



KOL HAMEVASER

The Jewish Thought Magazine
of the Yeshiva University Student Body

Emunah

Volume I, Issue 7

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ABOUT KOL HAMEVASER

KOL HAMEVASER IS A MAGAZINE OF JEWISH THOUGHT DEDICATED TO SPARKING THE DISCUSSION OF JEWISH ISSUES ON THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY CAMPUS. IT WILL SERVE AS A FORUM FOR THE INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW IDEAS. THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO KOL HAMEVASER WILL BE THE UNDERGRADUATE POPULATION, ALONG WITH REGULAR INPUT FROM RIETS ROSHEI YESHIVA, YU PROFESSORS, EDUCATORS FROM YESHIVOT AND SEMINARIES IN ISRAEL, AND OUTSIDE EXPERTS. IN ADDITION TO THE REGULAR EDITIONS, KOL HAMEVASER WILL BE SPONSORING IN-DEPTH SPECIAL ISSUES, SPEAKERS, DISCUSSION GROUPS, SHABBATONIM, AND REGULAR WEB ACTIVITY. WE HOPE TO FACILITATE THE RELIGIOUS AND INTELLECTUAL GROWTH OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY AND THE LARGER JEWISH COMMUNITY.

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Faith, Dogma, and Solomon Schechter

BY ALEX OZAR

Our goal in this essay is to develop an understanding of Jewishⁱ faith, and, subsequently, to explore the ramifications of that understanding on the role and function of dogma within the Jewish religious experience. It should be stressed here at the outset that the question is not whether or not dogma has a role at all in Judaism – as Orthodox Jews we proudly affirm and hold dear a number of dogmas, and the simple fact of our believing them is surely sufficient justification – but rather precisely what role it plays. Let us begin then with a simple question: what comprises Jewish faith?

Surely the most basic component of Jewish faith is belief in certain propositions, such as 'there exists a God' and 'His will was revealed in the Torah'. However, it seems that there must be much more to Jewish faith than any list of *'ani ma'amin'*s. Could we at all accept that the faith of our forefathers, sages, and saints could be reduced to cognitive assent to theological propositions? When Avraham raised the knife to slaughter his son, was he driven solely by the cold intellectual recognition of God's existence? When so many Jewish martyrs died with the *shema* on their lips, was there no more to their proclamation than the cognitive apprehension of God's unity? Can a list of doctrines possibly serve as the exclusive foundation of the Jew's heritage of four millennia of fiery dedication? People are not machines, and Jewish faith is not a matter of intellectual mechanism.

The faith of Avraham and his progeny is a passionate, zealous, and powerful commitment to, loyalty towards, and love for the Almighty. "Faith is not so much assent to an idea as consent to God."ⁱⁱⁱ Jewish faith is not merely assent to the idea of God, but is rather a commitment to God the person and consent to His will. When Avraham sealed a covenant with God he was committing himself to eternal loyalty to Him and His word, regardless of what it might entail for the future. So when he was commanded to sacrifice his son before God, he remained steadfast in his commitment, not faltering in the face of the greatest trial. The Jewish people, following in their forefather's stead, reaffirmed as a nation their absolute, unconditional loyalty to God at Sinai when they proclaimed "*na'aseh ve-nishma*" – that they were prepared to dedicate their lives to God and His commands, whatever it might involve. So we should hardly be surprised that throughout the many tests of history, and to this day still, the Jewish people has remained faithfully committed, willing even to sacrifice its children. Clearly, the faith of the Jews involves much that cannot be reduced entirely to propo-

sitional content.

So far we have shown only that there is more to the Jewish faith than propositional content alone, but propositional content there clearly is. However, it seems there are a number of qualities which distinguish Jewish belief in its traditional doctrines, such as the coming of the Messiah, from standard belief in a proposition, such as the belief that my shoes are brown. First, there is a difference in terms of the manner in which the proposition is believed; specifically, which of the believer's faculties are involved. If I ponder the question of whether or not my shoes are brown, the rational, cognitive faculty of my mind will immediately respond with the answer that they



are, in fact, brown. It is a simple, mechanical process of my intellect, an uneventful exercise with little to no experiential impact; my personality is hardly engaged. Now, consider Martin Buber's description of religious faith: "My rationality, my rational power of thought, is merely a part, a particular function of my nature; when however I 'believe,' ... my entire being is engaged, the totality of my nature enters the process, indeed this becomes possible only because the relationship of faith is a relationship of my entire being."ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Jewish belief is unique because it is holistic, being performed by the entirety of one's being. From his most basic primal emotions to his most sophisticated intellectual faculties, the totality of the Jew is engaged in the act of faith. When the Jew is asked whether or not he believes in the Torah's divine origin or in God's unity, his propositional response, comes not from the intellect alone, but from the whole of his being. As Rav Soloveitchik put it: "Knowledge of God is not just abstract in nature. It is dynamic, passionate, experiential, all-powerful, and all-redeeming. It is not knowledge in the ordinary

sense of the word; it is ecstatic and perceptual."^{iv}

In what may be a related phenomenon, it seems that the propositional content of Jewish faith itself is qualitatively distinct from that of standard beliefs. The proposition that my shoes are brown has one clear, definite meaning. However, consider the Jewish belief in the Messiah; to what precisely does it refer? Who is the Messiah? What does he look like? When will he come? What will he do? What will the world be like after his arrival? There are no definitive answers to these questions. Clearly, the content of the belief in the Messiah is a much more complex matter than that of 'my shoes are brown,' as it stands for a host

of possibilities but not any one in particular. Now, one may initially be tempted to say that the whole of this distinction is that whereas 'my shoes are brown' is clear and specific, Messianic belief is simply vague and undefined, a mere generality. However, this does not nearly do justice to the nature of Messianic belief.

Jewish Messianic belief's non-specificity is due not to some lack or deficiency in its content or character; on the contrary, it is precisely because it is so grand and comprehensive, encompassing a spiritual worldview of such profound depth, that it cannot be restricted to gritty particulars, as they would of necessity prove crude and grossly insufficient.

When a Jew asserts his belief in the Messiah, he is proclaiming his faith in the essential goodness of God and His creations, such that regardless of the incessant evils history has heretofore delivered, and despite the apparent futility of man and his society's quests for perfection, there must come a day when justice, kindness, and righteousness will reign^v. The conviction that this day must come is just one

particular expression of the Jew's broad and grand outlook on the nature of God and the world. Thus, even the purely propositional content of the Jewish belief in the Messiah, is of a very different sort than that of 'my shoes are brown.' Though both involve definite, concrete propositions, the former contains an entire philosophy as well, which is certainly the primary component, and from which any particular proposition cannot be disentangled.

Further, and here begins our discussion of particular dogma, one wonders whether Jewish Messianic belief, or Jewish beliefs in general, really require formulation as clearly delineated propositions. Maybe, as we saw specifically in the case of Messianic belief, any article of faith can be sufficiently abstracted so as to reveal its underlying philosophy, allowing it to shine free of the dross of gritty particulars. Does it really matter precisely how the Torah was authored, so far as we retain the fundamental conviction that it truly expresses the word of God? Does it matter whether we believe in God as the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover or as a person, or whether we conceive of God as an being or as an idea, so long as we have faith that there is some ultimate Entity? Perhaps we should drop our more specific, "fundamentalist" theological claims in favor of more broad, grand, and essential philosophical commitments (hereafter referred to as "abstracted faith claims").

The argument here is really two-pronged. First, as we discussed earlier, the primary component of Jewish faith seems to be the fundamental, non-propositional commitments and loyalty involved, rather than mere cognitive assent to theological propositions. As such, dogma other than the most basic convictions may just be so much unnecessary baggage. Second, even accepting the value of propositional faith claims in general, abstracted faith claims do seem to capture the essence and any significance of particular ones, overshadow them in terms of importance, and ultimately make them seem petty and sterile. Excessive focus on the fine points of dogma may serve to distract us from the loftier, more essential ideas they represent.

Here is one real-life example of this kind of argument: "The dogma of revelation in regard to the Pentateuch consists of two parts: the divine inspiration and the Mosaic authorship. The first part refers to a mystery, the second to a historic fact...Philosophy of religion must deal with the first part. Its concern is not whether the Pentateuch was written down in its entirety during the forty years of Israel's sojourn in the desert, but rather to understand the meaning and the validity of the claim that the will of God reached the understanding of man,

and that the Pentateuch is a mirror of God's reaching man... The essence of our faith in the sanctity of the Bible is that its words contain that which God wants us to know and to fulfill. How these words were written down is not the fundamental problem^{vi}."

There are a number of responses to this argument. To begin, from a purely pragmatic perspective, it is doubtful whether a dogma-less faith could be adequately maintained. Indeed, there have been many Jews of great stature who despite their rejection of certain dogmas remained passionately committed to the Jewish faith, religion, and people, but can we realistically expect this of the masses of ordinary Jews? People require fixed and concrete propositions to latch on to; abstract philosophical ideas can't provide believers with the existential security all people crave. Solomon Schechter, commenting on the so-called "historical school" of Jewish theology and revelation, writes: "How long the position of this school will prove tenable is another question... we may hope that even its theology, as far as it goes, will "do" for us, though I neither hope nor believe that it will do for those who come after us^{vii}."

On a more fundamental level, is it really true that particular dogmas are more sterile or petty than abstracted faith claims? For many, believing in literal Mosaic authorship of the Torah provides vibrancy and life to the religious experience that would be glaringly absent in an abstracted belief, for two reasons. First, the fact that the believer is uniting with the historical body of the Jewish people, from Sinai to the present, in affirming the traditional belief in *Torah mi-Sinai*, is in itself edifying and gives the truth of the proposition reality and meaningfulness. Second, abstract faith claims often become sterile platitudes themselves, devoid of meaning and significance. More pointedly, lofty philosophies can lead to utopias, but no less to totalitarianism and genocide, and we haven't seen many utopias. It is precisely with the gritty, concrete particulars of dogma that our faith achieves enduring reality, security, and meaningfulness.

In Schechter's words: "Being brought up in the old Low Synagogue, where, with all attachment to tradition, the Bible was looked upon as the crown and the climax of Judaism... in unguarded moments makes me rebel against this new rival of revelation in the shape of history. At times this now fashionable exaltation of Tradition at the expense of Scripture even impresses me as a sort of religious bimetalism in which bold speculators in theology try to keep up the market value of an inferior currency by denouncing loudly the bright shining gold which, they would have us believe, is less fitted to circulate in the vulgar use of daily life than the small cash of historical interpretation.^{viii}"

It in no way follows from the fact that Jewish faith consists primarily of non-propositional commitment and loyalty that propositional dogmas are not still vital and essential components of Jewish faith. For one, if we do demand that Jews commit their hearts, energy, and even lives to Judaism, would it not be strange to make no demands of their minds? Would it be natural to be Jewish in heart and body, but not in intellect? Reservation from commitment to Jewish dogma clearly betrays a lacking in overall Jewish commitment. One who lives a full, productive Jewish life but whose actions do not correlate with beliefs in God, His revelation, and the Jewish teleological vision is in danger of living a farce, as a sort of decapitated, skeletal zombie. When severed from our beliefs, our actions lose their meaning. To quote Schechter one final time, "We usually urge that in Judaism religion means 'life' but we forget that a life without guiding principles and thoughts is a life not worth living^{ix}."

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ⁱ It should be noted that many of the things to be said about Jewish faith will apply equally to religious faith in general. However, this will not be true in all cases, and so I retain the word "Jewish" throughout for the sake of clarity and convenience.

ⁱⁱ Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, 166.

ⁱⁱⁱ Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, 8. Harper and Row Publishers, 1961.

^{iv} Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Abraham's Journey*, Ktav, 2007.

^v For a fascinating explication of these ideas and their centrality to the definition of Judaism from its inception, as well as a demonstration of how the Genesis story is an expression of them, see Nachum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, Shoken Press.

^{vi} Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 258, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955.

^{vii} Solomon Schechter, *Studies In Judaism*, page xx, The Macmillian Company, London, 1905.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

"Let me know Your ways, that I may know You:" An Exploration of Rambam's Conception of *Imitatio Dei*

BY SEFI LERNER

Sometime in high school I was first introduced to the concept of *imitatio dei*. The idea seemed like a nice one – man has some sort of obligation or moral mandate to emulate God. The particulars, however, were amorphous. What is the purpose of imitating God? How is it accomplished? The well-known Gemara in *Shabbat* (133a) applies *imitatio dei* to character traits: "Just as He is compassionate and merci-

beyond this. According to him, not only is the imitation of God's actions a consequence of having achieved the intellectual perfection that allows one to know God, but the pursuit of such intellectual perfection is itself an act of *imitatio dei*, as an analysis of the first two chapters of *The Guide* demonstrates.

In the first two chapters, Rambam addresses the creation of man "in the image of God."ⁱⁱⁱ In I:1, *imago dei* is discussed with the specific intent of reconciling the use of the



ful, you too should be compassionate and merciful." While the Gemara offers insight into the realization of *imitatio dei*, the scope of its application seems somewhat limited. Rambam, however, threads references to *imitatio dei* throughout *The Guide of the Perplexed*, concluding that it is man's ultimate goal.

In the final chapter of *The Guide*, Rambam describes his conception of the highest level of human perfection: "the acquisition of rational virtues"^{iv} such that one gains an intellectual understanding of what is true. This intellectual understanding leads to apprehension of God and "assimilation to His actions."^v Hence, according to Rambam, *imitatio dei* is the result of reaching the human ideal. Man, in his perfect state, emulates God's actions. However, a careful reading of Rambam reveals that his understanding of *imitatio dei* extends

terms "image" (*tselem*) and "likeness" (*demut*) with the notion of God's incorporeality. How can man be created in the image of God if He has no likeness? Rambam argues that whereas the term "form" (*to'ar*) is applied to physical bodies, the terms "image" and "likeness" are applied only to the concepts that designate the true substance of a being.^{iv} Rambam therefore explains that man's creation in the "image" and "likeness" of God refers to man's elevated intellectual apprehension being similar to that of God. By rejecting the corporeality of God, Rambam allows for a close link between man's creation *imago dei* and his ability to achieve *imitatio dei*; both suggest a non-physical similarity between man and God. Inherent in the very creation of man in "the image of God" is his assimilation to God through superior intellectual apprehension.^v In short, *imitatio dei*

follows naturally and automatically from creation *imago dei*.

However, this relationship between *imitatio dei* and man's creation *imago dei* can only be said of man immediately after creation, before the sin. The key to understanding the attainment of perfection following the sin as described in III:54, and thereby *imitatio dei*, lies in a consideration of the second chapter of *The Guide*. In I:2, Rambam relates to man's condition both before the sin and afterwards. He introduces the chapter by telling of a challenge raised to him by a wise man. The wise man questioned how it is conceivable that man, whom he asserts was created "devoid of intellect," was punished for eating forbidden fruit by gaining the "capacity to distinguish between good and evil."^{vi} This punishment seems to be a reward! Rambam begins his response by refuting the assumption of the challenger: "For the intellect that God made overflow unto man, and that is the latter's ultimate perfection, was that which *Adam* had been provided with before he disobeyed. It was because of this that it was said of him that he was created *in the image of God and in His likeness*."^{vii} Man in his initial state was created with superior intellect. Rambam supports this contention by citing the verse regarding creation *imago dei*. Since God has no body, man's creation in the "image of God" can only mean that he was endowed with an intellectual faculty similar to that of God. This argument is mostly a reiteration, albeit more explicit, of what was already stated in I:1.

Rambam continues his response to the challenge by explaining Adam's punishment. In this explanation, he elaborates on the condition of Adam following the sin by contrasting it to his state before the sin. Before sinning, Adam was in a state of intellectual perfection such that he understood the difference between "truth" (*emet*) and "falsehood" (*sheker*). "Truth" and "falsehood" are terms applied to the concepts one understands through pure intellect. After sinning, however, Adam no longer operated with the terms "truth" and "falsehood"; rather, he became involved in designating things as "good" (*tov*) or "evil" (*r'a*.) "Good" and "evil" are applied to accepted beliefs, not objective facts. The sin, indicative of man's submission to "his desires of the imagination and the pleasures of his corporeal senses,"^{viii} lowered Adam from his original state of perfect intellectual apprehension. He descended from being one who comprehends objective truth to being a judge of subjective beliefs. Rambam cites the verse in Genesis (3:5) when describing man following the sin: "And ye shall be like *Elohim*, knowing good and evil." As Rambam explains in the opening paragraph of I:2, the term *Elohim*, being equivocal, is used in this verse to refer to human "rulers". Hence, following the sin, Adam no longer emulated God, but rather a human judge.

Rambam's description of Adam before the sin is strikingly similar to his description of the highest level of perfection in III:54. Indeed, the phrase "ultimate perfection" is used in I:2 to describe the state of Adam immediately fol-

lowing creation. The nature of this intellectual perfection is described identically in both chapters. In I:2, Rambam explains that man, before the sin, "in the virtue of intellect knew 'truth' from 'falsehood.'" Likewise, in III:54, he describes the highest perfection as attainment of "true opinions concerning the divine things." It follows that man, created in the "image of God" with superior intellectual apprehension, was in a state of highest perfection. Furthermore, in his warning against he "who neglect[s his] own soul so that its whiteness has turned into blackness through the corporeal faculties having gained dominion over it,"^{ix} Rambam makes evident that submission to physical pleasure stands in the way of achieving perfection. The sin of Adam is described in precisely the same way. In I:2, Rambam writes that Adam was "inclined towards his desires of the imagination and the pleasures of his corporeal senses." The very fault that lowered Adam from the state of highest perfection remains an obstacle in regaining that perfection.

Hence, regarding the condition prior to the sin, the following can be said: creation *imago dei* endowed man with superior intellectual apprehension which is a manifestation of *imitatio dei* and an achievement of the highest level of perfection. The sin, however, lowered man from the state of perfection in which he knew objective truth to a state where he makes subjective judgments based on his senses. The purpose of man following the sin is to return to his ideal condition prior to the sin. Rambam believes that this can only be done by removing the impediments created by the sin. In III:9, he explains that "matter is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is." This relates to the sin of Adam – once man became involved in the physical world, his ability to apprehend that which is not physical was diminished. Following the sin, man needs to work to obtain the highest perfection, intellectual apprehension of God and emulation of Him, which are both manifestations of *imitatio dei*. Only then will he remove the "veil" separating him from God. Only then will he return to his original, perfect state of creation *imago dei*.

In *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, Rambam makes it eminently clear that study and an understanding of God and His ways is the pathway to repentance: "What did David mean when he said, 'Good and upright is the Lord - therefore He instructs sinners in the way, He directs the humble in justice, and He shows the meek His way'?" This is referring to the Prophets who were sent to publicize the ways of God and to make the people return by repentance. Furthermore, people have been given the power to learn and understand."^x Perhaps Rambam is alluding here to the quest for the highest perfection. After all, achievement of *imitatio dei* is the ultimate act of repentance from the first sin of man. Moreover, the goal of intellectual pursuit, as presented here, is to learn God's ways, an essential component of emulation.

Hence, in light of Rambam, *imitatio dei* took on new meaning in my life. It is the force behind my ongoing struggle to become more

intimately acquainted with God through the study of His word and His world. It is not only when I act compassionately towards my fellow human being, a value Rambam himself stresses at the end of III:54, that I am engaging in *imitatio dei*, I am striving to emulate God through my intellectual study as well. Every pursuit of knowledge and understanding of God narrows the gap between Him and me as I aim to fulfill my potential as a being created *imago dei*. Rambam points to Moshe Rabbeinu as the quintessential example of a human seeking to know God and understand His actions.^{xi} Like Moshe, through my learning I am beseeching God: "Let me know Your ways, that I may know You."^{xii}

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ⁱ Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Trans. Shlomo Pines. (Chicago, 1963) III:54,(pg. 635)

ⁱⁱ Maimonides, *Guide*, III:54 (pg. 638)

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 1:27

^{iv} Maimonides, *Guide* I:1 (pg. 22)

^v It should be noted that at the end of I:1, Rambam appears to retract his interpretation of the similarity between man's intellect and God's, claiming that in truth they are not similar and only appear to be so. In the very next sentence, however, he again speaks of the "divine intellect conjoined with man." This tension is captured by H. Kreisel in *Maimonides' Political Thought* (Albany, 1999): "Despite the unbridgeable chasm between God's intellect and the human intellect, it is the intellect which provides the point of resemblance and 'contact'" (pg. 131). Nevertheless, man's endeavor to perfect his intellect may itself be considered an act of *imitatio dei*, though he can never actually reach the level of the Divine.

^{vi} Maimonides, *Guide*, I:2 (pg. 23)

^{vii} Maimonides, *Guide*, I:2 (pg. 24)

^{viii} Maimonides, *Guide*, I:2 (pg. 25)

^{ix} Maimonides, *Guide*, III:54 (pg. 635)

^x Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 6:5

^{xi} Maimonides, *Guide*, III:54

^{xii} Exodus 33:13

An Interview with Dr. Michael Wyschogrod

BY NOAH GREENFIELD

Do you believe God has a body? In your essay, "Incarnation and God's Indwelling in Israel," you write, "There must also be a physical aspect to God's being." It sounds like you do.

No. I never say *that*. What I say is that God dwells in the people Israel as God dwelt in the Temple, in the *Beit Hamikdash*. Now, the stones of the *Beit Hamikdash* were not God. That would be quite unacceptable to say. On the other hand, the stones of the building in which He dwelt were *holy* and are holy and that is why the Kotel is holy, because they are stones related to the building in which God dwelt. In the same way I think there is a divine presence in the people Israel. In other words, *chas v'shalom*, I don't say that God has a body, but I do say that God dwells in certain places, in particular in the *Beit Hamikdash*.

So, what is physical about that dwelling?

Once you say that God dwells in a particular space, you are moving into the physical realm, because, according to Descartes, matter is above all extension, meaning it occupies space. If God were totally the opposite of matter, you couldn't say that He dwells in space. So, God's or the *Shekhina's* indwelling in the Temple, and in the people of Israel, gives God a certain relationship to matter.

The most important thing to understand is that those who are horrified by the mention of God and matter in the same sentence are the Gnostics. But this is not the biblical view, which is that God created matter and *saw it was good*. If it was good, then there is a tie between matter and God. Not that, *chas v'shalom*, God is identical with matter, but it then is wrong to say that matter is the antithesis of God because God created matter and says it is good. Good is God. Anything that is good in some sense ties us to God. The good is what connects the human and the divine. That is the way I would prefer to say it. But not that God is simply a material object.

What are the mechanics? How can God be in something but not consist of any matter?

That is how it is. God is certainly not a material object. The key issue is, do you take the the non-materiality of God and exaggerate

it to the extent that God and matter are antitheses? If you do that, you are a Gnostic. But if you don't do that, if you say, God is not material, but at the same time, God is not the antithesis of matter either, that means that the creation is not something bad.

Do you have an answer to Socrates' question, 'Is something good because God likes it or does He like it because it is good'?

It is very interesting that the Rabbis never raised this question. Could it be they never thought of it? I think that's impossible. They must have thought of it and then why [didn't they ask it]? I don't know the answer. My tendency is to say that the good is good because God commands it. God is not bound by a good coming from some other source. Of course, the *akeida* is the key issue here. God's command is good and must be obeyed and God's command is higher than ethics. God is not the slave of anything, including ethics. He is the master of it.

You are not a Maimonidean thinker. If you were to go back in time and have a meeting with Rambam or if you were to meet a contemporary Maimonidean, what arguments would you use to try to persuade him theologically?

I have the deepest respect for Maimonides. I do not overlook the magnitude of his contribution. But, I think in some matters he is too much influenced by Greek philosophy.

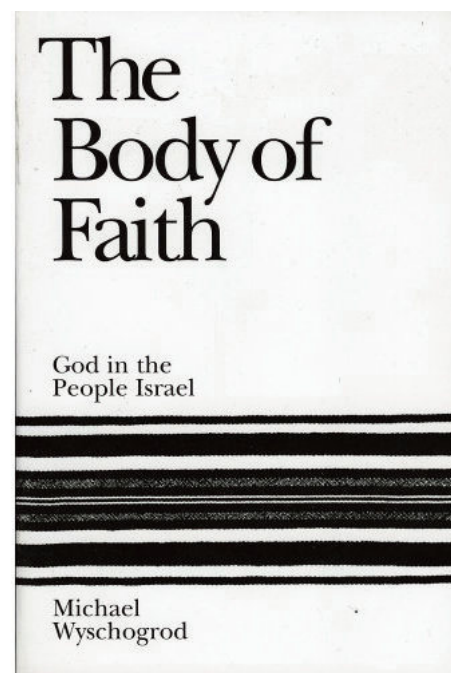
What is the key difference between me and Maimonides? I think it is the relationship to scripture. Maimonides feels that he has absolute authority to interpret scripture as necessary given his philosophical worldview. If and when it contradicts his views, scripture has to yield. An example: Rambam rejects the view of the eternity of matter because he feels it is philosophically not established that matter is eternal. But then he adds that if philosophers were to prove the eternity of matter, he would have no difficulty in reconciling that with scripture (Guide II, 25). Now, if you can reinterpret scripture to make it compatible with the eternity of matter, then you can reinterpret scripture to make it compatible with anything at all. That kind of authority over scripture I am very skeptical about.

I think scripture should have authority over us, not we over scripture. If scripture is not embarrassed to attribute aspects to God that Aristotle would not attribute, then I go with scripture. There is a, shall we say, an insufficient respect for scripture in some aspects of the thought of Maimonides. One gets the feeling that from Rambam's point of it, it would have been much better if the Torah had been written in the format of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and all the biblical stories he can do without. But they are there, so he has to live with them.

If Rambam were here, maybe he would show me that I am wrong. This is eminently possible, if not probable. But, I must see things as I see them now.

Rambam might respond by saying that a blanket literalism is not the way to go. But once you start allegorizing certain parts, why are you not allowed to extend allegorization or esotericism to the rest of scripture?

Well, I think that is a very difficult question to answer and I don't know that I can answer it with a formula. But Rambam very often refers to the principle that '*dibra Torah kilshon bnei Adam*' ('the Torah speaks in the language of humans'). This enables him to say, 'Well, the Torah just uses that expression, but it shouldn't be taken literally.' But he almost never, maybe even never, refers to the talmudic principle '*ain mikra yotzei midei pshuto*' ('scripture never dispenses with its plain meaning'), that whatever you find in a verse, the



basic *pshat* meaning should never be overlooked or destroyed or dispensed with.

I am very reluctant to wave aside the *pshat* meaning of the verse. Therefore, if the verse says that God was sorry that He created man, I think, all things being equal, that should be taken seriously. Now, was He sorry in the same sense as we are sorry? Maybe not entirely, but at least partly in the same sense, otherwise we do not know what 'sorry' means. Rambam says that terms applied to man and God have no common meaning at all (Guide I, 56). So when I say a man is angry and God is angry, the word 'angry' has no common meaning in those two instances. The problem is then that I don't know what the word 'angry' means when applied to God. After all, we only know what angry means from observing how human beings act and feel.

Rashi also doesn't seem to be bothered as much as Rambam by anthropomorphisms. Rashi deals with these anthropomorphisms with great equanimity.

If you push the Maimonidean line to its logical conclusion, you end up with a God about whom we can say nothing. That's not the

God of the Bible [and] it is not the God with whom a human being can have a relationship.

What does it mean to have a relationship with God?

It means prayer. When you pray to God, you have a relationship with God. When you ask God to heal your child who, God forbid, is ill, you have a relationship with God. You beg him for mercy, and you hope and pray that he will listen and grant your request. Now, from a purely philosophical point of view this is all fairly absurd, namely, that you can influence God by your prayer. Doesn't God know everything before you start praying? You are going to tell him something new? But apparently, God is influenced by your prayer. He wants to hear you pray, He wants to hear you ask Him to heal your child. Sometimes he actually does it. Sometimes not, and we don't know why He does or why He doesn't.

A systematic philosopher would say, "Well, if sometimes God answers prayer and sometimes God doesn't, I want to know when does He and when doesn't He. I want the criteria." I don't blame him. I would like to know, too. But we are not given these criteria. We are in a relationship with God to whom we can pray to and beg and then He will sometimes answer and sometimes He will say 'yes' and sometimes He will say 'no.' I don't think we will ever end up with a formula which will tell us when He forgives and when He doesn't.

It sound like you believe in hashgacha protis (individual providence)?

If you mean by *hashgacha protis* that God relates to the details of my life, the answer is, 'Of course.' God is aware that I exist, which the Aristotelian god is not. The Aristotelian Unmoved Mover is not aware that Wyschogrod exists. The God of Israel is aware that Wyschogrod exists. He is aware of the good things we do and the bad things we do and, when we speak to Him in prayer, He listens to us. We are not talking to the wall.

Do you believe in an olam haba? Why isn't it mentioned in the Bible?

Well, there are indications in the Bible that the dead have not simply disappeared. But, I have always thought that the fact that the Bible doesn't talk much about *olam haba* is at least in part because God is saying that this is not for people in this life to know. I don't think it is good for people in this life to sit and speculate what the next world is like.

[Emanuel] Swedenborg was a Christian theologian who wrote the most incredible

books about what heaven is like. He describes it in the greatest detail, the number of rooms, and where the staircase is, where the window shades are, what goes on and... I don't know whether what he writes is true or false, but I am fairly sure that God doesn't want us to deal with these issues. That's His business. Let that be a pleasant surprise after a hundred twenty years. While we are in this world, our job is not to sit and speculate about the next world, but our job is to do *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim*. What happens in the next world as result of our *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim* will take care of itself. That's God's job.

What is your justification for following Rabbinic Judaism, as opposed to Karaism or Christian forms of Judaism?

Firstly, I was born into Rabbinic Judaism, which is not a small factor. Secondly, Rabbinic Judaism sounds to me like a very sound supplementation to scripture, and it is clear that the Bible needs supplementation. I think the Rabbis respected scripture more than we do. When the Rabbis needed to prove something, they quoted a verse of scripture. I respectfully disagree with people who say, "Wyschogrod's theology is a biblicism and is therefore not authentic Judaism because it ignores Rabbinic Judaism." My answer to that is Rabbinic Judaism turns to the Bible for its justification, which is exactly what I do.

Rabbinic Judaism does not present itself as a substitute for the Bible. Rabbinic Judaism does not say, "Don't read the Bible, just read us." When Rabbinic Judaism insisted on the reading of the Bible in the synagogue three days a week, they read biblical texts, not rabbinic texts. So I think I am in harmony with the Bible's ultimate respect for scripture. If in contemporary yeshivas this is not the case, then the contemporary yeshivas have a problem and not I. Contemporary yeshivas do not emphasize scripture to the extent that they should. Rambam says that we should spend one third of our time on *Mikra*, one third on *Mishna* and one third on *Talmud*. Now, which yeshiva does that? Not too many.

You argue that to make halakha autonomous is "to put God into retirement."

The fundamental point is that I cannot accept the view that God simply handed over the Torah to human beings and said to them, "Interpret it any way you wish and whichever way you interpret it will be fine with Me." Even logically that's not possible, because if that is the case, then the rabbis can never be wrong, by definition. If they got up one morning and said, "*Chazer* (swine) is a big *mitzva*," then does the *Ribono shel olam* says, "Yes, *chazer* is a big *mitzva* because the rabbis said so?"

God remains God. He does not retire to Florida and hand over his divinity to human beings. "*Al tivtechu b'nedivim, b'ben adam sh'ain lo teshua*" ("Don't trust in princes, in a mortal who cannot grant salvation"). You must never put your absolute trust in human beings. Absolute trust is worthy only towards Hashem.

So, with the deepest respect for the interpreters of the Torah, the rabbis of the Talmud and contemporary rabbis, I combine that with a knowledge that all human beings by their nature can err. To deny that is idolatry. It is to make human beings into God. Human beings are never God.

So, how do you practice halakha?

Well, I am a Modern Orthodox Jew, who is certainly not perfect. I think very few of us are. But, basically, I try to follow the halakha



as it is practiced in Orthodox Judaism. I have written an article on conscience (“Judaism and Conscience”) which really says one thing and that is, in the final analysis, no human being should hand over full authority to another human being. In the final analysis, you are responsible for what you do. After a hundred twenty years, when you go to heaven, if Hashem looks at your record and says, “Well, why did you do this and this on Monday afternoon?” And you say, “Well, Rabbi So-and-so told me to do it,” this is not an absolute defense. Because Hashem says to you, “*Divrei ha-rav v’divrei hatalmid, divrei mi shomin?*” (“The words of the teacher and the words of the pupil: to whose words do you adhere?”).

I’ll give you a concrete example. I have often asked Lubavitch Jews, “Suppose the Rebbe, while he was in good shape, had written a letter three weeks before *Pesach*, and said: “These are the messianic times. There is a concept of *Torah shel moshiach*. I decree that this *Pesach*, after you eat the Hille sandwich, you eat a slice of bread with a piece of pork and butter on it.” Would you have done it?”

I get various [answers]. The most common answer [is]: “That’s impossible, the Rebbe could never write such a thing.” But I really am very curious, what would these Lubavitchers have done had the Rebbe written such a command? In other words, was the Rebbe to them an absolute authority? If he is

an absolute authority, you have to do whatever he says. If he is not an absolute authority, then we are in good shape. Then it means you have to listen to him very carefully, you have to think about it, then you have to decide based on your knowledge of Torah. You cannot simply write it off and leave it to another person. Because you are responsible for your actions, not another person.

You will probably find that the attitudes towards women in the Bible are different than contemporary societies. Are you a feminist? Do you see a tension there?

I am not a female, I am male. But certainly a document that was written two thousand years ago cannot in all detail correspond to our sensibilities today.

But, before, when we were talking about the Bible, you stressed a preference for literalism in words and also in themes. Within the Bible itself, the attitudes toward women are not particularly positive. Why now prefer modern sensibilities that are different than the Bible over those of the Bible themselves?

Well, life is a combination of scripture and the ideas of the current world in which we live. I am not advocating that we ignore the world in which we live and just look at scripture. [Karl] Barth used the expression, ‘We study the world with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.’ You have to read both.

My theology is not a biblicism that is blind to everything else in the world. I think the bible opens up our eyes to many things going on in the world, including the *ahavas Hashem* of women. If they do it *l’sheim shomayim* and with love and with respect for the tradition, then I am for doing as much as we can within the boundaries of halakha to accommodate them. If that makes me a feminist, I guess I am.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.

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“A Still Small Voice”

BY BATYA HERZBERG

In contemplating biblical examples of public affirmations of *emunah* (commonly translated as belief), the first that comes to mind is the exclamation of the nation after the showdown on Har ha-Carmel. Indeed, there was little else that the nation could say after witnessing the obvious preference of the God of Eliyahu over the deity Baal than “*Hashem hu ha-Elokim*.” Not once but twice. And this pronouncement is the one that we, until this very day, use as the closing of our prayers on the most venerated day of the year. We, after standing from dawn till nightfall are like the nation and its prophets on that renowned mountain. After experiencing the sheer emotional and physical exhaustion of pouring our hearts and souls out in prayer, after beseeching God to reveal his countenance to us, can manage little else but “*Hashem hu ha-Elokim*,” a most raw and blatant affirmation of belief. Tosafot,ⁱ in fact, discusses the connection between the cry of the nation then and its cry now, and proves from the fact that the nation repeated the phrase, that we too may repeat it without fear that we are asserting a plurality of deities. Rather, the repeated phrase serves to strengthen and emphasize the *emunah* that the people felt in their hearts at that moment;ⁱⁱ one that we strive to mimic on Yom Kippur. Not only did the nation publicly affirm their unwavering *emunah*, they went so far as to reject other forms of worship as valid.ⁱⁱⁱ Additionally, as if this exclamation was insufficient, the nation also fell on their faces, an action that connotes “genuine and spontaneous awe and fear of God,”^{iv} not simply empty words that are contrived or forced.

We may then proceed to ask: must *emunah* be accompanied by good deed to be considered valid *emunah*? Almost immediately after the Har ha-Carmel confrontation, Eliyahu is sent death threats by the evil queen Izevel. While, we would have expected the nation, that had so very recently witnessed revelation via Eliyahu, to come to his aid and defend him against the ruthless monarch, we see that Eliyahu is forced to flee alone to the desert. While perhaps the drama on the mountain should have ushered in a golden age of belief in God and tranquility, the subsequent *perakim* paint quite a different picture. How the recent euphoria that Eliyahu felt as he stood triumphantly on the mountain must have dissipated to nothingness in a matter of moments. How this disappointment must have paralleled that of Moshe Rabbeinu whose nation, after they too expressed their incontrovertible belief in one God, resorted to building and worshipping a golden calf (a reasonable comparison, for the *haftarah* of *Ki Tisa*, the *parashah* in

which the calf is built, is none other than the narrative of Eliyahu on Har ha-Carmel). And to some degree, the quality of their utterance on Har ha-Carmel surpassed that of Har Sinai.

While on Har Sinai, “*kaffa aleihem Har kegigit*,”^v and virtually forced them, on pain of death, to accept His law, here Eliyahu provided the prerogative to the nation: “*im Hashem ha-Elokim lekhu aharav ve-im ha-Baal lekhu aharav*,” if Hashem is the God, go after him, and if the Ba’al, go after it. The choice was in their hands exclusively, and they chose well.^{vi}

Yet, they veered. The nation’s declaration of *emunah*, bona fide as it was, was not substantiated by any action on their part. Their *emunah*, though genuine, existed in a vacuum, it was *emunah* of a moment, a fleeting burst of inspiration that fizzled by the next *perek*. So how much was it worth?

Contrast this picture to that in the time of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehuda. In his time too revelation came – this time in the form of a Torah scroll found in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*. Although this revelation was less dramatic than the former, and although the nation did not cry out words that pierced the heavens as they prostrated themselves on the ground but simply “*va-yaamdu kol ha-am be-vrit*”^{vii} it is immediately apparent that this declaration of *emunah* far surpassed that of those who stood on Har ha-Carmel. For indeed, following the reading of the Torah, drastic religious action was taken; a covenant was formed, the land was purged of idolatry, and *Pesach* was celebrated unlike any other observed since the time of the *Shoftim*. (It must be noted that Eliyahu too killed the *neviei ha-Baal*, but the actions of repentance seemed to have stopped there). Similarly, *Sefer Nehemiah*^{viii} describes the reaction to another reading of the Torah. The tears were only a harbinger of the reformations to come. Following the reading, the nation engaged in observance of holidays, acts of penance, formation of a lasting covenant, and service toward the *Beit ha-Mikdash*.

It should not be thought that the display of *emunah* on Har ha-Carmel was artificial. Indeed, if it was, would we use it as part of our most sacred liturgy? Rather, it was a sincere outpouring of genuine *emunah*, one worthy of exemplifying. It was a fulfillment of what the Rambam calls “*yesod ha-yesodot ve-amud ha-hokhmot*”^{ix} – the knowledge of the existence and involvement of God in the world. As R’ Aharon Lichtenstein asserts, “This mitzvah [*emunah*] has a purely cognitive aspect, which asks of a Jew to recognize certain metaphysical or historical facts.” The nation in the time of Eliyahu serves as a sterling example of such cognition. The manifestation of this belief, however, was sorely lacking. “Beyond the conceptual concept,” continues R’ Lichtenstein,

“this mitzvah also has experiential facets,”^x ones that the nation failed to implement after the great revelation.

It is of particular note that the biblical examples of genuine *emunah* coupled with genuine action were not escorted by great fanfare or by overt miraculous occurrences. The religious changes were installed after less major religious experiences. This brings to mind Rashi’s comment about God’s instructions to Moshe to climb the mountain alone to receive

God. Rather, they are, as the Maharal explains, the everyday worship, the adherence to the mitzvot “*kalah ke-va-hamurah*.” This is qualified by the conclusion of that midrash – Rav Ploni arose and stated, “*halakha ke-ben-Pazi*,” the law is as ben-Pazi states it.

And He said: ‘Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.’ And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in



the second tablets: “*ha-rishonot, al yedei she-hayu be-tshuot ve-kolot u-kehillah, shalta bahen ayin raah. Ein lekha yafeh min hatsniut*” – “the first tablets, because they were given with fanfare, and great sounds, and in a throng, were affected by the evil eye. There is nothing better than modesty.”^{xi} In other words, events of great fanfare do not necessarily parallel actions of great purport. Similarly, *Tehillim*^{xii} asserts, “*va-yamru al yam be-yam suf*” – some days after God shone His countenance upon the Jews to remove them from bondage, when “*ra-atah shifha ba-yam ma shelo raah Yehezkel ben-Buzi*,” (a maidservant by the sea saw things that Yehezkel, the great prophet, did not see in his vision of the *merkavah*) the nation wondered if there weren’t enough graves in Egypt. Also, immediately after the Torah recounts the victory song that the nation sang in triumph and pride as they made their way across the miraculously dry seabed after *kriyat yam suf*, it describes the complaint of the nation about the lack of water and later about the lack of meat.

Perhaps this is the very point which ben-Pazi, in the midrash cited by the Maharal^{xiii} wished to make when he asserted that them most important passuk in the Torah is not “*shema yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem ehad*” nor is it “*ve-ahavta le-reiakha kamokha*.” Rather, it is the all inclusive *pasuk*, the one that most succinctly addresses the Torah point of view, “*et ha-keves ha-ehad ta-aseh ba-boker ve-et ha-keves ha-sheni ta-aseh ben ha-arbayim*.” Indeed, the *emunah* is critical and without it the religious act is severely lacking. However, the moments that define the Jew’s life are not the ones when he experiences revelation and miracles, when he can proclaim in a state of great euphoria and excitement that he has come to recognize the one and only

the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

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ⁱ Brachot 34a

ⁱⁱ Radak, Metzudat David - Melachim I 18:39

ⁱⁱⁱ Malbim - Melachim I 18:39

^{iv} R’ Elchanan Samet, The Eliyahu Narratives (shiur 40), VBM of Yeshivat Har Etzion

^v Masechet Avodah Zara 2b

^{vi} Mikdash Melech – Sefer Melachim. Yigal Ariel. Midreshet HaGolan 1994.

^{vii} Melachim II 23:3

^{viii} Nechemia 8-10

^{ix} Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah I:1

^x By His Light, p144

^{xi} Tanchuma 31

^{xii} 106:7

^{xiii} Maharal. Netivot Olam. Netiv Ahavat Ha’Rei’a I

Ethics and Truth: Samuel David Luzzatto’s Critique of Maimonides

BY YOSEF LINDELL

Although by the close of the 14th century Maimonides’ position as a traditional authority had been established beyond any shadow of a doubt, the Aristotelian philosophy and rationalism to which he subscribed slowly began to be eclipsed by pervasive trends toward mysticism. It was only with the advent of the Enlightenment in the 18th and 19th centuries that a new type of rationalist was born, one who worshipped the God of Reason and championed man’s ability to unlock the secrets of the natural universe through the power of his own intellect. Jewish thinkers, inspired by this new ideology, resurrected Maimonides, the philosopher and rationalist who had advocated the primacy of the intellect and had so courageously sought to connect Judaism with the general culture of his day.

Into this revived rationalist milieu stepped R. Samuel David Luzzatto, widely known by his acronym Shadal. A traditional Jew of deep religious conviction, Luzzatto vigorously opposed complete reliance on rationalism, reason, and the human intellect. Not content to parley only with the scholars of his own day, Luzzatto took on Maimonides himself. In one of his letters, reprinted in *Mehkerei Ha-Yahadut*, Shadal attacks the Rambam with an acerbity possibly unmatched by that of any traditional Jew of the modern era. Blaming the Rambam for introducing Aristotelianism into Jewish thought, Shadal, almost like a modern-day *Kuzari*, sought to defend the time-honored precepts of Judaism from the foreign inroads of Greek philosophy.

Yet Shadal was no obscurantist. Despite his attack on rationalism, he was an important scholar of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* circle and corresponded regularly with the likes of Zunz, Geiger, and Frankel. Shadal’s penchant for critical study is well known, and, being well read in many secular disciplines, he quoted freely from many non-Jewish biblical scholars and philosophers. This being the case, Shadal’s rejection of what he termed “Atticism”, the exercise of the intellect and the pursuit of the rational, was not only incongruous with the trends of his own age but also with his own high regard for secular culture.

Noah Rosenbloom explains that Shadal’s distrust of rationalism was not a repudiation of the intellectual culture that surrounded him, but rather a rejection of its values.ⁱ According to Shadal, the cultivation of the intellect to the exclusion of all else led to a precipitous decline in ethics and morality and a return to a near-Godless Hellenistic age.ⁱⁱ In his critique of Spinoza in a letter in *Mehkerei Ha-Yahadut*, Shadal emphasizes this point: “This philosophical speculation that makes the intellectual faculty of

prime importance and teaches [one] to downplay the importance of the heart is widespread among men and scholars, and it causes ... the diminution of pity, compassion, love, and kindness.”^{iv} It is difficult to overstate the role played by ethics in Shadal’s worldview. In *Yesodei Ha-Torah*, Shadal formulates an entire philosophy of Judaism that charges its adherents with the preservation and dissemination of morals and ethical values above all else.

It is in this vein that Luzzatto expands his polemic against Maimonidean philosophy and the introduction of Aristotelian concepts into Judaism. For Maimonides, the intellectual apprehension of God was the highest goal that man could achieve. Shadal wonders where in his skewed hierarchy of values Maimonides places ethical conduct. Furthermore, in Shadal’s eyes, Maimonides’ assertion that a human being can only reach perfection by having the proper beliefs and conceptions about the nature of God diminishes the importance of morality and ethics.^v

Luzzatto also criticizes Maimonides for what he sees as an intolerant approach to both Jews and non-Jews who do not harbor the proper beliefs. According to Maimonides, who bases all reward and achievement of purpose on the attainment of a correct conception of God, one who does not have such beliefs is, in Shadal’s words, “not human, and we are not commanded to love him.” Shadal sees this as one of the great detriments that Maimonidean philosophy has brought to the Jews. Not only does this violate his sacrosanct principles of ethics, but it is untraditional as well: “From it the hatred of other religions and heretics came into our religion, something that we did not inherit at all from our ancestors.” To the contrary, he writes, “It is not part of the faith of Israel to believe that God will punish the nations for their beliefs and for the service of their false gods, rather for theft and all that is between man and man. And all the words of the prophets bear witness to this.”^{vi}

In a similar vein, Shadal criticizes the Rambam for his alleged denial of the literal sense of the eschatological doctrine of bodily resurrection. According to Luzzatto, Maimonides believed that resurrection was only for the soul and not for the body. This very issue evoked controversy during the Rambam’s lifetime. R. Meir HaLevi Abulafia of Provence accused the Rambam of denying physical resurrection, and the Rambam responded in his *Ma’amar Tehiyat Ha-Metim* by denying the charges against him. However, Shadal does not think that the Rambam was completely sincere in this regard. Furthermore, he argues, even if the Rambam did take resurrection literally, he still misunderstood its nature. Luzzatto says that according to Mai-

monides resurrection was “only for the righteous and wise, and not for the evildoers and those who stray.”^{vii} Later, Shadal goes further and accuses the Rambam both of basing his doctrine of resurrection on the Aristotelian adoration of the intellect and of claiming that “not [even] for the righteous is there an eternity to the soul, but only for the intellectuals.”^{viii} Medieval opponents of the Rambam were apparently unconcerned with this latter aspect of Maimonides’ doctrine of resurrection. But to Luzzatto, the exclusion of the common man from one of Judaism’s greatest rewards was patently unethical and unjustifiably glorified intellectual attainment. Moreover, Shadal lived in an age of universalism spurred by the Enlightenment. Thinkers such as Lessing and Mendelssohn believed that people of any belief could partake in society, for all religions had a core of truth. The exclusion of the common man from resurrection belied those Enlightenment sensibilities.

Shadal also objects to the Rambam’s introduction of principles of faith into Judaism. “The second detriment is the matter of the principles that he set up to be the foundations of our belief ... the prophets, *Tannaim*, *Amoraim*, and *Geonim* never set boundaries on matters of belief ... rather they would judge every person according to his actions.”^{ix} Once again, this criticism is not a medieval one, but rather one that arises from Shadal’s stress on ethics and his adherence to the mentality of his time. Maimonides’ formulation of the Thirteen Principles of Faith, argues Shadal, created the potential for a class of heretics that could be excluded from the Jewish community despite their virtuous conduct, *which would be both a perversion of ethics and the tenets of an inclusive society based on universal beliefs*. It is worth noting that in rejecting the principles of faith, Shadal parallels Moses Mendelssohn who held that matters of belief were never legislated and blamed Maimonides for the “Jewish Catechism”.^x

Shadal’s distaste for rationalism went further than his attacks on the Rambam. In another letter in *Mehkerei Ha-Yahadut*, Luzzatto has equally critical words for the medieval biblical commentator R. Abraham ibn Ezra. One would have thought that since Shadal was a biblical scholar who always sought the original meaning of the text, he would have had great praise and respect for the medieval *pashtan*. But, to the contrary, Luzzatto saw Ibn Ezra as a philosopher in the spirit of Aristotle who muddled the clarity of the biblical text with his hints, subtleties, and occasionally heretical leanings. “Who can not be amazed by Rashi,” he writes, “for even though he did not study philosophy, he acquired clear and unadulterated wisdom ... and Ibn Ezra, who learned all the disciplines, did not write one thing in order or in clear language.”^{xi} Although Shadal admits that Ibn Ezra sometimes came up with more plausible interpretations of Biblical verses than Rashi did, that was only because he had more sources available at his disposal.^{xii}

Yet Shadal’s critique of Ibn Ezra goes beyond his dislike of the principles of Aristotelian metaphysics. Shadal saw truth as an

ethical imperative. In his opinion, the lack of clarity in ibn Ezra’s hints and riddles perverted the truth. He writes:

I was habituated by my upright mother and father to hate tricks (*tahbulot*) and cunning language (*leshon arumim*) and that which I find praiseworthy in the words of R. Yehudah HaLevi, who revealed his opinion on the straight path and with clear language, is despicable to me in the words of Ibn Ezra, who speaks in a concealed fashion. ... And when I gird my tools of war in favor of one or against one from the early ones, is my intention to hurt or help people that have already died? My intention is only to help the people of my generation and for coming generations, to glorify and exalt the paths of uprightness, integrity, the love of truth, modesty, and humility, and to denigrate and abominate the ways of crookedness, cunning (*ormah*), deceit, and haughtiness.^{xiii}

Shadal also saw this obscurity and insincerity exemplified by Ibn Ezra as one of the drawbacks inherent in rationalist philosophy. In his critique of Spinoza he wrote: “And it [philosophy] causes ... trickery (*ha-tahbulah*) and cunningness (*ha-ormah*).”^{xiv}

Within his critique of Ibn Ezra, Shadal objects to the rationalist penchant for allegorizing the Bible. In a sense, this is an old argument – medievalists had denounced the allegory of the rationalists as well. The Maimonidean controversy of 1304 centered around those who allegedly sought to deny the literal meaning of some biblical narratives and perhaps even of the commandments. But unlike his medieval predecessors, Luzzatto does not attack allegory because of the slippery slope leading to the rejection of Divine authority. Rather, because it rejects the literal meaning of the biblical narrative, allegory is an affront to the enterprise of *peshat* study, the attempt to uncover the simplest and perhaps original meaning of the text. Shadal writes: “Little by little, those who sought the original intent of the text (*peshat*) increased in Israel ... [but] the philosophers Ibn Ezra, Rambam, and their students returned and submerged the Torah in the depths of allegory and riddle ... and perverted the verses and removed them from their literal intent entirely.”^{xv} As a man of truth and ethics, Shadal could not stomach allegory, for he believed it obscured the true meaning of the Bible.

According to Shadal, the allegory of the rationalists was problematic for another fundamental reason. By reinterpreting biblical texts to accord with metaphysical truths, the rationalists sought to impose reason on the realm of faith. In Luzzatto’s opinion, these two realms were completely separate and irreconcilable. Indeed, because they each affirmed separate truths, there was no need to search for a way to bridge them. At the outset of his commentary to Genesis, he writes: “The wise understand that the intent of the Torah is not to teach the natural sciences, but that the Torah was given only to direct humankind on the path of righteousness and justice[.] ... Therefore it is not proper for the Torah scholar to force the Scriptures from their literal meaning to make them conform with the natural sciences.”^{xvi}

The Rambam, who believed in both the absolute truth of the Torah and the immutability of certain principles of Aristotelian metaphysics, saw the need to harmonize these two truths by reinterpreting or allegorizing passages in the Bible which in their literal sense contradicted philosophical principles. In perhaps a rather extreme formulation of this idea, the Rambam asserted that if Plato’s view regarding the eternity of matter was proven true, then the Bible would have to be reinterpreted to fit with this conception. Indeed, the Rambam asserts that it would not be particularly difficult to do so.^{xvii} This notion of two truths that must be reconciled was accepted to varying degrees by almost all of the medieval philosophers in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim circles, and only extreme literalists or rationalists attempted to deny it. In the 14th century, the Franciscan William of Ockham was the first to argue that this synthesis proposed by thinkers like Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas was faulty. Human reason could never comprehend metaphysics, and, therefore, belief in God must be accepted on faith alone. Only observable phenomena, the realm of the natural sciences, could be put to empirical tests. With reason thus sundered from faith, both fields could develop without impinging upon each other. Thus, mysticism, a new metaphysics divorced from nature, flourished in the late medieval Europe, and the groundwork for the Scientific Revolution, the realm of the empirical, had been laid.^{xviii}

Shadal, following in the footsteps of Ockham and the thinkers of the Enlightenment, believed that it was unnecessary to reconcile the truths of philosophy and science with those of the Bible and religion. The realm of science taught man about the natural world and the realm of religion taught man how to behave. Although both disciplines were important, and equally true, they were also completely unrelated. Therefore, Shadal criticizes the Rambam for his attempt to synthesize the worlds of philosophy and religion by reinterpreting biblical texts. He writes:

Moreover, I am repelled by Maimonides because he confused and wanted to blend Religion with Philosophy. ... The impossible and inscrutable God of Philosophy is not and cannot be the God of Religion. It was only the puerile and pedantic efforts of the so-called philosophers of the Middle Ages who sought to conciliate the Bible with the tenets of their philosophies.^{xix}

In Luzzatto’s opinion, the rationalists were inappropriately attempting to bridge distinct worlds by obscuring the plain meaning of the text through their allegories.

True to the principles advanced here, Shadal did not see any value in metaphysical speculation. Influenced by Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Luzzatto claimed that one could not rationally prove God’s existence, but must accept it on faith. He also believed that Revelation could neither be proven nor contravened by reason. The realms of reason and faith remained separate for him.^{xx}

Because of this compartmentalization, Shadal saw no contradiction between his schol-

arly pursuits and his deeply entrenched faith. *Wissenschaft* was a legitimate and helpful tool that granted a person a greater appreciation of the world and a better understanding of the past, but it could not substitute for the religious truths of Judaism nor help one attain them. Maimonides believed that the tools of the philosophers allowed a person to apprehend God and understand His ways. Thus, the study of philosophy was perhaps the greatest religious imperative. Luzzatto fundamentally disagreed. Religion, for him, was the realm of ethical conduct, and only the performance of good deeds brought one closer to God. As per Kant, metaphysical speculation was a futile pursuit, for the rich world of spirituality could not be measured by the tools of the empiricists.

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This article is a shortened version of a term paper submitted for Dr. David Berger’s class on the Maimonidean Controversies.

ⁱⁱ Samuel David Luzzatto, *The Foundations of the Torah* in Noah H. Rosenbloom, *Luzzatto’s Ethico-Psychological Interpretation of Judaism* (New York: Yeshiva University Dept. of Special Publications, 1965), 150.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., Rosenbloom, pp. 31-34.

^{iv} Samuel David Luzzatto, *Mehkerei Ha-Yahadut* (Warsaw: Defus “ha-Tsefirah”, 1912 or 1913), 198.

^v Ibid., pp. 165-66.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid., p. 166.

^{viii} Ibid., p. 168.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x See Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem* vol. 3, trans. M. Samuel (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 2002), 106-08.

^{xi} *Mehkerei Ha-Yahadut*, p. 193.

^{xii} Ibid., p. 194.

^{xiii} Ibid., p. 197.

^{xiv} Ibid., p. 201.

^{xv} Ibid., p. 193.

^{xvi} Samuel David Luzzatto, *The Book of Genesis: A Commentary by SHaDaL* trans. Daniel A. Klein (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998), 1.

^{xvii} See Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1963), 327-29 (2:25).

^{xviii} C. Warren Hollister, *Medieval Europe: A Short History* 7th edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 352.

^{xix} Qtd. in Morris B. Margolies, *Samuel David Luzzatto: His Life and Work* (New York: Ktav, 1979), 75. From Samuel David Luzzatto, *Epistolario* (Padua, 1890) [August 20, 1845, to A.F. Lebrecht], 464-65.

^{xx} See Rosenbloom, pp. 40-50.

Kol Hamevaser's Israel Issue!!!

Kol Hamevaser will be presenting a special issue in honor of the State of Israel's 60th birthday.

Possible topics include:

Zionism

Orthodoxy and the State

Contemporary Israeli Politics

Israel-Diaspora Relations

Personal Reflections and Experiences with Israel

Hilkhos Eretz Yisrael

The Land of Israel in Jewish Thought

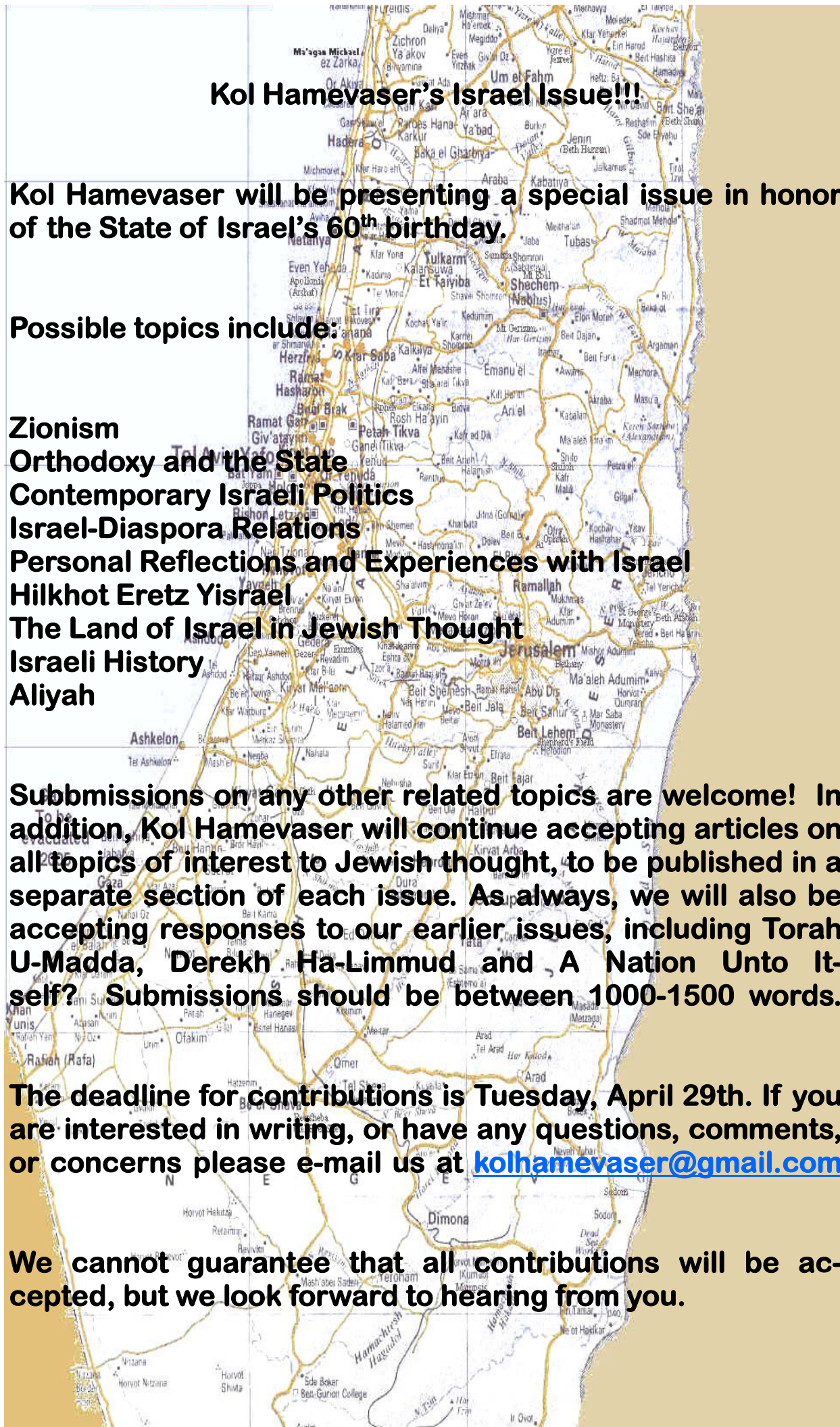
Israeli History

Aliyah

Submissions on any other related topics are welcome! In addition, Kol Hamevaser will continue accepting articles on all topics of interest to Jewish thought, to be published in a separate section of each issue. As always, we will also be accepting responses to our earlier issues, including Torah U-Madda, Derekh Ha-Limmud and A Nation Unto Itself? Submissions should be between 1000-1500 words.

The deadline for contributions is Tuesday, April 29th. If you are interested in writing, or have any questions, comments, or concerns please e-mail us at kolhamevaser@gmail.com

We cannot guarantee that all contributions will be accepted, but we look forward to hearing from you.



Postmodern Faith

BY SHIRA SCHWARTZ

Epistemology, the study of how we come to know things, is an exploration of intellectual agency. What sources and methods provide sound knowledge? What sort of idea-generators can we place our faith in? The Enlightenment taught us to trust in reason, Romanticism in nature and sentiment, while Pragmatism pushed us towards empiricism and method. Modernism built on Pragmatism, looking back at Enlightenment science and forward to physical mastery of that science, namely, technology; creation for creation's sake, just because we could, as humans, shape the world. Postmodernism looks at the stuff of that creativity, the malleable chaos behind it, and forces us to embrace the unformed. The postmodern matrix poses a new challenge for epistemology, one that will either destroy its function entirely or reinvent it with new rigor and verve. Postmodernism opens up a shapeless world, one where identity and structure are open-ended questions. In this formless, non-committal reality, the issue of "faith," in anything or anyone seems myopic. It appears to offer no ideological infrastructure, but the episteme of disbelief.

Logical Positivism, rooted in the Enlightenment, produced an unwavering faith in logic and science that eventually overflowed onto the social realms in emergent social sciences. Auguste Comte, the French positivist and father of sociology, offers an outline emblematic of the positivist conviction, an intellectual trajectory that serves as a model for the evolution of all branches of knowledge. The first stage, theology, claims unproven, *a priori* divine knowledge as its base; the second, metaphysics, argues for essential universal values and human rights; the third, positive knowledge, maintains empirical, verifiable knowledge that has the capacity to predict. Scientific or positive knowledge is both verifiable and reasons from known to unknown phenomena. Comte sees the latter as the most accurate sort of knowledge, while the prior forms remain necessary precursors that allow for knowledge to become scientific and thus fully developed, proven.

The urge to differentiate between science and other branches of knowledge originates from the positivist worldview and mission, but is by no means a dead urge in the postmodern era. The historical climate that bred this tendency may no longer exist in quite the same manner; resultant Nazism coupled with the contextual analysis of scientific development that History of Science has successfully undertaken, deter us from adopting a reductionist appreciation of positive, scientific, "objective" knowledge. But recurrent conflicts between theology and science, particularly regarding evolution, and anti-evolution arguments, such

as Creationism and Intelligent Design, that have been posed in evolution's place, make distinguishing between different fields and methodologies a current concern. Particularly, in America, a country formed out of recognition for the need to divide between religious and secular spheres, the question of what science is has taken on legal significance, as schools grapple with defining what is not only appropriate, but legal to teach in a science classroom.

Comte's appraisal of scientific knowledge is pitched at raising science above other "ways of knowing," creating an epistemological hierarchy. It promotes an unwavering faith in empirical knowledge that has been destroyed in

insufficient fodder for the postmodern multi-layered human being, thereby muting science's victorious holler. The postmodern perspective acknowledges the limits and distortions of modernism, similarly to the way Pragmatism pushed for a model that would exceed the extremes and generalities that the Enlightenment and Romanticism/Transcendentalism offered. Postmodernism is interested in separating disciplines in order to explore the very claim that any single approach possesses epistemological superiority. It embraces chaos, argues against constructed order, and questions the very significance of epistemology. This deconstructed view of reality, arguably, rips away human agency, or at the very least, reframes it as one



many ways by both modern and postmodern studies of science. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, reduces science to a series of conceptual paradigm shifts. These shifts proceed like religious conversions, as our understanding of the data develops and older theories are replaced by newer theories, not necessarily "truer," but that answer the current set of questions more cohesively and attractively. Still, Kuhn at least recognizes a consistently developing, agreed upon picture of what science is at any given time; tangible paradigms that emerge from the complex fluidity of data. His work reflects a modern attitude, a human, subjective construction of reality, but a belief in the potency of that construction—that it actually takes shape. Peter Gallison's work analyzes science's material culture, attempting to reveal not only fluid data, but fluid agency—the multiple actors involved in scientific development. It emphasizes an array of hosts—material, environmental, theoretical, human—and presents a complexity that resists concretization. In this way, Gallison's work is a postmodern conception of science, inter-source density that transcends human direction and creativity.

Currently, differentiating between science and other branches of knowledge is not, like in Comte's era, about branding science the epistemological "panacea"; the technological advances of modernism have been proven

of many historical actors.

The inevitable professionalization of knowledge generated specialization, and with that, to a degree, postmodernism. Formalized education and academia made knowledge, and the dialogue around it, accessible, thereby widening that dialogue to encompass endless data and infinite ways with which to handle it. History as a field stands as a concrete example of the postmodern effect. It has come to acknowledge multiple elements and layers that affect the shape of history. Historical analysis depicts these layers—time, matter, people, ideas, events, environment—as competitors for agency in the power-struggle of history. And History has opened up to include these spheres of historical inquiry: social, economic, cultural, intellectual, political, environmental. Specialization within those spheres was not far behind. No longer is it a question of new-age Intellectual History vs. classic Political History, but of History of Science vs. History of Philosophy, or even more particular, History of Physics vs. History of Biology. The intense methodological specialization provides thorough knowledge of narrow quarters. But has it enhanced our ability to "know history"? The complex, specialized framework is the result of a complex, specialized human being, developing resources with intense speed and progress. But with all the knowledge, can we better govern ourselves? Perhaps we have

abandoned the notion long ago that history can be didactic. But can we transcend the dysphoria of postmodernism to question if it is all truly worthwhile without that telos? Can we assert historical agency and demand meaning in a world governed by postmodern, professionalized ideology?

The question of utmost importance: is any single element or sphere indeed more potent and central than the rest? Formalization of social studies into social sciences hoped to establish a way of knowing these things for certain. But has it really gotten us any farther?

The academic dialogue is full of scholars fighting for their historical field to outshine the rest. Specialization of a drastic magnitude has emerged, as Morton White would say, "toothbrush" histories. Despite our ability to write these histories, we must ask ourselves why they matter, if unabashed immersion in the fluidity is the goal, or if perhaps, as living people, it behooves us to form from our awareness of it, "more perfect" models, that can bring humanity to greater levels of nobility—to assign geometric parameters to the malleable topology of our postmodern existence.

Perhaps the postmodern revelation is that we matter as much as anything else, that humanness is just as reliable as reason, nature or method. Perhaps a dense matrix of infinite agents has branded locality legitimate, has taught us not to get lost in the chaos, but to confidently embrace our own block within it, now only more aware of, and kinder to, the neighboring communities around us. Perhaps specialized, local studies of the way female high school students in New York City responded to McCarthyism in the 1950's, have brought us back to believe in the authenticity of our own reality, in its relevance and epistemological faithfulness. Perhaps, just perhaps, we have come full circle to learn that thorough self-awareness is as valid as scholarship, and with that, have found sufficient evidence to confidently assert faith in ourselves.

As postmodern people, we come to the intellectual stage with a vast inheritance of epistemological approaches. We inherently trust in these intellectual traditions: reason, nature, method, creativity, and employ them all in different life situations. Yet, the human desire for objectivity and structure, pinned against the postmodern thrust, in its nascence and breadth, cause us to distrust all aspects of this inheritance as fervently, or perhaps as un-fervently, as we trust them. If we could penetrate that uncertainty, we may find ourselves in the proximity of a source, broad enough and bold enough to converge and redeem the totality of existence, in proximity with God himself.

Shira Schwartz is a staff writer for Kol Hamevasser

Preview: An Interview with Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

BY ARI LAMM

Editors' Note: The following is a preview of a larger interview with Rosh HaYeshiva of RIETS and Chancellor of Yeshiva University HaRav Norman Lamm, shlit"a, on the topic of "Emunah." The full interview will be available for the upcoming issue of Kol Hamevaser.

What are Jews required to believe with regard to Tehiyyat ha-Metim?

According to the Rambam, *tehiyyat ha-metim* is one of Judaism's thirteen dogmas, such that if one does not accept this dogma, he is deprived of Olam ha-Ba, the World-to-Come. Of all the thirteen *ani ma'amins* of the Rambam, this is probably the most difficult to grasp and accept. It seems to defy all reason and all reasonableness. It is analogous to unscrambling an egg; nature goes in one direction only, and it boggles the mind to suggest that it can backtrack.

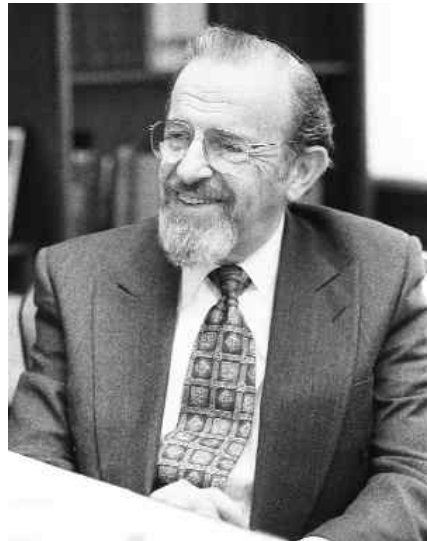
We should therefore wonder: why did the Men of the Great Assembly, the Sages of the Mishnah, and all following who formulated our traditional dogmatology, insist upon including Resurrection of the Dead as part of the faith of Judaism? Why did our ancestors, the Pharisees, insist upon it in the face of the opposition by the various sectarians?

I profess that I always felt uneasy about it intellectually, even while it was a source of great comfort to me personally. I had no choice but to accept it on the authority of the Sages of the Halakha. I reasoned that if a person is a real believer – a *ma'amin be-emunah shelemah* – then he must judge each item not on its own merits alone, but also in the context of all the principles of Judaism that were elaborated and emphasized by our Torah and our tradition. I accepted *tehiyyat ha-metim* solely on faith.

The above thoughts occurred to me in the past. But at one point all that changed. The doubts that agitated — even tormented and at the same time comforted me, but especially puzzled me — were resolved when as a young graduate student in Revel I attended a series of lectures on the Thirteen Principles of Maimonides by none other than the Rav (I do not know if those lectures have ever been published, but if they have not—they ought to be).

What the Rav said is this: the concept of the Resurrection of the Dead is obviously of great importance to the whole structure of Jewish belief because it was incorporated in our daily prayers, namely, the Amidah: We say, *mekhalkel hayyim be-hesed, mehayye metim be-rahamim rabbim*, "He sustains the living in loving-kindness, resurrecting the dead in abun-

dant mercies." Then the prayer illustrates the principle as follows: *somekh nofelim ve-rofe holim u-mattir asurim u-mekayem emunato li'yesheney 'afar*, "You support the fallen, heal the sick, set free the captives, and keep Your faith to them that sleep in the dust." Note the progression from lesser evil to greater evil,



namely: people who are *nofelim*—fallen, failures; those who are *holim*, sick; prisoners who are *assurim*—incarcerated or enslaved; and, finally, the greatest evil of all: the *yesheney 'afar* "them that sleep in the dust"—the dead. And hence the praise to the Almighty from lower to higher to highest illustration of His ethical personality.

The payer, therefore, is an elaboration on the moral character of the *Ribono Shel Olam*: He not only supports the fallen, not only heals the sick, not only liberates the imprisoned, but also will someday neutralize the worst evil of all, namely, death itself, by being a *mehayye metim*.

Thereby, the Rav managed to transform *tehiyyat ha-metim* from a non-rational dogma to a paean of praise for divine goodness, morality and ethics—an infusion of meaningfulness for which I shall always be grateful...

Ari Lamm is the interviewer for Kol Hamevaser

Does God Communicate With Us Through the Language of History?

BY BEN GREENFIELD

I think that most Orthodox Jews believe so. To their minds, a spiritually robust individual discerns Divine messages in every major event of his life. In terms of the public scene, the religiously "in-tune" affirm that no bombing, battle, peace treaty, stock boom, or bust is due to mere coincidence. Rather, each significant news report conveys a lesson from God and — as is so fondly attributed to the Persian Jews of *Megillat Esther* — the righteous can read *Shem Hashem* into stories that otherwise lack it.

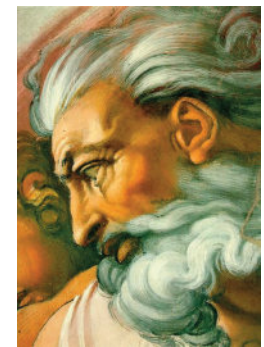
Paradoxically, this faith goes hand-in-hand with the belief that no one can actually interpret God's telltale messages. In fact, most consider it abhorrently rude to do so. Few endeavors in Jewish thought are so universally despised as ascribing reasons to the Holocaust: Who are you to blame the Zionists, anti-Zionists, or kind-of-Zionists for a murder so vast and vicious?* What tools allow you to spin such damning insights? Even if much of our irritation is due to hearing such rebuke from outsiders (it is significantly less risqué to fault one's own group), what makes an insider's words any more accurate? Ultimately, meaningful understanding of God's history lessons is deemed simply impossible.

Nonetheless, we do it all the time and nothing better illustrates our incapacity for interpreting world events than our actual attempts to do so. To demonstrate this point, consider three situations. Flipping through a history of the Holocaust, you read about an oft-overlooked tragedy. In the spring of 1943, an SS-run military academy blew a gas line, causing several dozen students to incinerate in their sleep. The timing, victims, and severity of the accident appear to us as more than coincidental. Although only a gut feeling, the message is clear in your mind: God visited His wrath upon a group that deserved punishment. While perhaps pitying any unnecessary loss of life, you also hope that a thinking, introspective German turned inward at that point and declared: "We must be doing something wrong." Similarly, imagine if today's JPost detailed a deadly epidemic running through the classrooms of a Hamas-run *madrassa*. Once again, you might pity the innocent, but at the same time one feels that such an obvious symbol of terror and anti-Semitism needs to be informed of its great moral errors. Lastly, consider last month's attack on Mercaz HaRav. If one message could be seen in the massacre, presumably the most reasonable would be one of Divine rebuke and censure. Considering the obvious symbolism of Yeshivat Mercaz

HaRav, our first response (after pain, pity, compassion, and commiseration) should have been: "The Yeshiva, and the movement and political policies which it represents, must be doing something wrong."

Clearly, however, no such reaction took form. In place of questioning their values, Religious Zionist leaders affirmed them; the attack did not weaken their resolve, but emboldened it. Broken and tearful, an emotional Rav Yaakov Shapira included in his eulogy that "the Land of Israel, which these eight [victims] loved so much and were so devoted to — we have to stop playing with it! We have to stop dividing it!" He continued, "Please pray for us, and for the yeshiva, that it should continue to grow and have influence . . . we pray for the blind eyes to open." Of course, the Rosh Yeshiva is not the only leader who viewed the Mercaz HaRav massacre as inspiration to further its own ideals. At last week's memorial service, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, the former Sephardic Chief Rabbi, opined that "the State should erect another town, another yeshiva, and another settlement for every Jew killed."

I do not disagree with their statements; like most Jews, I did not interpret the Mercaz HaRav attack as a critical evaluation of Religious Zionism. However, I did construe it as a



damning blow to the enterprise of reading Divine messages into world events. The most straightforward interpretation — that Religious Zionism needs to conduct serious soul-searching — is also the least popular. This reality highlights the inconsistent and baseless methods we use when interpreting history. After all, most events can be interpreted in dozens of mutually exclusive manners, but our particular explanations are generally motivated by nothing more than preconceived (and usually self-righteous) notions; we find ourselves sucked into a whirlpool where new events confirm only that which we previously believed.

Thus, our faith in a communicative God swirls down the drain. If the equivocal language of Divine transmission is sufficiently ductile to both justify and invalidate any given

Maimonides' Approach to Understanding the Book of Job

BY SHAYNA HOENIG

position, no voice can clearly be discerned. In effect, historical events can only address utterly one-sided questions, where alternative explanations stand as obviously untenable. Thus, if we actually wish to hear God's word in the ten o'clock news, we must limit it to tame, indisputable lessons: learn more Torah, perform more *hessed*, and desist from general bad stuff. Yet these lessons impart nothing that we do not already know and – as in the case of Mercaz HaRav – are probably incorrect interpretations: if Hashem sought to broadcast messages of Torah and *hessed*, a yeshiva was a truly terrible target for Him to choose as the site of an act of terror.

Aware that interpreting God's messages is a thoroughly impossible exercise (or, at best, practically fruitless), believing that such messages even exist becomes unreasonable. Would God communicate in an utterly ambiguous language? If He does, should we care? We can believe that God both controls and guides historical events, but let us cease to pretend that His omnipotent command of history implies a revelatory communiqué through history.

Ben Greenfield is a staff writer for Kol Hamevaser

Historical placement, linguistic difficulties, and ambiguous authorship are only a few of the issues that arise and complicate the study of the book of *Job*. Scholars such as Marvin H. Pope and Robert Eisen have devoted much penmanship to these and other questions akin to them, regarding the study of *Job*. Perhaps though, one of the most fundamental issues regarding the book of *Job* is the question of its overall message and purpose.

In his critical study of *Job*, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Robert Eisen endeavors to analyze the book of *Job* from a philosophical vantage point, a method that was first "established by Saadia Gaon (Iraq, tenth century), refined by Maimonides (Egypt, twelfth century) and modified further by later authors in Provence, Spain and Italy until the early Renaissance."ⁱ Eisen examines the approaches of Saadia, Maimonides, Samuel ibn Tibbon (with brief discussions of the "Tibbonide" interpreters Immanuel of Rome, Elijah ben Eliezer ha-Yerushalmi and Isaac Arundi), Zerahiah Hen, Gersonides and Simon ben Zemah Duran (chapters 2-7)ⁱⁱ in efforts to understand *Job* philosophically. Of particular interest is the philosophical understanding of Maimonides, whose commentary on *Job* is printed in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Maimonides begins his commentary in chapter 22 with the establishment that "the story of *Job*... is a parable intended to set forth the opinions of people concerning providence."^{iv} According to Maimonides, the book of *Job* aims to establish a "foundation for the belief."^v The way that this is conveyed is through the dialogues that take place between *Job*, his three friends, and a fourth visitor named Elihu. Based on these dialogues, Maimonides divides the book of *Job* into different philosophical approaches, attributing to each conversant a different philosophy. The purpose of these dialogues is "to make known each one's opinion concerning this story: namely that the greatest and heaviest misfortunes befall the most perfect individual, who was the most unblemished of them in righteousness." Essentially, Maimonides believes that the purpose of the book of *Job* is to examine various responses to the long debated existential question regarding theodicy—specifically, why the righteous suffer.

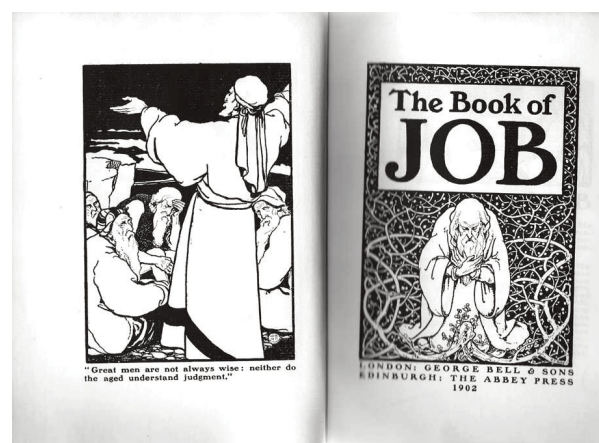
The opinions that are purported in the book of *Job* according to Maimonides are as follows: the opinion of Aristotle is attributed to *Job*, the opinion of "our Law" is attributed to Eliphaz, the doctrine of Mutazila is credited to Bildad, and the opinion of Ashariyya is ascribed to Zophar. The fifth and final opinion is that of Elihu who is considered by *Job* and his [*Job*'s] three friends as superior;^{vi} though no specific philosophy is attributed to him by

Maimonides, the philosophy of Elihu according to Maimonides elucidates the purpose of the entire book of *Job*.^{vii}

The first approach that Maimonides lists is the Aristotelian approach which is conveyed through *Job*'s words. This ideology espouses that there is no providence. *Job* explains that his suffering proves this point, as he says "the righteous man and the wicked are regarded as equal by Him, may He be exalted, because of His contempt for the human species and abandonment of it."^{viii} Furthermore, *Job* iterates that "it is all one therefore I say: He destroyeth the innocent and the wicked... He will mock at the calamity of the guiltless."^{ix} *Job* essentially believes that man is abandoned following his [man's] creation, as *Job* remarks: "Hast Thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like

less of sin, no one can be completely exonerated from suffering of some sort; thus, no suffering is unjustified.

The third philosophy delineated by Maimonides is elicited through *Job*'s second friend, Bildad. Bildad explains that *Job* is suffering now so that his reward is increased later on in the world to come. He explains to *Job*: "if thou are pure and upright, surely now He will awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous. And though thy beginning was small, yet thy end should greatly increase."^{xiii} Bildad thus explains that though the righteous may suffer in this world, their afflictions are only temporarily and they will be duly rewarded in the world to come. The converse is true as well regarding the wicked; they may prosper in this world but



cheese?"^x Implicitly, according to the Aristotelian approach, there is no logical understanding that can explain why the righteous suffer because suffering is simply an arbitrary matter, since there is no providence. God's justice thus needs no cogitation if it seems to be contradicted since, according to *Job*'s philosophy, divine retribution is not exercised in a calculated fashion in the first place.

The second philosophy is conveyed through the first of *Job*'s friends, Eliphaz. Eliphaz professes that everything that befell *Job* was what he deserved, as he says "for he had committed sins because of which he served these misfortunes."^{xi} According to Eliphaz's approach, what Maimonides calls the approach of Scripture, suffering and reward is allotted in a fair manner; man gets what he deserves. Eliphaz tries to convince *Job* of this as he rhetorically questions, "is not thy wickedness great? And are not thine iniquities without end?"^{xii} He thus chooses to understand *Job*'s suffering as just and appropriate since *Job* is clearly iniquitous. According to Eliphaz's philosophy, there is no need to reconcile the issue of seemingly arbitrary providence because there is no conflict in the first place. Eliphaz strives to preserve a just outlook regarding theodicy by explaining that the suffering of the righteous is not unwarranted since affliction occurs proportionate to one's sins. Since no one is truly guilt-

they will receive divine retribution and suffer accordingly in the world to come. Bildad thus reconciles the issue of why the righteous suffer by deferring the ramifications of it to the after world. Therefore, implicitly, since man cannot view the circumstances that are found in the world to come, he [man] should abstain from questioning providence altogether. Instead, man should express complete faith in God that though things may seem unfair in this world, in the world to come there is an absolute preservation of an appropriate system of reward and punishment for the righteous and the wicked respectively.

The fourth philosophy presented by Maimonides is one that is championed by Zophar, *Job*'s third friend. Zophar, representative of Ashariyya's school of thought according to Maimonides, does not aim to resolve observed breaches in providence. The approach of Zophar is to abstain from questioning the will of God altogether because "we are incapable of penetrating the secrets of His wisdom, which necessitates His doing what He wills without there being another reason." Zophar remarks to *Job* "Canst thou find out the deep things of God? Canst thou attain unto the purpose of the Almighty... But an empty man will get understanding, when a wild ass's colt is born a man."^{xiv} Essentially, according to Zophar, man will never be able to understand

*For an excellent example of intelligent and sincere Jews making absolutely disturbing statements, see

<http://www.vosizneias.com/2007/04/jerusalem-israel-rabbis-blame-for.html>, where an Israeli *Gadol be-Torah* attempts to interpret the Holocaust while American readers self-righteously nod their heads. Of course, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, a former Sephardic Chief Rabbi, has become particularly associated with statements of this kind. One fairly well-known example of this occurred in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when he noted that "there was a tsunami and there are terrible natural disasters, because there isn't enough Torah study. . . Black people reside there [in New Orleans]. Blacks will study the Torah? [God said] let's bring a tsunami and drown them . . . Hundreds of thousands remained homeless. Tens of thousands have been killed. All of this because they have no God . . . Bush was behind the [expulsion of] Gush Katif, he encouraged Sharon to expel Gush Katif . . . We had 15,000 people expelled here [in Israel], and there [in America] 150,000 [were expelled]. It was God's retribution . . . God does not short-change anyone." It should be noted that the exact context and nature of Rabbi Yosef's words are subject to debate.

the workings of God and thus the only appropriate response to suffering is to “set thy heart aright, and stretch out thy hands toward Him—”^{xv} to react with complete and unfaltering faith. Zophar’s approach necessitates that man eschew what he [man] may see as inconsistencies in God’s providence because he cannot possibly understand God’s ways. Man should not reflect on these questions at all and should instead turn his heart towards God in an act of complete faith. As mentioned above, the question regarding the existence of providence is eschewed.

Elihu, the final conversant, at first seems to be restating the prior assertions made by Job’s three friends. However, Maimonides explains that what Elihu comes to add did not occur to Job’s friends, and that his additions are in fact the entire purpose the book of *Job*. Elihu, the youngest of the five, begins by lambasting Job for his ignorance and proceeds thereafter to criticize Job’s friends for the “senile drive!”^{xvi} they professed about providence. The element that Elihu comes to add, according to Maimonides, regards the intercession of angels. According to Maimonides, Elihu says that “it is an attested and well-known thing that when a man is ill to the point of death...if an angel intercedes for him—regardless of what angel—his intercession is accepted and he is raised from his fall,”^{xvii} as is told in the book of *Job* “If there be for him an angel, an intercessor, and so on.”^{xviii} What exactly this angel represents is not clear. According to Robert Eisen, Maimonides feels that the angel “represents a natural force or cause that comes to the aid of an individual in grave danger.”^{xix} These natural forces are, however, limited and cannot always intercede. This is the explanation of Elihu’s words, “Lo, all these things doth God work, twice, yea thrice, with a man.”^{xx} Because these forces will not always succeed, the implication is that eventually, pernicious forces will overpower them.

Upon Elihu’s conclusion, God intercedes and speaks to Job and in doing so, according to Eisen, He offers support for Elihu’s words. God’s message according to Eisen is that “everything learned from Elihu is ultimately all that one can know about providence. There are natural processes that are either beneficial or harmful and the description of these processes is the limit of what human beings can fathom about how God governs the world.”^{xxi} Maimonides also explains Elihu in this way, saying that Elihu’s point is to explain to Job that man’s intellect is incapable of apprehending how “natural things that exist in the world of generation and corruption are produced in time and of conceiving how the existence of the natural force within them has originated them.”^{xxii} He further exhorts Job to understand that God’s ways do not resemble man’s ways; nevertheless, though man cannot understand God’s ways, Elihu urges Job that “His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.”^{xxiii} Elihu is essentially instructing Job to realize that man cannot understand God’s ways, but that does not mean

that there is no understanding to be found. Regarding Elihu’s words, Eisen concludes that “teaching Job the limits of human knowledge concerning providence is, in fact, the point of the book.”^{xxiv} Maimonides also concludes his commentary with the statement that the philosophy elicited by Elihu, “the establishing of this foundation for the belief and the drawing attention to the inference to be drawn from natural matters, so that you should not fall into error and seek to affirm in your imagination that His knowledge is like our knowledge” is “the object of the *Book of Job* as a whole.”^{xxv} Maimonides’ recapitulating statements about the philosophy of Elihu reveal Maimonides’ interpretation of the book of *Job*’s overall purpose: to teach the appropriate approach towards understanding providence.

It is interesting to note variant approaches towards the analysis of the book of *Job*. For example, in contrast to Maimonides, who divides the book of *Job* into five parts, each part representative of a different philosophic world view, Marvin Pope also divides the book of *Job*, but into four parts. However his divisions are based on plot and not on philosophy. Pope explains *Job* as a compilation of topical sections including: (1) “The Dialogue”—Job’s conversations with his three friends, (2) “The Elihu Speeches”—Elihu the bystander’s insights, (3) “The Theophany”—revelation of God to Job, and (4) “The Epilogue”—conclusion of the story and fates of Job and his friends. Pope utilizes this form to assert his conclusion that “The Book of *Job*...can hardly be regarded as a consistent and unified composition by a single author.”^{xxvi} Because, according to Pope *Job* is divided based on plot, it lacks a cohesive quality.

For Maimonides on the other hand, the story line is of ancillary importance as he indicates at the conclusion of his philosophical analysis of *Job*: “I have summed up all its [*Job*’s] notions, nothing being left aside except such matters as figure there because of the arrangement of the discourse and the continuation of the parables.”^{xxvii} For Maimonides, the book of *Job* is essentially a statement of different philosophies about the nature of providence; the surrounding plot details are nothing more than surrounding plot details. Because philosophical approaches to providence are presented and discussed consistently throughout the book of *Job*, Maimonides preserves unity in the book of *Job*.

According to Maimonides, the book of *Job* presents a survey of philosophical attitudes towards understanding providence, both correct and incorrect. Only upon the study of the philosophies which Maimonides feels are incorrect can one recognize the true validity of the fifth approach, that of Elihu. Upon that recognition, Maimonides concludes: “if man knows this, every misfortune will be borne lightly by him. And misfortune will not add to his bouts regarding the deity and whether he does not know and whether He exercises providence or manifests neglect, but will, on the contrary, add to his love.”^{xxviii} Hence, Maimonides believes that studying the book of *Job* will generate a greater understanding of how

to relate to providence and in so doing will ultimately generate within man a greater love for God.

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ⁱ Cohen, Mordechai Z. *Review of: Robert Eisen. The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. 2004

ⁱⁱ Cohen, Mordechai Z. *Review of: Robert Eisen. The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. 2004

ⁱⁱⁱ Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide of the Perplexed* III: 22 & 23

^{iv} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 486

^v Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963].. 497

^{vi} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 494

^{vii} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 497

^{viii} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 491

^{ix} Job 9:22-23

^x Job 10:10

^{xi} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 493

^{xii} Job 22:5

^{xiii} Job 8: 6-7

^{xiv} Job 11: 7, 12

^{xv} Job 11: 13

^{xvi} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 494

^{xvii} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 495

^{xviii} Job 32:23

^{xix} Eisen, Robert. *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish History*. 57

^{xx} Job 33:29

^{xxi} Eisen, Robert. *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish History*. 63

^{xxii} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 496

^{xxiii} Job 34:21-22

^{xxiv} Eisen, Robert. *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish History*. 65

^{xxv} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 497

^{xxvi} Pope, Marvin H., *The Anchor Bible: Job*. Garden City, 1965. xxviii

^{xxvii} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 497

^{xxviii} Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans., Pines, Shlomo [Chicago, 1963]. 497

Beyond Commandments

BY AYOL SAMUELS

We tend to think that adherence to *mitsvot* fulfills God’s will, while the performance of *aveirot* accomplishes the opposite. However, there are certain instances in which the roles are switched. R. Nahman bar Yitshak explains that a sin done for the sake of God (*l-shma*) is greater than a commandment performed not for His sake (*shelo l-shma*).ⁱ What follows from this statement is that there is a value system beyond normative *halakha*. When this value system is out of sync with the halakhic one, R. Nahman Bar Yitshak tells us, the former triumphs.



To be sure, the concept of *aveira l-shma* does not simply refer to the performance of a smaller transgression in order to prevent a larger one from transpiring or in order to protect the halakhic system. After all, R. Nahman Bar Yitshak’s proof text comes from the story of Yael and Sisra. This story recounts that Yael, a married woman, had relations with Sisra, the general of the enemy army in order to kill him, win the war, and thus save her nation. Because the Bible praises Yael, R. Nahman Bar Yitshak sees this case as a paradigm for *aveira l-shma*. Yael’s purpose in transgressing what was, according to the Talmud, a serious commandment, was clearly not to preserve the halakhic system; rather, her goal came from a value greater than the system itself. Thus, the value of the *aveira l-shma*, for R. Nahman Bar Yitshak is not that it ensures future performance of commandments, but that it expresses certain values that lie outside of the formal commandments.

This same concept of sinning for a higher purpose is expressed in Maimonides’ introduc-

tion to his commentary on *Mishnah Avot*. He quotes the sages' statement that the biblical verse, "In all your ways know Himⁱⁱⁱ" comes to include the performance of sin. The Rambam explains that, when performing this sin, one must place as his goal "truth" (*takhelit kelapei ha-emet*) even though this action is "sinful from a certain perspective." Like R. Nachman Bar Yitshak, the Rambam thinks that there are values beyond halakha that are included within the will of God and that sometimes trump formal mitzvot. For the Rambam, one of these values is "truth."

These meta-halakhic values do not just represent a will of God separate from the will reflected in the mitzvot. Rather, the mitzvot themselves are based upon these values. The Talmud in Tractate Shabbat 31a expresses the idea that there are values that underlay the mitzvot in the well-known story of the man who asked to be converted while standing on one leg. Hillel's response to this man was, "what you hate, do not unto others—this is the whole Torah and the rest is commentary." Hillel is pointing out that there is a single value that all the mitzvot are meant to express. Rav agrees that there is a purpose to all the mitzvot but, unlike Hillel, he thinks that the goal of all the mitzvot is to purify (*le-tsaref*) people.ⁱⁱⁱ Rav continues to explain that clearly God does not care at what exact point one is allowed to slaughter an animal for His own sake. Nahmanides highlights Rav's statement in his commentary on Deuteronomy 22: 6-7. He says that Rav's statement demonstrates that there is a purpose to the mitzvot and that that purpose is to benefit man, "to prevent him from harm or detrimental beliefs or bad character traits or to remember the miracles of the creator or to know God."^{iv} Maimonides echoes these sentiments, giving his own similar list of the societal and individual enhancements that are the goal of the mitzvot. He vehemently opposes those who see the commandments as "divine will" that cannot be explained. Both Hillel and Rav and later, Maimonides and Nahmanides emphasize that the mitzvot are not ends unto themselves. Rather, they are meant to lead to the realization of greater values. It is for this reason that there are certain cases, according to R. Nahman Bar Yitshak, in which a mitzvah must be transgressed because of a contradiction between it and one of the ultimate purposes of halakha.

Knowing which principles and values the mitzvot are meant to accomplish not only allows us to see the rare individual cases in which the mitzvot and the values contradict each other and act accordingly. This knowledge also gives us the tools to guide and check the halakhic system itself, to ensure that it always meshes with the system of values. One of the more extreme formulations of this idea comes from the words of Rav Avraham Yitshak Hacohen Kook. In his introduction to *Ein Aya*, Rav Kook says that in an ideal time and place where there is no danger to the halakhic system, the specifics of halakha (*perat*) would be determined using the principle values (*ha-ke-lalim ha-rashiim*) which are the basis of the Torah, instead of the formalistic method of

learning one halakha from another. The Radbaz actually uses this method that Rav Kook sees as ideal in answering one of the halakhic questions posed to him. He was asked whether a Jew is required to allow the government authority to cut off his limb so that they spare his friend's life. The Radbaz begins with a typical halakhic discourse. He explains that, since one must lose a limb rather than desecrate the Sabbath and one must desecrate the Sabbath in order to save a life, it is possible that one must sever a limb in order to save a life. However, the Radbaz ends his response by proclaiming that the Torah states, "its ways are pleasant and all of its paths are peaceful" (*Mishlei* 3:17) and thus it is unfathomable that one would be commanded to cut off a limb in order to save a life so that must not be the law.^v This line of rea-

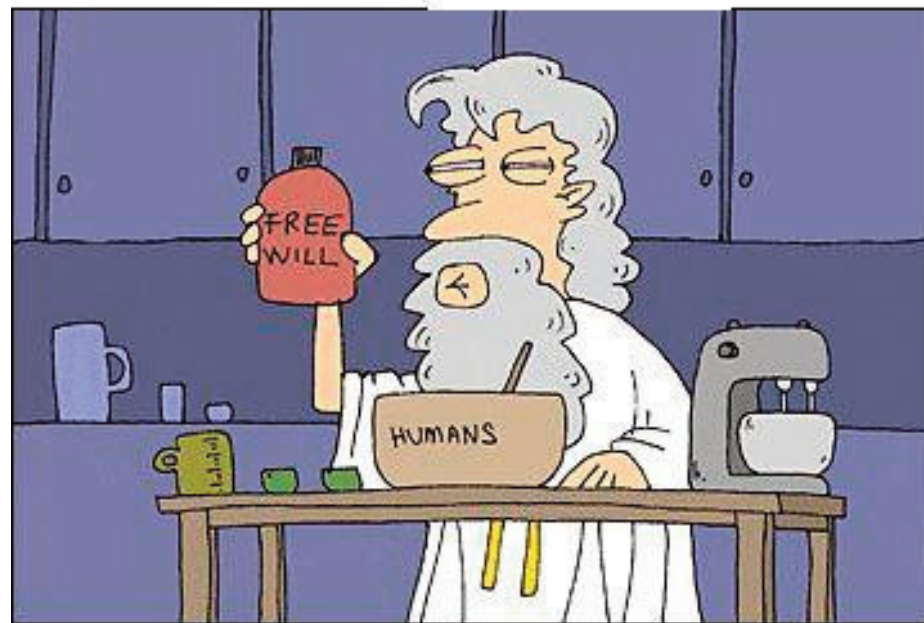
and chasing away the birds is a mitzvah. Performing the mitzvah in such a way, even if it is technically a mitzvah, is clearly not in sync with what, according to Nahmanides, is the ultimate purpose of the mitzvah. Thus, knowledge of the goal of the mitzva can be essential for the correct performance of the mitzva.

There are two possible ways to figure out what the goals of these divine laws are. The first way is to look to our tradition. We can closely examine the parts of our tradition that speak to these overarching principles. This would require a serious study of Tanakh as well as the *agadata* we find in the Talmud. Often, we have explicit statements by both God and his prophets which could point us in certain directions. Other times there is a more amorphous "general spirit of the Torah," in the

with the system God gave us. If we say that there is a purpose that we must ensure the halakha accomplish, we also run a serious risk of people claiming whimsically and without much thought that various mitzvot no longer apply.

While these risks and misgivings are real, the opposite extreme runs an equal, if not greater, risk. If we only focus on the formalisms of the halakhic system and ignore the values that it is based on, then we have no way of ensuring the continuous connection of our system with the will of God. Having a system that has lost its connection with God's desire is no better than having no system at all. Thus, the dangers implicit in examining the goals of our mitzvot and using them to guide our practice of halakha beseech us not to avoid the issue altogether but to examine the issues with much care and depth. It is incumbent that we study these theological and philosophical issues with as much rigor as we do the specifics of halakha and the Talmudic discourse. Our experts need not only be experts in halakha and Talmud but in *hashkafa* as well. Let us talk about what God truly asks of us with as much fervor as we talk of the laws of Shabbos. And, when we apply these values to the halakhic system, we must acknowledge the inherent danger and set certain conditions to ensure that they are applied responsibly and wisely.^{vi} Only then will we reach a point where the other nations will see our practices and acclaim "*Rak am hakham ve-navon ha-goy hag-adol ha-zeh.*" (*Devarim* 4:6).

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EVER WONDER IF GOD HAD ANY SECOND THOUGHTS?

soning takes a value that the Radbaz thinks is a goal of the halakhic system and forms the halakha in such a way that it fits this value.

Attuning oneself to the ultimate goals of the halakha is not just useful for the *posek* who is creating halakha. It is also necessary for each individual's optimal performance of the commandments. After all, if it is true that there are larger goals that mitzvot are meant to help us achieve, then how can we perform these mitzvot correctly without understanding their purposes? Let us take, for example, the commandment of sending away the mother bird when taking eggs from a nest. Nahmanides argues in his commentary on that verse that the purpose of that commandment is to encourage mercifulness in humans and discourage cruelty. Working within Nahmanides' reason, it would appear that one who chases away the bird simply because it is a mitzva but is not aware of the ultimate purpose, could not have performed the mitzva in the optimal way since it will probably be less effective in encouraging compassion. To go even further, I have had conversations with people who thought that even if one does not need the eggs, taking them

words of Rav Kook. Beyond the philosophical and theological parts of the torah, we must also study the specific laws themselves in order to infer their purpose. The other way to figure out the will of God is by using human intellect, our experiences in the world which God created, and natural morality. God's command, "and you shall do what is righteous (*hayashar*) and what is good in the eyes of God" (*Devarim* 6:18) assumes that man knows what is good. The Radbaz, therefore, in the aforementioned response, says that the laws of our Torah must agree with our reason and logic (*sevara*). It makes sense that God gave us the power to understand the laws of the Torah and His desires since He wants us to achieve them.

Of course, we must be very careful. The values are often ambiguous and it is not always possible to determine exactly what their parameters are. We can only guess at the will of God with the utmost humility. Allowing these values to then affect halakha and the way we practice it is clearly uncomfortable. The clarity and, for some, the sanctity of the halakha is lost once we say that there is a purpose beyond the laws themselves that must guide what we do

ⁱ Horiyot 10b

ⁱⁱ *Mishleh* 3:6

ⁱⁱⁱ Bereishit Rabba 44

^{iv} Guide to the Perplexed III:31

^v Responsa Radbaz part III siman 627

^{vi} The Neziv, for example, in discussing the concept of *aveira l-shma* in his responsa (part II Siman 9), sets two prerequisites for an *aveira l-shma* to be enacted. The first is that he who is performing the sin get no benefit from it, and the second is that he measure very well what is gained and what is lost.

Tsamah Nafshi

BY ERIT STERLING

The expression of emotional and existential estrangement from God and the world is best expressed in some of the *mizmorei tehillim*. As the *meshorer* cries out for deliverance, repentance, inspiration, or simply acknowledgement, the reverberations of his song are heard throughout the generations. Hundreds, even thousands of years later, the same emotions, the same elation or estrangement is felt by the descendents of the great composer. One particular *tehillah* that has found a special place in my heart is *tehillah* 42. I first encountered the full text of this *tehillah* (though I had unwittingly known parts of it through popular *kumtitz* songs) while doing a project in eleventh grade. Its words have continued to be a source of hope, comfort, and personal expression ever since that time. The powerful emotional imagery used in this *tehillah* expresses the multi-dimensional and complex emotions of the Jew in *galut*.

Tehillah 42 begins with a simile in which the *meshorer* compares himself to a deer thirsting for water “*ka-ayal ta’arog al afikei mayim ken nafshi ta’arog elekha Elokim*”ⁱ “as the deer groans for flowing streams of water, so too my soul groans for You, God.” The *Daat Mikra*ⁱⁱ explains that the *ayal* or deer, is unique because, when it is thirsty, it lifts up its voice and cries out to be near streams of flowing water. Like the deer who cries out when it is far away from water, so too the Jew, in his distant exile from the *Beit Ha-mikdash* cries out because he wants to be able to see “*pnei Elokim*”. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirschⁱⁱⁱ explains that the deer in this *mizmor* hears the water flowing, but is unable to reach it. Like the deer in the absence of water, in the absence of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, the Jewish people sense Hashem. We know that He is near in reality, but we feel as if he is far away. With the loss of the *Beit ha-Makdash*, revealed miracles and *nevi'im*, we tend to feel more distant from Hashem, even though He is very near to us.

Rashi’s^{iv} explanation of this metaphor delves into the specific character of the *ayal*. According to Rashi, the *ayal* serves as a kind of messenger for the other animals. When the other animals are thirsty, they call out to it, imploring that it lift his eyes up to *marom* on their behalf. Upon their request, it digs a hole in which it inserts its horns and begins to move them around. As it looks up to Hashem, it simultaneously takes action, digging a hole to demonstrate its will and belief that He will provide it with water. As it digs, Hashem is *merahem* on it and the deep brings water up to it. What compels Hashem to grant the *ayal’s* re-

quest is not simply its cries, but his willingness to take action, its demonstration of its full faith that Hashem will provide it with water. Like the *ayal*, the person who cries out to Hashem through feelings of distance and frustration cannot expect to be answered without taking initiative, without being an active participant in the answering of his or her own cry. If a people truly thirst for the attainment of a close relationship with Hashem, they must prepare themselves for this relationship by taking active steps toward its attainment.

Many commentators take note of the use of a strange word in the second *pasuk* of this *perek*. The *shoresh*, root *ayin reish gimmel*, which is generally translated as groan, is found in only one other place in all of Tanakh. In *sefer Yoel*,^v (1:20), it says “*gam bahaimot sadeh ta’arog elekha ki yavshu afikei mayim*” “the beasts of the field cry out to you, for the streams are dried-up.” In this context, the *shoresh* “*arag*” is used in connection to “*bahaimot sadeh*,” and not specifically to the *ayal*. This seems to conflict with the claim of Rashi and other commentators who say that this word is used specifically in reference to the cry of an *ayal*, in the same way that the word *sha’ag* is used specifically in relation to a lion. The solution to this difficulty lies in Rashi’s explanation, as enumerated previously. The *ariga* of the *ayal* is really the cry of all animals, insofar as the *ayal* cries out to Hashem on their behalf. When viewed in light of this explanation, the *pasuk* in *Yoel* fits in beautifully with this *tehillah*. Even the animals who cannot cry out for themselves, who turn to another as their representative, are viewed as if they themselves were crying out to Hashem. Like the *ayal*, who cries out on behalf of other animals, people too are capable of *davening* as representatives of others. Even people who are unable to *daven* on behalf of themselves can be counted in the communal voice of *klal yisrael*.

After the comparison between the thirst of a deer for water and the thirst of the *mishorer* for Hashem, the *tehillah* continues to describe the exact nature of this thirst. “*tsamah nafshi le-Elokim le-Kel hai*” – “my soul thirsts for Elokim, for the living God.”^{vi} Radak^{vii} explains that the extension of the thirst metaphor is not simply an extended literary tactic. Rather, there is something about thirst specifically which portrays the longing for Hashem in a way that no other feeling does. Thirst is more desperate and compelling than hunger because one can go two three days without food, but not without water. When one is thirsty and he drinks water, “*tashuv nafsho elav*,” “his life will return to him.” Though food is eventually necessary for survival, the need for water is more

compelling and immediate.

The Malbim^{viii} explains that the thirst of a deer is the result of two separate causes. First, the *ayal* is naturally thirsty. Additionally, the *ayal* is accustomed to eating poisonous roots and needs to drink water in order to counteract the effects of the poison. Like the natural thirst of the *ayal*, the Jew’s thirst for the living God is natural; it is embedded in his consciousness. He thirsts for the living God upon whom both physical and spiritual life are dependant. The natural thirst for Hashem arises out of a feeling of necessity and dependence. Just as it is natural to thirst for water because without it life cannot be sustained, it is similarly natural to thirst for Hashem.

Another dimension of thirst is present in



people as it is in the *ayal*. Like the deer who eats poisonous roots, man sometimes does things that are poisonous to his soul. Man is fallible and often commits sins that he knows are detrimental to both body and soul. After committing a sin, man suddenly has the urge to connect to Hashem, to rebuild the lost connection that has resulted from sin. But the process of returning to Hashem has a prescribed measure. As articulated by many *nevi'im*, Hashem does not desire the empty rituals, the rote observance. Practice must be preceded by genuine desire, by the groans of thirst for the living God, by the striving toward the feeling of a close relationship to Hashem. This idea is further expressed in a Shabbat *zemer* written by Ibn Ezra^{ix}. “*Tsamah nafshi l’Elokim le-Kel hai, libi u-besari yeranenu le-Kel hai*” – “my soul thirsts for E-lokim, for the living God, my heart and my flesh will sing to the living God.” Ibn Ezra infuses this idea of multifaceted longing into an extension of the second

pasuk. Both the heart and the flesh of man, the instinctual and responsive aspects of each person, thirst for Hashem.

Through the exploration of two *psukim* in one *mizmor* of *Tehillim*, many dimensions of man’s relationship to Hashem can be revealed. Like the *ayal* has a specific call that is unique only to its kind, each person has his or her own way of connecting to Hashem, of expressing his or her deepest feelings, estrangement and longing. Still, as each of us calls out to Hashem on behalf of ourselves, in expression of our personal emotions, it is important to bear in mind that we are also calling out on behalf of those who feel they cannot do so themselves. The desire to have a relationship with Hashem must not come only from the guilt of human

fallibility. Rather, it must also come from a natural thirst for a genuine relationship with Hashem. Actions must be prefaced by sincerity and desire to strive toward a true relationship. Man must express both longing and praise for Hashem with his whole being. “*Libi u-besari yeranenu le-Kel hai*.”

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ⁱ Psalms 42:2

ⁱⁱ Daat Mikra, Tehillim 42:2 (Amos Chacham)

ⁱⁱⁱ Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Tehillim 42:2

^{iv} Rashi, Tehillim 42:2

^v Yoel 1:20

^{vi} Tehillim 42:3

^{vii} Radak, Tehillim 42:3

^{viii} Malbim, Tehillim 42:2

^{ix} From the Shabbat Zemer “*tsamah nafshi*” written by Ibn Ezra

And the Body Your Handiwork

BY RABBI ELIE WEISSMAN

To “the Chinuch” who reminds me on this painful, angst-ridden morning “*ki aharei ha-peulot nimshakhim ha-livavot*.” (For after the actions, the heart is pulled). {Mitzvah 16}

This morning I wake, and belong to Wordsworth and not Ramban. Not because one’s philosophy speaks to me more than the other’s, but because one was required to put on *tefillin* each morning, and the other wasn’t. That manifold complex of tradition, with its limitless chambers and corridors, shaping my life (and not William Wordsworth’s), and usually injecting it with meaning, now acts as a burden upon me; it binds me.

My mind, clinging to the fantastical, rebellious illusions of the previous night, conjures images of freedom. I wake at ten without the guilt of “*seder*” or “*zmanim*.” I decide, at ten, where I wish to go, and just go. Today I walk slowly through the park, perhaps sitting under a tree and reading a story with no particular message or meaning. I spend the day following my whims as they peak. More importantly, my actions, good or bad, retain no Divine ramifications.

This morning, I pull the covers back over my head, hoping that I will fall back to sleep for only a few minutes, granting me the privilege of arriving late to *minyan*, and hopefully sparing me the full service; my will is not His.

Still, despite (and in spite of) my will, my body carries me lazily from my bed, allowing the words “*modeh ani lifanecha*” to slip unconsciously from my lips. My bare feet touching the cold bathroom floor wake me from my trance and remind me of the day ahead. I am unprepared to deal with an agonizing morning of learning, staring blankly at texts that don’t need the embarrassment of my half-thought *sevaras*.

My thoughts break; and I discover that I am dressed and ready for *minyan*. My hands pour water over each other three times and my lips recite a blessing that my conscience had

not yet agreed to. New words begin to flow from my mouth: “*asher yatsar es ha-adam behakhma u-vara vo nikavim...*” “I cannot prevent their emergence; I will ignore them. My mouth continues: “*E-lokai neshama shenasata bi tehora hi*.” I wish to cry out “stop;” but the words, having broken through the dam built by my mind, flow ceaselessly, becoming louder and louder as my feet walk me into the *Beis Midrash* for *minyan*.

My lips, ignoring my protests and cries for freedom, plow forward in their praise of God. A revolt ensues. Body, with its legions of limbs and organs, defies its master in favor of its Maker. Antagonists and enemies on all sides, my intractable mind is overwhelmed by the sheer might of the magnificent and imposing tradition which fuels and captures my body. My arm, brandishing the black mark of the King, and my head,

adorned with His crown, do His bidding, denying my mind’s objections, now drowned out by the rising voices of commitment. Contemplative mind succumbs to a simplistic body, trained to serve Him and invigorated by the multitudes of committed servants surrounding, similarly lauding their Creator.

The conflict ends in tranquility. I yield to my body, swaying rhythmically to the sweet sounds of subjugation.

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I Believe with Complete Faith: An Exploration of Turning Faith into Action

BY ESTER STIEFEL

Do you believe that *Mashiah* is coming? Maybe not today, or tomorrow, or even next year, but will he come during your children’s lifetime, your grandchildren’s, your great-grandchildren’s?

Ten years ago my father was walking down the street in the beautiful, quiet Jerusalem neighborhood of Rehavia, when he saw a ‘for sale’ sign outside an apartment. Only interested in what the real estate market was like in Israel, my father casually called the real estate agent and asked to see the apartment. As soon as he began looking at the apartment, the owners began pushing him to buy it, but my father was unsure. Did he want the apartment? If he did buy it, what would he do with it? How was he going to maintain it from America? Maybe he should just wait. When my father expressed these concerns to a family friend, the friend turned to him and posed the following question: “Do you *really* believe in the coming of *Mashiah*? Just imagine,” he continued, “thirty or forty years from now *Mashiah* could be here and we will all come up to Jerusalem to go to the *Beit Ha-mikdash* for *Pesah* or *Succot*. At that time you will have to turn to your grandchild and say, ‘see that apartment, see that one over there, I almost bought that apartment, we almost would have been a twenty minute walk from the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.’”

“The righteous man shall live by his faith.”ⁱⁱ There is a longstanding question in Jewish tradition concerning faith: how do we fulfill this ‘thing’ called *emunah*? Merriam Webster’s online dictionary defines faith as “belief,” “trust,” and “loyalty to God.” It is firm belief and complete trust in something for which there is no proof. We cannot see faith, touch it or smell it; we can only feel it, believe it in our minds and in our hearts. As the Rambam, in the *Guide of the Perplexed* teaches: “Know that faith is not a verbal utterance, but rather a matter that is represented in the soul.”ⁱⁱⁱ Real, unwavering faith is something very hard to have, even our forefathers, who saw great miracles like the splitting of the sea and food falling from the sky, struggled with this untouchable thing called faith. What does it mean to have faith? Or to be even more basic, what is faith? And ultimately what can we do to express our faith?

Like our forefathers, we all struggle with our faith daily. Unfortunately, it is not always

a conscious struggle, but unconsciously every time we sin, every time we waste precious learning time, or miss an opportunity to do a mitzvah we demonstrate this lack of faith. For instance, every time we speak a word of *lashon hara* we are showing a lack of faith. We are demonstrating that we do not believe that God is watching our every move. We fail to show our *yirat shemayim* when we fail to recognize that there are consequences to our actions. We fail to show *ahavat Hashem* when we do not treat other human beings, who are created in the image of God, (footnote Berasheit 1:27) with respect. We each struggle in these ways trying to strengthen our faith; it is so easy to slip, but how can we possibly overcome this struggle?

To better understand what *emunah* means let us look at the first time the word *emunah* appears in the Torah. In *Parashat Be-shalah*ⁱⁱⁱ the word ‘*emunah*,’ ‘faith,’ appears in the description of the war against Amalek. During the battle with Amalek, when Moshe’s hands were raised Israel triumphed and when they fell down Israel began to lose. So “Aharon and Hur supported his arms...and his arms were *emunah* until the sun set.” Here, *emunah* means steady and not the usual translation of faith or belief. In this instance, ‘*emunah*,’ means stability. Faith, then, is our stability. It is what is supposed to help us triumph in our everyday lives, as the Jewish people triumphed over Amalek.

Rabbi Nahman of Breslov in *Likkutei Mo-haran* teaches that when it says in *Be-shalah* that “his hands were *emunah*” it means that Moshe had such great faith that his faith permeated his whole body.^{iv} This is analogous to when a person has such complete faith that the faith encompasses one’s entire body. Faith is not something that is just in our hearts and our minds. Rather, it is something that has an impression on the entirety of the person; even in our limbs when we perform a physical action like Moses did, as he held up his arms. A person’s entire being and life should be imbued with faith; one’s whole life ought to be a reflection of that person’s faith. But the question remains: how can we imbue ourselves with this kind of faith?

When it comes to something as complex as faith, there are more questions than answers. Even when there is an answer, the question is normally more powerful than the answer such that the answer is not very satisfying. When times are good and things seem to be going our

What is God?

way, it should be easy to believe in God and see His hand in our daily lives. However, in good times, we become too comfortable and sin, thus showing a lack of faith even if we think we feel it in our hearts. Every time we sin we are ultimately saying to God, "I don't believe that You are everywhere watching and judging me always." We are not taking our faith and letting it permeate into our very being, into our very actions. When times are hard and we see bad things happening to good people it is even easier to lose faith and question God's actions or even doubt that there is a God. So everyday of our lives, in good times and in bad, faith is elusive and mysterious; it leaves us with more questions than we can answer. Nevertheless, I would like to attempt to explain how we can strengthen our faith just a little, by translating it into action.

God does not expect us to find a way to physically show our faith on our own. Rather,

How many times do we take the time to sit and think, *what are we doing?* Are my actions expressing my belief in God, and His Torah, and in a final redemption? In this age of technology and capitalism, everything is instantaneous, competitive, and fast paced. We become so tied up with our busy, crazy lives that we seldom stop to think. Even if we spend the whole day learning Torah, do we regularly take the time to ask why? I am not trying to question the notion of faith; rather, I am trying to take a moment to recognize faith so we may reorient ourselves and act in ways that reflect what we actually believe.

It is impossible to know why things happen the way that they do. The daily picture of how the world works is unclear to us and the only way we can keep going is by having faith that God guides us and that everything will be alright in the end. A way through which this faith can come is by acting on it, by being



He has given us guidelines and means with which we can express and strengthen our faith. As a verse in *Tehillim* teaches "all of Your (God's) commandments are faith."ⁱ God gave us the Torah and its commandments to help us live a life of faith. However, as we have seen, having faith and acting with faith are not that simple and holding on to our faith can be exceptionally difficult. In our everyday lives there is constant conflict between having faith and the harsh reality of life. We might wake up and truly believe that we have true sincere faith in God, but then we rush through morning prayers and forget to bless God for the food we just ate; we tell a little white lie here and there, or when we hear that someone was shot we automatically think *where is God?* All of us are guilty of these thoughts and actions in one form or another because the reality of life constantly tests our faith. Human beings are not perfect, and even people who have the greatest faith can come to feel abandoned by God in hard times. We are constantly challenged to overcome our fear of reality and bring our faith to the forefront of our lives.

Our perspective of the world is foggy and it is hard for us to see God's master plan. Our faith is constantly tested whether it is through hardships or through how we act daily. And what are we doing about it? How many times do we actually stop and think about our faith?

meticulous in following God's commandments and by knowing that we do not know the big picture God has in store for us, individually and as a nation.

After having his faith questioned, after he took a moment to see the big picture, my father sat down the next day with the real-estate agent and signed the papers buying the apartment. From this whole experience I realized that in order to be truthful to ourselves about the nature of faith, we need to take a moment to recognize our goals and, through that, translate our faith into action.

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ⁱ Makkot 24a

ⁱⁱ Maimonides, Moses. Guide of the Perplexed 1:50

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 17:12

^{iv} *Likkutei Moharan* 1:91

^v Ps. 119:86

Editors note: In Spring 2007, as an assignment for Rabbi Shalom Carmy's Belief and Religious Commitment course, YC students were asked to attempt a definition of God. The following are unedited selections from the students' responses.

Student 1

God in the Judaeo-Christian tradition refers to an omnipotent creator, ruler, and benefactor of the world. But perhaps more essentially, when we affirm our belief in God's existence, we are expressing our most fundamental convictions about the nature of the world and the human experience. Our sense that there is an ultimate purpose to our lives, and meaning to our actions; our fundamental moral convictions; the feeling that there is an underlying unity and order among all things; these and more are we express in proclaiming that God exists.

Student 2

Defining God and Gods

The task of defining God will not lead to the same results one would produce when defining god. God, as far as I know, is minimally a monotheistic god (not in the sense, of course, that He believes in one god, though He probably has more than *emuna peshuta* on that subject) and can be further refined to refer to the Abrahamic god and even to the Jewish god (though Judaism entertains enough competing theologies about god that it can be said to have many gods(!)). On the other hand, god can extend much further, to both pagan gods and to the frequently heard "President Joel is (a) god." God (with a capital G) can be said to have certain common characteristics. Limited by unfamiliarity with non-Abrahamic monotheistic religions, such as Sikhism, and even with the Abrahamic ones (especially Bahai), I can only say with partial certainty that the Abrahamic god has some sort of monopoly on divinity. While a Christian trinitarian may posit that God is three and therefore divinity is not monopolized but shared, he would likely still agree that those three are also one and so 'some sort' of monopoly can still be agreed upon. But that unity cannot be extended to the idea of god. Pagan gods tend to have a lot of competition and those declaring the divinity of President Joel have at times spoken similarly of Arnie Eisen.

What is god, then? I would like to posit a very minimalistic answer: A god is an object of worship. Furthermore, a god is thought of having powers and/or influences on both its worshipers and those who do not worship it (or who do not do it properly), whether directly or indirectly, whether sensed or not. Offering a sacrifice to President Joel, for instance, can result in a building named after the worshiper. Similarly, an Abrahamic god holds the keys to the afterlife; but if a worshiper fails to have faith in Jesus, hell awaits. This god does not necessarily have a claim on ultimate truth or the highest quality of being, nor is it necessarily ineffable or inconceivable.

In what way is belief important to this very minimalistic god? Belief seems to be but a precursor to worship, which can provide either benefits or repercussions. If I believe President Joel is a god, I will continue to offer him my tuition, lest I be smitten. If I don't, I may be less inclined to do so. In some cases, as in some forms of the Christian model, faith is part of the worship and is the key to determining future smiting. Belief is important only insofar as it helps identify the object of worship and possibly the correct mode of worship.

Student 3

This entry includes a follow up question posed to the student by Rav Carmy and the student's answer.

When thinking about God I have two fundamentally different reactions. The first is that He is indefinable. That any attempt to define the “essence” of God is impossible and that any attempt to give an attributive definition does not get at that which makes God God. This, for the purposes of the assignment, will get us nowhere. The second sense is that He is a machine with a heart. What I mean by calling God a machine is that He is a being that is entirely consistent. Unfortunately, this alone does not capture qualities that I believe must be present in a being for it to be God. Therefore, I add to this formulation a heart. Meaning that I add that the flavor of His consistency is that of, let us say, goodness. Unfortunately, this begs the definition of goodness- which it is unclear to me how to express as part of God but not distinct from Him and also to retain God's being the originator of all except to divorce it from God and therefore make Him a slave to it (as opposed to a slave of his own consistency). Also, it lends arbitrariness to what it is that God is consistent about. I must also add to this the understanding that God is not externally limited in his abilities to carry out his will. This definition though is unclear and maybe not all encompassing. Also, it begins to express the form of that which was rejected at the get go.

Are you saying that when we use an indefinable term we have no way of disagreeing about whether it's being used correctly? If I say this is yellow and you disagree, so we need a definition in order to disagree?

No. We can disagree about the use of a term up to the point of departure of our common notion those things predicated on an indefinable term. This is assuming of course that we can delineate properties of an indefinable term even if we cannot define the term itself. To your example of yellow, I may not be able to define what yellow is, but it would seem that we could all agree that Big Bird is covered in yellow feathers. To that degree, we can have discussion on whether an indefinable term is being used correctly. Again in terms of yellow, we could evaluate the claim that my teeth are yellow on a given day by recourse to examples of yellow not under dispute between us. (This could extend to a quality like virtue and generalize by recourse to linguistic evidence as demonstrating that most people would agree about a certain feature...)

Student 4

In some religions G-d is seen as one single, non-tangible eternal being, all-powerful and all-knowing, responsible for every single aspect of every part of creation and the current workings of the world. In other religions, there are many gods, each with distinct human characteristics such as love and pain and are even susceptible to death, though usually only if they are killed by another god. Each one of these gods is in charge of a specific aspect of nature or some facet of running the world. Regardless of what any individual religion or group may hold, the one constant is that G-d is always referred to as some sort of superior being or beings, responsible at least in some way for the world as we know it.

Student 5

I feel like I am not up to this challenge of defining God. I have many personal thoughts, but for few of them do I have a clear, logical and definitive proof. I will not answer the question in terms of what I can prove. Throughout history, people have had many different pictures of what a god is. Philosophers have debated the metaphysical questions: what is the nature and number of God. Today, far more focus on the psychological relationship of man to God. People relate to God as the one they look up to, the one who has more power than them. A god is one who doesn't fail. There is no obstacle he cannot overcome, no goal outside his reach. He is the one who is greater, who people can turn to in their time of need to solve their problems. Of course, once their appointed gods fail, they become false gods; but the quest to find a real God is ever-present.

Yet once one enters into what makes God truly God, one leaves the easier terra firma of relating to God and enters the above philosophical questions regarding God. I do not intend to foray into those well-charted waters of *proving* what God is; rather I will give my thoughts, my personal reflections – somewhat disorderly at that – on what God is.

I personally attack the question here from two directions. Firstly, there is my religiously inspired vision of God as a perfect being (which draw upon my own psychological and metaphysical leanings). Not merely the most perfect, or perfect at many things, but an absolutely perfect, both in potency and morality. To truly be God, in my view, he must be omniscient and omnipotent. The world is His cradle; He knows every inch of it and exercise power over all of its aspects. God's perfection spreads to the moral domain as well; He acts for a reason, and acts with consideration of the beings he has created and will affect with his further actions. His knowledge and power come into play in this arena as well; there is no question He cannot answer because of a lack of data, no goal He cannot achieve because of an inability to accomplish. God cannot pass the buck when asked whether the Judge shall perform justice. And God must act to instill that justice in the world he created.

I also, at times, attempt to think of God from a more scientific position – not in attempting to prove his existence, but in considering the mechanics, so to speak. My vision of God is that He is ‘extra-universal.’ If God is omnipotent and omniscient, if he is to know the future, he must be outside time. For him to be outside time, he would need to be outside space, in the way we experience it (certainly Einstein's general theory of relativity seems to confirm that notion). He is outside this universe. In a physical sense, God is not enclosed by the universe; his power over the universe demands a certain separation from it.

That God is extra-universal means he may well relate to the physical element of the universe, but that he is not enclosed by it. There is some ‘other’ domain, outside the universe that God inhabits. He doesn't need to be outside the spatial dimension of the universe (being that I have already posited that he doesn't inhabit space, that requirement would be somewhat illogical). But he needs to outside it in *some* dimension. God may be immanent in the universe, but I think that God's presence demands a place that is separate. I further feel that this relates to how God manages the universe – he does not orchestrate its every move, but leaves it to the universe he ordered to march forward, interfering with its working to perform hidden and revealed miracles, possibly through quantum mechanics. If God is our independent of our universe, God may still be perfect, may still be greater than all, but leave open a door for our own development. His separation allows Him to instill justice and perfection within our world without stunting our own growth.



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