil religion carry any serious implication of *yirat cheit* or *yirat ha-onesh*, suggesting that civil wrongs trigger God's wrath.⁴⁶

IX

The shallow religious demands typical of American civil religion are all too common in all of contemporary American religion, Jewish as well as Christian. Sixty years ago, the Rav – then as still a relatively recent immigrant – was scathing in his denunciation of the superficiality of the American religious experience. In a lengthy three and one-half page footnote (!) he challenged the American approach to religion. The footnote is well worth reading in its entirety, but this excerpt is relevant:⁴⁷

Rudolf Otto in his book, *The Idea of the Holy*, give[s] the lie to the position that is prevalent nowadays in religious circles, whether in Protestant groups or in American Reform and Conservative Judaism, that the religious experience is of a very simple nature – that is, devoid of the spiritual tortuousness present in the secular cultural consciousness, of psychic upheavals, and of the pangs and torments that are inextricably connected with the development and refinement of man's spiritual personality. This popular ideology contends that the religious experience is tranquil and neatly ordered, tender and delicate; it is an enchanted stream for embittered souls and still waters for troubled spirits.... Therefore, the representatives of religious communities are inclined to portray religion, in a wealth of colors that dazzle the eye, look as a poetic Arcadia, a realm of simplicity, wholeness and tranquility. Most of the sermons of revivalists are divided in equal measure between depicting the terrors of hellfire and describing the utopian tranquility that religion can bestow upon man. And that which appears in the sermons of these preachers in a primitive, garbled form, at times interwoven with a childish naïveté and superficial belief, is refined and purified in the furnace of popular "philosophy" and "theology" and becomes transformed into a universal religious ideology which proclaims: If you wish to acquire tranquility without paying the price of spiritual agonies, turn unto religion! If you wish to achieve a fine psychic equilibrium without having to first undergo a slow, gradual personal development, turn unto religion. And if you wish to achieve an instant spiritual wholeness and simplicity that need not be forged out of the struggles and torments of consciousness, turn unto religion! "Get thee out of thy country," which is filled with anxiety, anguish, and tension, "and from thy birthplace," which is so frenzied, raging, and stormy, "to the land" that is enveloped by the stillness of peace and tranquility, to

the Arcadia wherein religion reigns supreme. The leap from the secular world to the religious world could not be simpler and easier. There is no need for a process of transition with all its torments and upheavals. A person can acquire spiritual tranquility in a single moment.

If this is true of American religion generally – and nothing much has changed in the sixty years that have elapsed since the Rav wrote this searing critique – except that now much of Orthodoxy embraces the simplistic view of religion the Rav spurned – it is *a fortiori* true of the American civil religion. As Franklin noted, and Bellah approvingly echoed, American civil religion is abstract, generic and makes no demands on its adherents. Adopting this sort of religion will not be limited to the civic context. There will inevitably be reciprocal effects on American religion generally and American Orthodox Judaism in particular. Thus, whether our judgment is colored only by our own interests or those of the broader American public, civil religion does little good and substantial harm to the cause of meaningful faith in a secular age.

The conversion of the *d'var ha-Shem* into a totem with magical powers to ward-off evil is precisely what is wrong with manifestations of civil religion. It is shallow; it requires no effort (and, I think, has little effect); it is childlike in its ascription of reformatory powers to mere words.

Perhaps the Orthodox community's current infatuation with civil religion is only a tactical bow to the political ascendancy of evangelical Christianity. That is a legitimate consideration, but one which needs to be exercised with great caution. Politics is a *galgal ha-chozer b'olam* – a wheel which turns – and too deep a commitment to one side in the cultural wars can have ill effects later when the other side rules.

More likely, the Orthodox commitment to civil religion stems from a perception that it is a bastion against unvarnished secularism. Secularism is a real problem, and one that may well get worse, not better. Indeed over the last two presidential terms, secular resentment at religious intrusion into public life has palpably increased.

There are real battles to fight on this front.⁴⁸ Real battles not just to protect the place of religion in society as a whole, but to protect our own ability to practice and to maintain our own views. Finland, for example, has just proposed banning religious schools on the theory that children should not be exposed (read brainwashed) into a single religious truth. England has more or less mandated that comparative religion be taught in religious schools. Advocates of secularism boast of their absence of fixed principles, and their openness to changed conditions and their refusal to be bound by dogma.⁴⁹ These, and others to boot, like those from scientism, are serious challenges, ones not met at all by civil religion. Civil religion is a distraction from real battles.

The battle against secularism is as urgent as the fight for meaningful *yirat shamayim*. Neither battle is going to be won by ignoring scientific truths in favor of an extreme, un-Jewish, form of biblical literalism;⁵⁰ by endorsing totemic forms of religion; by pursuing quixotic campaigns to display menorahs in public as a way of stemming assimilation; or by treating women as if they were intellectual ciphers. On front after front, we are waging the wrong battles to further significant *yirat shamayim* in an age when religious shallowness and secularism are pressing on all sides. I assume these unfortunate choices were not made because there is nothing better to say in the name of Torah.

Perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps I simply seek personal escape from enforced *yirat shamayim*. Perhaps the standard I have urged is too difficult to attain; perhaps in a secular age we need to use every weapon at our disposal; perhaps I am urging an elitist standard of *yirat shamayim*. Perhaps I fail to take full account of the demands for instant gratification and easy self-transformation inherent in rampant 7, 10, or 12-point schemes for instant self-improvement and transformation, of the prevalence of Cliff's Notes for works of great literature and their equivalents for *gemara* and *Tosafot*;⁵¹ of the pursuit of knowledge as entertainment in an age of short attention spans. And so maybe we are condemned to seek out officially sponsored, but shallow, forms of religious expression consistent with

the lowered expectations all around us. I hope not – but I could be profoundly wrong.

* * *

After delivering this paper, I came across statements of two disparate European religious leaders expressing some envy of American civil religion. Pope Benedict, writing when he was Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, called for the creation of an American-like civil religion in Europe. He writes:⁵²

In America the state is little more than a free space for different religious communities to congregate; it is in its nature to recognize and permit these communities to exist in their particularity and their non-membership in the state. This is a separation that is conceived positively, since it is meant to allow religion to be itself, a religion that respects and protects its own living space distinctly from the state and its ordinances.

This separation has created a special relationship between the state and the private spheres that is completely different from Europe. The private sphere has an absolutely public character. This is why what does not pertain to the state is not excluded in any way, style, or form from the public dimension of social life.

Similarly, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes with evident approval of American civil religion. He writes:

It was the French writer, Alexis de Tocqueville, who in the 1830s, in the course of his classic *Democracy in America*, explained the paradox. There was a separation between religion and state, but not between religion and society. “Religion in America,” he wrote, “takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the

first of their political institutions.” What he meant was that, though it had no power, it had enormous influence. It sustained families. It bound communities together. It prompted people to join voluntary organizations for the promotion of the common good. It was the basis of a shared morality which, precisely because it was upheld by faith, did not have constantly to be enforced by law. “In France,” he noted, “I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. In American I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country.”

In a strange way civil religion has the same relationship to the United States as Pesach does to the Jewish people. It is, first and foremost, not a philosophy but a story. It tells of how a persecuted group escaped from the old world and made a hazardous journey to an unknown land, there to construct a new society, in Abraham Lincoln’s famous words, “conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Like the Pesach story, it must be told repeatedly, as it is in every inaugural address.⁵³

Ratzinger called not for civil religion as American Protestants understand it, but for “convinced minorities” of Christians to offer their secular counterparts “a different way of seeing things.”⁵⁴ His is an attractive model. Nothing in this is inconsistent with my thesis. Neither is Rabbi Sack’s conception of civil religion. As the struggle over abortion and gay rights indicates, it is by no means certain that Americans share a common morality anymore – but if they do not, civil religion as currently practiced by government is incapable of filling the gap.

NOTES

1. Mark DeWolfe Howe, *The Garden and The Wilderness* (1965).
2. *Capital Square Review & Advisory Board v. Pinnette*, 515 U.S. 753 (1995); *Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches U.F.S.D.*, 508 U.S. 384 (1993).
3. Compare, M. Stern, "Jews and Public Morality," p. 159 in D. Schatz, *et al.*, *Tikkun Olam* (1992) with N. Diamant, "A Comment on Tikkun Olam and Political Activity," *ibid.*, p. 215.
4. See, most recently, *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 125 S.Ct. 2722 (2005); *Van Orden v. Perry*, 125 S.Ct. 2854 (2005); *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578 (1987).
5. R.J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (1986); S. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (1994).
6. *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 125 S.Ct. 2722, 2748–51 (2005).
7. See D. Laycock, "Forward," *Harvard Law Review* (2004).
8. *Citizens for a Responsible Curriculum v. Montgomery County Bd. of Educ.*, 2005 W.L. 1075634 (D. Md. 2005). The principle is more easily stated than applied. Does the government disparage religion if it insists, for example, that interracial marriage is acceptable even if some religions prohibit such unions?
9. *County of Allegheny v. ACLU*, 492 U.S. 573, 661 (1989) (Kennedy, Scalia, Rehnquist, Thomas, J.J., dissenting) (permanent display of crucifix on public building would be unconstitutional). In *Lee v. Weissman*, 505 U.S. 572, 641 (graduation prayer), Scalia, J., dissenting, wrote:

And I will further concede that our constitutional tradition, from the Declaration of Independence and the first inaugural address of Washington, quoted earlier, down to the present day, has, with a few aberrations, see *Church of Holy Trinity v. United States*...ruled out of order government-sponsored endorsement of religion – even when no legal coercion is present...where the endorsement is sectarian, in the sense of specifying details upon which men and women who believe in a benevolent, omnipotent Creator and Ruler of the world are known to differ (for example, the divinity of Christ). But there is simply no support for the proposition that officially-sponsored, nondenominational invocation and benediction read by Rabbi Gutterman – with no one legally coerced to recite them – violated the Constitution.

See *Wynn v. Town of Great Falls*, 376 F.3d 292 (4th Cir. 2004); *Hinrichs v. Bosma*, F.Supp.2d (S.D. Ind. 2006); *ibid.*, 400 F.Supp.2d 1103 (S.D. Ind. 2005). An appeal was dismissed on technical grounds.
10. An *amicus* brief filed on behalf of American Jewish Congress urged that the Ten Commandments on display in Texas and Kentucky were distinctly (Protestant) Christian in character and on important theological points. Brief Amicus Curiae of the American Jewish Congress in *Van Orden v. Perry*, 125 S.Ct. 2722 (2005), the Justices divided over whether this tilt was sufficiently well-known to be relevant for constitutional purposes.
11. *Citizens for a Responsible Curriculum v. Montgomery County Bd. of Educ.*, 2005 W.L. 1075634 (D. Md. 2005).

12. Cf. *Skoros v. City of New York*, 432 F.3d, 1 (2d Cir. 2006) (exclusion of purely religious symbols from school holiday displays constitutional).
13. See, e.g., *ACLU v. Bd. of Comm'rs, Lucas County*, F.Supp.2d (N.D. Ohio 2006).
14. *Freedom from Religion v. State*, 898 P.2d 1093 (Col. 1995).
15. See, e.g., Pollingreport.com/religion/htm (visited 2/1/06) (collecting such polls). See also, P. Beinart, "Religious Experience" (TRB), *New Republic*, February 20, 2006, p. 6.
16. *R on the Application of Begum v. Headteacher, Denbigh H.S.*, (2006) UKHL15 (2006).
17. "Finnish Government Withholds Private School Licenses" (February 2006), at newsroom.finland.fi/stt/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=11728&group=Politics.
18. *Dædalus* (Winter 1967). The article is available on line at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_ga3671/is_200510/ai_n15744610/print. There is an entire secondary literature on the subject of American civil religion.
19. Jefferson himself apparently did not believe that religious belief was essential for morality. See T. Jefferson to T. Law (June 13), 1814 in D.W. Adam, *Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 385–86. This raises the question of whether much of the religious language of the Declaration should be taken as other than clever and convenient propaganda, much of it aimed overseas, and not as a statement of principles of the not yet existent American government.
20. Found conveniently at www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/washing.htm.
21. See R. Niebuhr, "Do the State and Nation Belong to God or the Devil?," in R. Niebuhr, *Faith and Politics* (1968), p. 83. The essay was originally written in 1937. For an interesting defense of Niebuhr, although stated in terms milder than I think Niebuhr may have intended, see P. Beinart, "The Rehabilitation of the Cold War Liberal," *The New York Times Magazine* (April 30, 2006), p. 40.
22. I do not claim that the Rav would endorse the claims made here.
23. For an example, see the overheated claims in J. Gibson, "The War on Christmas: How The Liberal Plot to Ban the Social Holiday is Worse Than You Thought" (2005).
24. J.B. Soloveitchik, *On Repentance*, 224 (1975).
25. See the paper of R' Moshe Twersky referred to elsewhere in this volume.
26. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses com, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/president/inaug/lincon2.htm>.
27. Pfeffer is surprisingly matter-of-fact in his description of the addition of the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, although I have no doubt that as a matter of abstract law he believed it to be unconstitutional. L. Pfeffer, *Church, State and Freedom*, 2nd ed. (1967).

28. *School District of Abington Twshp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 306 (1963) (Goldberg and Harlan, J.J., concurring).
29. For a good survey of the meaning of *yirat shamayim*, see R' Y. Amital, "The Fear of God In Our Times," *Jewish Values In A Changing World* (2005), p. 1.
30. Chapter 2:1–2.
31. *Sefer ha-Yereim*, Commandment 1.
32. Maimonides, *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, Positive Commandments 4. He is followed in this by *Sefer ha-Chinukh*, 432.
33. *Talmidei R. Yonah* 2b (Vilna ed.) In a related vein, my rav, R' Yonason Sacks, frequently calls attention to the *Biur Halakha*, *Orach Chaim* 659, arguing that the obligation to spend up to a third of one's wealth to perform a positive commandment extends to fulfilling a commandment according to all views. QUERY: Are these views normative *halakha* or *mishnat hasidut* (the ways of the pious)?
34. *ha-Amek Sha'aleh* (Leviticus) 101, s.v. *umitbai lei*.
35. Rabbi Y.Y. Weinberg, *le-Perakim* 347 (2003).
36. The *Yereim*, note 24, uses this source as an *example of yirat shamayim*. See also *T.B. Nedarim* 8b. But cf. *T.B. Rosh ha-Shana* 18b and *Ritva ad loc* and editor's notes. However, see *Genesis Rabbah* 68:19 quoted by Rashi to Genesis 27:21, noting that Yakov, but not Esau, frequently invoked God's name. The *midrashic* formulation is more cautious than Rashi's.
37. R' Meir Soloveichik told me at the Forum that his great-grandfather, R' Moshe Soloveitchik, in fact did not carry money into a bathroom, a report substantiated by R' Aharon Lichtenstein.
38. *Saving America? Faith Based Services and the Future of Civil Society* (2004), p. 18.
39. See Deuteronomy 4; 3; 31:11–13.
40. *Iyunin le'sefer Shmot*, 29–33 (1969) (Hebrew).
41. See J.B. Soloveitchik, "Surrendering Our Minds To God" in A.R. Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav*, 99 (1979).
42. R.J. Neuhaus, "Can Atheists Be Good Citizens?" *First Things* (August/September 1991), p. 17.
43. Compare G.S. Paul, "Cross National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies: A First Look," *Journal of Religion and Society*, 7 (2005), p.1 with J. Gruber, "Religious Participation and Outcomes: Is Religion Good For You?" *NBER Working Paper Series # 11377* at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w11377> (2005) (citing literature). One possible way of reconciling these conflicting studies is that voluntary religious behavior generates positive personal outcomes, whereas involuntary imposition of religious norms has adverse social consequences.
44. "Leading Scientists Still Reject God," 394, *Nature* (1998), p. 313.
45. See, e.g., *Rashi* to Leviticus 19, 14, quoting *Torat Kohanim* 7, 14. And you should fear your God "because the [giving of bad advice] is not given to [humans] to know if his intent is good or evil, and he can avoid blame...Therefore [the verse] says to fear God."

46. In a previous Orthodox Forum, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein in an essay entitled "The Duties of the Heart and the Responses to Suffering," in S. Carmy, *Jewish Perspectives on the Experience of Suffering* (1999), explored the relationship between recognition that suffering is a penalty for sin with sympathy for the suffering of others, along with modesty about human ability to decipher God's actions.
The essay is reprinted in Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Living* (2004), p. 117.
47. Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, *Halachic Man*, trans. L. Kaplan, fn. 4, pp. 139–41.
48. For a catalog of potential clashes over gay marriage and civil unions, see M. Stern, *Gay Marriages and the Churches* (forthcoming) (2008). See also, the illuminating article by E.J. Dionne, "Why the Culture War Is the Wrong War," *Atlantic* (January 2006).
49. See, e.g., S. Fish, "A Cartoon In Three Dimensions: Our Faith In Letting It All Hang Out," *The New York Times* (February 12, 2005), section 4, p. 15.
50. Compare in this regard, R' Saadia Gaon to Mishle 1:7 ("for it is obviously impossible that the fear of God should exist without knowledge") with the comments of the Vilna Gaon on the same verse, that "fear [of God] is the foundation and beginning of wisdom."
51. See the anecdote referenced in R' Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Conceptual Approach to Torah Learning," *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Learning* (2003), pp. 54–55.
52. J. Ratzinger, "Letter to Marcello Pera" in J. Ratzinger and M. Pera, *Without Roots* (2006), pp. 110–11.
53. R' J. Sacks, *Haggadah* (2006), p. 64.
54. *ibid.*, pp. 120–21.

13

“The Beginning of Wisdom:” Towards a Curriculum of *Yirat Shamayim* in Modern Orthodox High Schools

Mark E. Gottlieb

Almost forty years after Robert Bellah’s groundbreaking study of the then regnant religious ethos in contemporary American culture, the Lily Foundation commissioned the first and most statistically-significant survey of the actual beliefs and practices of over three thousand American adolescents aged thirteen through seventeen.¹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the findings from the National Study of Youth and Religion, presented to the public in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*,² echoed some of Bellah’s most memorable and striking claims. In a chapter suggestively titled “God, Religion, Whatever: On Moralistic Therapeutic

Deism,” sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, describe the process of adolescent religious development as something which “is simply happily absorbed by youth, largely, one might say, by osmosis, as one sixteen-year-old white Catholic boy from Pennsylvania stated so well: ‘Yeah, religion affects my life a lot, but you really don’t think about it as much. It just comes natural I guess after a while.’”³

Smith and Denton conclude, however, that despite this claim for the intuitive and fundamental nature of adolescent religious experience, in reality “only a minority of United States teenagers are naturally absorbing by osmosis the traditional substantive content and character of the religious traditions to which they claim to belong.” “For,” Smith and Denton say, “it appears to us [that] another popular religious faith, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, is colonizing many historical religious traditions and, almost without anyone noticing, converting believers in the old faiths to its alternative religious vision of divinely underwritten personal happiness and interpersonal niceness.”⁴ With Bellah and, now, Smith and Denton, it certainly seems like modern American teenagers preternaturally anticipate – and pretty accurately reflect back – their parents’ highest hopes and most gripping fears about God, man, and the cosmos.

Although clearly a critical educational desideratum, to date, no data-driven study either informing an anecdotally detailed portraiture of “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” or presenting a more compelling alternative has been replicated in our own community.⁵ Still, the ideological muddle many Modern Orthodox educators encounter in our schools on an almost daily basis would seem to confirm these broader observations about the minimalist or “thin” quality of our students’ religious experience.⁶ Despite our strong numbers and increasingly professionalized infrastructure, ask a Modern Orthodox educator how our community is doing, and you’ll likely hear ambivalence or frustration, at best, apocalyptic predictions of the imminent demise of our movement, at worst. Alternately identified as an eclipsing of *yirat shamayim*, a lack of passion or punctiliousness in *shemirat ha-mitzvot*, a religious behaviorism that belies the

richness and depth of an authentic religious sensibility of inwardness and meaning, or some other such critique, this prognosis now coexists side-by-side with the increasingly clichéd "slide to the Right," and the dreadfully-feared phenomenon of "Flipping Out."

Our educational institutions, starting first with the family, are engaged in nothing less than a counter-cultural struggle against the forces of consumerism, sound-byte oversimplification, and functionalism, on the one hand, and an often disdainful and stifling parochialism that denies the Divine Presence in the totality of the order of creation, on the other. Unsurprisingly, the sociological and cultural dispositions of both these unhappy alternatives feed off each other in a vicious circular frenzy, further eroding the chances for a healthy and vibrant culture of critically engaged and serious Orthodoxy. To name these troubling spheres of influence for the hearts and minds of our children and students is not to equate the threat posed by each to the religious well-being of our constituent population. The one necessary thing, the cultivation of an unapologetic life of *avodat Hashem*, must always be paramount. But the emotional and intellectual fallout from this communal tug-of-war has created nothing short of a profound crisis of meaning for many of our students.⁷

In what follows, I'd first like to offer a tentative analysis as to just what is entailed by saying that our schools and students are missing a more robust and essential realization of *yirat shamayim*; next, I present a framework for understanding what *yirat shamayim* might mean in a specifically educational or pedagogical context, and finally, I offer some modest programmatic suggestions of just how our schools might go about addressing this perennial religious educational problem. As an appendix to the argument articulated below, I've included an outline of a high school course in Jewish Thought that was developed at the Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts, as a case-study of *yirat shamayim* education in action. Of course, this is simply one educator's vision of what *yirat shamayim* education might look like, with no pretense or presumption of comprehensiveness. If the interested reader finds this particular approach meaningful, I will have satisfied my rather circumscribed goals for this conversation.

A PEDAGOGICAL PRIMER: ON THE DIFFICULTY OF DEFINING *YIRAT SHAMAYIM*

Despite (or, perhaps equally, because of) its centrality in our religious tradition, defining *yirat shamayim* in a clear, unequivocal way is difficult. The term itself remains terribly elusive, both conceptually underdetermined and colloquially overextended. It is more often intuitively identifiable in the embodied lived lives of simple, pious Jews or knight-saints of the faith than discursively described or discretely analyzed. Covering a range of actions and attitudes, thoughts and feelings, *yirat shamayim* includes a number of different religious and educational goals which may require multiple modalities of instruction and expression. With this caveat in mind, we might identify two basic dimensions within the general category of *yirat shamayim*, one broadly cognitive, the other, affective. While the language and context of most biblical and talmudic references to the normative obligation of *yirat shamayim* convey a strong sense of affective or emotional engagement and response to the Divine,⁸ there is also a significant tradition, mostly in the medieval and modern literature on the topic, that depicts *yirat shamayim* as a kind of intellectual or cognitive apprehension, a comprehensive religious perspective, a way of understanding God and world that informs our entire orientation to existence.⁹ Interestingly, both the cognitive and affective expressions of a comprehensive and thoroughgoing religious consciousness are interwoven in one of the most foundational formulations of *yirat shamayim*, found in Rambam, *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* (2:2):

And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him and the fear of Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and long with an exceeding longing to know His great Name; as David said, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” [Psalms 42:3] And when he considers these matters, he will recoil frightened, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with

meager intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge. And so David said, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers – what is man that You are mindful of him?" [Psalms 8:4–5]

According to Rambam, an intellectual or cognitive apprehension of the sheer vastness and complexity of the natural order yields, apparently willy-nilly, an affective, almost palpably physiological response in the attentive *oved HaShem*. This continuum of cognitive and affective moments in the total *yirat shamayim* experience suggests a holistic quality to the normative obligation, a kind of "feeling intellect" or "logic of the heart,"¹⁰ widening the range of the educational goals necessary to foster its realization in our students and schools. The challenge here, of course, is to not define *yirat shamayim* so broadly or diversely as to nearly preclude the educator's ability to create clear and realizable educational goals for text and non-text study towards passionate religious engagement with reality.

As Lewis Carroll famously reminds us, when you don't know where you're going, any which way will get you to your destination. Needless to say, the lack of a deliberate, consistent, and systematic definition of *yirat shamayim* makes it very hard, if not well nigh impossible, to create clear and developmentally appropriate educational goals, curricula, and forms of assessment, for our students and schools.

A THEOLOGICAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: EDUCATION AS A COUNTER-CULTURAL ACTIVITY

The late cultural critic Neal Postman, Professor of Communication and Media Studies at New York University and student-colleague of Marshall McLuhan, suggested that schools and larger educational communities serve as an important corrective, a kind of barometric counter-balance, to the philosophical and social excesses, the cultural and political hegemony of the larger surrounding setting.¹¹ In Postman's model, schools are meant to be purposely counter-cultural, cultivating their own alternative intellectual and ideological environment for their students. In a contemporary culture often inimical

to our most basic values of modesty, purity, community, thrift, piety and virtue, the cultivation of a compelling, alternative culture, embodying religiously-appropriate and even edifying forms of art, communication, recreation, information-transmission, etc., must be an educational priority.¹² In addition to these frequently hidden elements of the modern curriculum, there is often a strong, unidentified, cognitive component to what is missing in our educational institutions, one that may account for the dissonance experienced by many of our Modern Orthodox students.

Recent conversations, mainly in Israel but slowly trickling stateside, on the omnipresence of Talmud in the traditional Yeshiva High School curriculum and the perceived crisis of value looming in the *dati-leumi* horizon have sharpened the focus of this educational deliberation on the religious development of adolescents.¹³ Much of the discussion to date has centered around the question of “relevance” in our contemporary Talmud curriculum, with the sides of traditional Brisker *lomdus* squaring off against the newer schools of applied, contextualized, values-driven interpretation and teaching. I also want to raise the issue of relevance, not only in the relatively thin sense that *shor she-nagach et ha-parah* will not naturally resonate with today’s suburban students as much as it did with our agriculturally knowing ancestors but, far more significantly, in the more robust, foundational sense that our students do not perceive the worlds of knowledge, experience, or meaning through the lenses of a Torah-centered consciousness.

Simply put, Modern Orthodoxy struggles to articulate and transmit a coherent, compelling, and systematic worldview for her students, one which gives consistent meaning and value to the welter of experience comprising our engagement with reality. This lack of a comprehensive worldview impacts many areas of a student’s religious life and development, from an inability to identify and articulate basic theological principles and commitments to a widespread confusion regarding the viability and parameters of our community’s engagement with modernity, civil society, and culture, both high and popular. Not only are the vast majority of our students unable to articulate what an authentically traditional position

might be on a host of live issues facing them in today's world, that is to say, *what* to think Jewishly, they appear even far less equipped to begin the deliberation of *how* one would go about thinking Jewishly, how to frame or perceive an issue from a place of authority, meaning, and Jewish understanding. In brief, our boys and girls are not educated to know, perceive and feel with *yirat shamayim*. After briefly surveying some classic formulations of *yirat shamayim*, we will attempt to sketch a view of what *yirat shamayim* might look like as an educational or pedagogical principle.

FROM ONTOLOGICAL DEPENDENCE TO EPISTEMOLOGICAL COMPREHENSIVENESS: *YIRAT SHAMAYIM* AS WORLDVIEW

The Maharal, living and teaching on the cusp of modernity, offered an approach to *yirat shamayim* that emphasized the relational aspect of created and Creator, of human object and ultimate Subject.¹⁴ *yirat shamayim* consists precisely in the acknowledgement that Man is utterly and radically dependent upon God for his very essence and existence:

The essence of fear is that man is an effect in relation [to Hashem who is] the Cause, and this is the quintessence of fear. And by virtue of the fact that man is an effect, he is considered as nothing in that he is an effect dependent upon his Cause.¹⁵

God's ontological exclusiveness – as the Rav *zt"l* formulates it, "God and reality are identical; to exist is tantamount to abiding in God,"¹⁶ – yields a kind of totalizing consciousness, in which our encounter with the worlds of knowledge and experience in and around us is mediated by our ontic dependence on God. In other words, a religious reading of reality, the activity of giving a comprehensive account or narrative of our life's experiences informed by our textual and lived traditions, is really the epistemic correlative of Maharal's metaphysic.¹⁷

Understood this way, *yirat shamayim* defined as man's total dependence on God in the ontological plane of Being, yields a second, derivative variety, one eminently suited to the educational context

we are focusing on here. If *yirat shamayim* is, ontologically-speaking, the acknowledgment of one's essential dependence on God, then we might say that *yirat shamayim* is also the epistemological activity of giving a comprehensive account, a religiously-coherent and complete narrative of one's encounter with reality – *b'Orcha nireh Or* (Psalms 36:10).¹⁸ It must emphasized, however, that this understanding of *yirat shamayim* as Worldview, a comprehensive account-giving and cognitive-experiential orientation towards man and world, does not presuppose the existence of a single, exclusive, particular, or monolithic Orthodox Jewish Theory (or Theology) of Everything. I am not suggesting that there exists some particular, privileged account of reality that embodies the traditional Jewish way of thinking about x, y, z or any given topic of interest. Indeed, we can easily conceive multiple models of worldview thinking within a traditional scheme, from Maimonidean rationalist orientations, to those embodying more mystical approaches (both Hasidic and Lithuanian versions), to Musar and personalist models (perhaps themselves subject to various distinctive versions, e.g., a Slobodka "worldview" would differ in perhaps some significant ways from a Novordock or Kelm Musar orientation). But the common denominator between all such individual models would be a comprehensiveness of scope and a commitment to developing and articulating a systematic way of thinking about any given topic or area of human engagement.

Thomas Mann once defined authenticity as a kind of "life full of citations," a way of being that draws on our lived and total engagement with our textuality, which constructs our consciousness out of the shared storehouse of our sacred scriptures, texts, and sources. Our educational institutions fall far short of this ideal not just in the obvious inability of the vast majority of students to quote or even simply recognize *pesukim*, *ma'amarei chazal*, or other *mekorot* that would inform one's cognitive perspective on any given matter. More than this: Torah doesn't merely have something to say about everything we encounter in our lives, public and private, from politics to popular culture (often confused these days in our media-drenched society), economic theory to sports, and everything in between; it is

the very ground of our thinking, the prism through which we ought to understand all reality. This is first an epistemological claim, and only secondarily a pedagogical one. In both keys, this lack of a coherent and comprehensive *hashkafat olam* precludes our students from seeing knowledge, beauty, and experience in a religiously relevant fashion.¹⁹ There are, blessedly, study halls in Israel that are just beginning to seriously engage in this explicit work of worldview-formation from the rich depths of our *mesorah* and its robust application to the realia of cultural and political life.²⁰ Modern Orthodox education in America, however, seems to be stuck in a sort of collective communal time-warp when it comes to our Talmud Torah, bound by modes of mechanical mastery of a technical or conceptual nature. Without the cultivation of a comprehensive account of meaning and experience, informed by the reflective study of halakhic axiology and practice we're describing here, Modern Orthodoxy in America will remain a religiously minimalist community of affluence and mediocrity, a spiritual half-way house for those on a serious quest for meaning, unable to provide its adherents with the religious and cultural resources to realize its ambitious and holy mandate.

FROM THEORY TO PRAXIS: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR RENEWAL

To illustrate what I'm trying to capture in this call for a cognitively-grounded understanding of *yirat shamayim* – namely, the cultivation of a comprehensive worldview, a theological anthropology or contemporary theology of culture – I want to briefly focus on one particular area where I think our failure is most obvious and acute. Before articulating what one such model of worldview-thinking might look like, it is important to emphasize again that this is just one possible expression of *yirat shamayim* as worldview-thinking, not by any means an exclusive one. Another traditional model or comprehensive religious account may express different foci, to take just a single example, on the relative balance between the dignity and measure of man and the need for epistemological modesty in all things. What I am offering here is simply one narrative among

perhaps many others that captures the comprehensive, not to say totalizing, quality of a coherent and reflective orientation, one we are calling a *yirat shamayim* perspective.

For all the talk about the primacy of *mitzvot bein adam l'chaveiro* in our tradition, I submit that our yeshivot and day schools would look very different if we didn't merely pay lip-service to this domain of religious life, but, instead, really lived like our faith requires. What would our curriculum look like if we really took seriously Hillel's maxim that the entire Torah can be distilled into the principle of *ve-ahavta le-reakha kamokha*, and that the rest of the Torah is simply an elaboration of this ideal? What would our day school and yeshiva graduates look like if they lived their lives as if the closest we came to the Divine Other in this world was in the divine face of the human other, if they really internalized C.S. Lewis's powerful expression from his wartime sermon, *The Weight of Glory*, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal... but it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit?" Something like Levinas' transformational reading of Rav Hayyim Volozhin or Rav Simcha Zisl's ideal of acquiring Torah by "bearing the burden of the Other," is what we're programmatically – in the most tentative, telegraphic form – grasping at here.²¹ Let me leave the reader with a couple of suggestions towards cultivating a more comprehensive theological-grounded consciousness, a *yirat shamayim* worldview, in our educational communities, one curricular, the other centered around school culture, before closing on a more hopeful note.

First, our choice of texts and topics – more, the way in which we study *all* our traditional texts – should more concretely reflect this goal of making *explicit* the mostly implicit value-system, or worldview, contained within our *masorah*. From *Nezikin* to *Nashim*, as well as in the more straightforward areas of ethical inquiry embodied in the *halakhot* governing *shemirat ha-lashon*, *tzedakah*, *bikkur holim*, *ribit ve-ona'ah*, *kibbud av ve-eim*, *tzni'ut* and *kavod ha-briot*, to name just the most obvious cases, our curriculum must raise the questions of human value, notions of personal identity and agency, conceptions of gender and community, of social and political justice,

and, above all, the radical commitment to a thoroughgoing ethic of religious humanism. Obviously, more attention should be paid to classics in *machshava*, *Musar*, and *Chassidut*, which treat these concerns in a direct manner (again, read and studied in a deliberate and reflective fashion – *Mesillat Yeshtarim* can be taught, and usually is, I'm afraid, in a way which bypasses almost all of these concerns, making it less, not more, of a source of real, transformative power), but the *Yam shel Talmud* and *Halakha* are still the most significant sources for this sort of study.

Second, our schools and yeshivot need to create the spiritual space for faculty, rebbeim and teachers, to engage in their own religious and ethical growth and development, a personal-pedagogical discipline of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*. Rav Dov Zinger, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Makor Hayyim in Kefar Etzion and one of our community's most thoughtful educators, once told me that when his Yeshiva's students are not experiencing *tefilla* with the proper *kavvana*, are becoming too competitive and not forming a cohesive cohort, the faculty look inward, and search within themselves for the latent sources of dysfunction. Institutional and classroom leaders must model this kind of introspective habit, this practice of educating toward *yirat shamayim*, if our students are to see spiritual practice in action and be receptive to its proper place in their own lives.

In 1789, Samuel and John Phillips founded their academy in Andover, Massachusetts and wrote the following lines, elegantly articulating the very kind of comprehensive religious and moral educational vision we've just outlined:

But above all, it is expected that the Master's attention to the disposition of the minds and morals of the Youth under his charge will exceed every other care; well-considering that, though goodness without knowledge...is weak and feeble; yet knowledge without goodness is dangerous; and that both united form the noblest of character...the first and principal object of this institution is the promotion of Piety and Virtue.²²

Less than a century after the founding of Phillips Andover Academy and halfway around the world, Rav Yisrael Salanter made a similar claim for the priority of an embodied and ethically-centered

vision of *yirat shamayim* over traditional forms of talmudic scholarship, of coherence and embodied purpose of vision over disengaged theory and disconnected pilpulism, radically revolutionizing the landscape of Jewish education for the next fifty years. If not for the destruction of European Jewry in the middle of the past century, the Musar Movement may still have been advancing the aims of reflective, practice-based *yirat shamayim* education, stemming from a comprehensive worldview grounded in the sources of our *masorah*, to ever more sophisticated heights. Perhaps what this postmodern world needs most, with its deep skepticism towards abstract rationality divorced from pragmatic value, is another kind of Salanter-inspired renaissance.

APPENDIX
High School Jewish
Thought Course Outline
as Case Study of Worldview formation

בס"ד

Jewish Thought
Rabbi Gottlieb

Maimonides School
אלול תשס"ד/2004 Fall

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, זצ"ל, the founder of Maimonides School, often characterized Judaism as a "divine anthropology," a religiously significant account of the human condition. This Jewish philosophy of the person must engage the entire range of human activity, especially those areas that form the basic fabric of everyday life. Nearly everything we do, both as individuals and in relations with others, is colored by sentiments, attitudes, ideas, feelings, customs, and beliefs concerning "how to live." For the serious Jew, the activities of everyday life – loving, working, playing, studying, caring, giving, teaching, talking, eating – are both the locus (place) of *kedusha*, holiness, and the object of our ethical and religious teachings. This course, through thoughtful deliberation and discussion of basic, but equally sophisticated, texts and themes, will train the student to think deeply, and "think Jewishly," about the ideas and experiences of knowledge and *יראת שמים*, love and friendship, work and play, and character and ethics.

Contrast, both between sources and ideas within our tradition, as well as sources that form the body of wisdom in the worlds of literature, philosophy, history, science, etc, serves the purpose of defining (and refining) "borders" but does not go far enough to convey all that is "within." For this reason, we will be looking to develop an authentic Jewish approach to life through the analysis of classical and contemporary Jewish sources, supplementing these sources, when appropriate, with writings for the world of general culture and thought.

Our approach of analysis, exposure to texts both Jewish and General, and discussion, will require serious effort and participation

on the part of the student. Students are expected to prepare reading assignments at home in preparation for class direction and discussion. There will be one written assignment (3–4 pp. in length) in each semester.

Grades for the course will be based on class preparedness (33%), participation (33%), and written work (33%). A secondary skill that will hopefully be cultivated in our course will be the continued development of the practice of outlining articles and essays. This will sharpen the students' ability to distill the central ideas of the essay, as well as see the connection between form and content, and how creativity stems from structure.

Course Curriculum

Unit 1 Introduction: What is Jewish Thought and Why Study It?

1. פירוש ר' ש.ר. הירש על התורה, שמות לג:כא
2. רמב"ם, הל' יסודי התורה, ד:יג. הל' תשובה י:ו
3. N. Postman, "Science and the Story We Need"
4. Selections from R. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Mind*

Unit 2 יראת שמים, or Recovering the Lost Virtue of Reverence

1. תפילת "ונתנה תקף", מחזור של ימים נוראים
2. P. Woodruff, *Reverence*, pp. 3–13, 35–43.
3. פירוש ר' ש.ר. הירש על התורה, דברים י:יב–יג
קהלת יב:יג עם התורה תמימה
ברכות ו: "ואמר ר' חלבו...לזה"
4. תהילים לד:יב–טו עם פירוש ר' ש.ר. הירש
5. רמב"ם, הל' יסודי התורה, ב:א–ב
רמב"ם, הל' תשובה פרק י (א–ו)
6. רמח"ל, קטעים ממסילת ישרים
נחשוני, הגות בפרשיות התורה, עמ' 754–750
7. R. Soloveitchik, "Torah and Humility"
8. R.S. Carmy, "To Get the Better of Words...."
9. Vaclav Havel, "A Word About Words"
10. Selections from Rabbi B. Freundel, *Contemporary Orthodox Judaism's Response to Modernity* (KTAV).

Unit 3 אהבת ה' ואהבת אדם: Love and Friendship

Our source material will highlight the religious reality that the Jewish ethical life is located in the inter-subjective arena, the realm of human relationships. The *Ordo Amoris*, the right ordering of love and affections, must be studied and applied to the concrete situations of human interaction. The need for serious reflection in this area of Jewish ethical life is especially important in the high school years, as relationships and friendships take on a special urgency and intensity. Biblical and Talmudic narratives of love and friendship (Yaakov and Rachel and Leah, David and Yehonatan, R. Akiva and Rachel, Choni Ha'MeAgel), as well as theoretical and philosophical materials from Chazal, medieval and modern sources (Aristotle and Rambam on friendship, Netziv on “first impressions,” Rav Soloveitchik on marriage and parenthood, etc., Plato and Nietzsche on Love and Philosophy, C.S. Lewis on “loves and likes for the sub-human,” R. Lamm on Homosexuality, etc.) on the nature of love, friendship, and other relationships, will help cultivate an authentically Jewish ethic of relating to the other.

The ultimate purpose of our work together is to grow as thinking, feeling, and religiously sensitive individuals.... כן יהי רצון

I look forward to what lies ahead,

Best wishes for a חתונה טובה and an exciting year of studies together,

RMG

NOTES

1. Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Dædalus* (Winter 1967), pp. 1–21, later expanded into Bellah *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (University of California Press, 1985).
2. Oxford University Press, 2005.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 170–71.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
5. Thankfully, this lacuna looks like it will be shortly filled. Dr David Pelcovitz, Dr. Scot Goldberg, and Rabbi Steven Eisenberg of the Institute of Applied Research and Educational Partnership at Yeshiva University’s Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration have begun the hard work of data collection

and analysis on the religious and spiritual lives of Modern Orthodox youth, both before and after the Year in Israel experience. Their findings will provide an excellent starting-point for more focused communal agenda setting in the area of *yirat shamayim* education in our schools.

6. On "thinness" as a philosophical concept, see Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, 1994), pp. 1–21.
7. For an insightful treatment of some of the complexities inherent in talking about religious development in modern orthodox teenagers, largely informed by James Fowler's important work on the developmental stages of faith and meaning-making in the lives of boys and girls, see Jay Goldmintz, "Religious Development in Adolescence: A Work in Progress," *Tradition*, 37:4 (Winter 2003), esp. pp. 54–62.
8. See, for example, Deut. 10:12.
9. See, for example, Rashi on Job 4:6, ibn Ezra on Exodus 18:18–25 (long version). For a survey of some of these sources that portray *yirat shamayim* as a kind of cognitive, almost intellectualistic apprehension, variably expressed as a stance of absolute obedience to God's will and wisdom, a universalistic moral orientation, or an acknowledgement of our ultimate ontological dependence on God's reality, see Warren Zev Harvey's discussion in this volume, "*Yirat Shamayim* in Jewish Thought."
10. Rav Soloveitchik identifies this religious-philosophical orientation with Pascal's *logique de coeur* (*Halakhic Mind*, Free Press, 1986, p. 52). This approach has also been associated with John Henry Newman's pedagogic-apologetic theory articulated in his *A Grammar of Ascent* (1870). For a thoughtful analysis of Newman's theory in a contemporary educational context, see Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: Practical Reason and the Lure of Technique* (University of Notre Dame, 1992).
11. Neal Postman, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (Basic Books, 1971).
12. For an important early articulation of the need to create alternative cultural expressions in modern orthodox education, see Rabbi Mayer Schiller, "Realities, Possibilities and Dreams: Reaching Modern Orthodox Youth," *Ten Da'at* 3:2 (Winter 1989), pp. 23–26. See also now, Yoel Finkelman, "The Hidden Curriculum and *Mahshevet Yisrael* Education" (ATID, The Academy for Torah Initiatives and Directions, 2006).
13. *Notes from ATID: Talmud Study in Yeshiva High Schools* by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein and Rabbi Yehuda Brandes (ATID, 2007).
14. *Maharal, Netivot Olam* (*Netiv Yirat Hashem* 1). For the analysis of Maharal's conception of *yirat shamayim* suggested here, I am indebted to Rabbi Mayer Twersky's Orthodox Forum presentation. Much of what appears in the next paragraph is drawn from his thoughtful theological treatment there.
15. *Netivot Olam* (Ibid.)
16. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer* (Toras HoRav Foundation, 2003), p. 128.
17. On the use of "religion" as a form of account giving that is comprehensive, unsur-

- passable and central, see Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religious* (University of Chicago, 1999), esp. pp. 3–16.
18. For a traditional understanding of *yirat shamayim* in this more holistic spirit, see the commentaries of Seferno and R. S.R. Hirsch to Deuteronomy 9:12. For a contemporary and systematic formulation of this idea, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Blackwell, 1990).
19. Although the literature on the religious significance of "worldview thinking" is rapidly growing in the communities of Christian academic and educational inquiry to date, little has been contributed to the world of Jewish Thought in this important area. See, most recently, David Naugle, *Worldview: A History of a Concept* (Eerdmans, 2000); James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as Concept* (InterVarsity Press, 2004). Two exceptions to this lacuna in our contemporary theological literature are Max Kadushin's classic, *The Rabbinic Mind*, and, more recently, an important article by Jonathan Cohen, "Deliberation, Tradition, and the Problem of Incommensurability: Philosophical Reflections on Curricular Decision-Making" in *Educational Theory* 49 (1), pp. 71–89.
20. I have in mind here places like Beit Morasha, Yeshivat Siach Yitzchak's Machon Bina l'Itim, Beit Midrash Ra'avah, and, on a more public scale, the Shalem Center, but nothing remotely like this is happening in our day schools, yeshivot or other *mekomot Torah* in America.
21. For Levinas' ethical-theological reconstruction of *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim*, see "In the Image of God" according to Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner," found in *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures* (Continuum, 2007), pp. 148–163. For Rav Simcha Zisl, see *Hokhma U-Mussar*, chs. 1–4, *Kol Kitvei HaSaba MiKelm* and the thoughtful analysis in Ira F. Stone, *A Responsible Life: The Spiritual Path of Musar* (Aviv Press, 2006).
22. Cited in F. Washington Jarvis, *With Love and Prayers: A Headmaster Speaks to the Next Generation* (David R. Godine Publishers, 2000).

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