



# KOL HAMEVASER

The Jewish Thought Magazine  
of the Yeshiva University Student Body



## Israel at 60

Volume I, Issue 8

May 8, 2008





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The Jewish Thought Magazine  
of the Yeshiva University Student Body

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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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WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE ENTIRE STAFF OF KOL HAMEVASER AND ALL OTHER CONTRIBUTORS FOR ALL OF THEIR HARD WORK AND DEDICATION. IN ADDITION, WE WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS OUR *HAKARAT HA-TOV* TO ZEV ELEFF AND THE STAFF OF THE COMMENTATOR, WHOSE SUPPORT MADE KOL HAMEVASER POSSIBLE.

-DAVID LASHER AND MATTAN ERDER  
OUTGOING MANAGING EDITORS

# Editorial

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Kol Hamevaser,

In his article in the previous installment of *Kol Hamevaser*, Ben Greenfield argues that God does not communicate with us through the language of history. In particular, after considering the difficulty in formulating a coherent and defensible interpretation of the recent Mercaz haRav attack, he exhorts his readers to “cease to pretend that His omnipotent command of history implies a revelatory communiqué through history.” While Mr. Greenfield’s point is well-taken – it is hubris of the highest degree to for one to claim knowledge of what is going on in God’s “head” – I think he fails to make an important, if not somewhat obvious, distinction.

While the true meaning of most events will continue to be shrouded by inherent difficulty and uncertainty of interpretation, other acts of God, which fall under the rubric of prophetic revelation quite clearly proclaim “darsheni.” For example, if after several generations of warning God decides to destroy the Beis Hamikdash and exile His wayward people, it is safe to assume that He is angry and that Klal Yisrael should begin to contemplate changing ways. On the other extreme, and more contemporarily, I quote Israeli Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Yehuda Amital, who bemoans that ours is “a generation with an impaired sense of history:” “The prophet says, ‘Old men and old women shall yet again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand because of his old age; and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets’ (Zechariah 8:4-5)...After two thousand years, children play in the streets of Jerusalem! Can this be a natural phenomenon, after two thousand years?” (*Commitment and Complexity: Jewish Wisdom in an Age of Upheaval*. Ktav Publishing House. Newark, 2008. pp. 56-57) While this sign may not directly impel us to do any one specific action, it certainly seems to tell us that it is time to hear the voice of our beloved knocking and get a move on.

Forgive me for waxing poetic (an unnecessary apology on the pages of *Kol Hamevaser*), but I also feel that Mr. Greenfield’s thesis fails to address the grander scope of Jewish History. When we turn on “the ten o’clock news,” we see much more than “tame, indisputable lessons.” Who can fail to perceive in the continued survival of the Jews, that “certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces,” the hand of God plucking us out from the fire? Perhaps it is impossible to tell why God allowed a terrorist to murder a few yeshiva boys, but isn’t it eminently clear that He has prevented other terrorists from murdering us all?

Sincerely,  
Julian Horowitz, YC ‘11

## “AND YOU EXPECT TO POSSESS THE LAND?”

BY GILAH KLETENIK

At the start of high school, I was Israel activism exemplified. As an upstart freshman, I even co-founded our school’s Israel club. I sent many a letter berating “anti-Israel bias” to the *New York Times* and emailed even more letters urging elected officials in Washington to support the Jewish state. I was raised in a Zionist home, experienced summers at a Bnei Akiva camp and even spent a year in Israel with my family during middle school. So my deep concern for Israel was natural and the positions I took on the issues only typical of a Modern Orthodox Jew.

The rhetoric I spewed in my advocacy efforts is familiar to us all. At the dinner table, in the classroom and at community meetings with congresspersons, I was wont to make such impassioned and blanket statements as “the Palestinians don’t want peace” and “a greater Israel, is a more secure Israel.” I held these beliefs to be true with great intensity and considered them the obvious expression of my firmly held religious convictions and deep-seated love for my people. Today, my perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more nuanced, but no less informed by my Judaism.

In retrospect, I’m not quite certain when my positions began evolving into what they are today, but I do know that the shift was gradual, painful. And, while the particulars of my journey are obscure, I nevertheless recall a fateful moment when I realized that the words coming out of my mouth were incongruent with the values in my head. It was then that I began to internalize my dishonesty, and gained the courage to admit that I could no longer, in good conscience, defend and justify a country whose actions I considered morally questionable. How could I advocate for a country that occupies another nation, a government that deprives citizens of their natural rights?

It was difficult for me to confess that the country I loved dearly, and the state that meant so much to my people, was also a guilty player in the unending conflict. And more, it was hard to realize that the numerous settlements I had come to believe crucial not only from a religious perspective, but also from a security perspective, were in fact roadblocks to peace and that many were even built on Palestinian land. Even tougher was coming to terms with the fact that what we perceived as “security” necessities, often only engendered more hatred and distrust of Israel within Palestinian society. I began to understand that these policies were in a sense counter-productive; only generating the need for more roadblocks, curfews and walls. Above all though, what was most

challenging was acknowledging that maybe the rest of the world wasn’t totally “wrong” – maybe there was something behind their incessant, albeit unbalanced calls against Israel’s “systematic humiliation and human rights violations.”

It wasn’t that I stopped believing in Israel’s legitimacy. To the contrary, I realized that by embracing these beliefs, I was in effect delegitimizing my homeland. Israel’s entitlement to exist is often connected to not only the



right, but the need, especially in the aftermath of the Holocaust, for the Jewish people to defend itself. But, when Israel, the country of the Jews, a people that has endured thousands of years of persecution and the victim of countless injustices acts immorally, does this not call into question the very legitimacy of its existence? On a practical level, it’s clear that these policies have only come to hurt Israel, fanning the flames of the cycle of violence and further distancing the possibility of peace. This reality not only hurts Israel’s image abroad, but might even be the country’s undoing.

Furthermore, religious Jews that we are, we turn to the Torah for ultimate legitimacy, which it seems we are increasingly losing: “Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying: ‘Son of man, they that inhabit those waste places in the land of Israel speak saying: ‘Abraham was one, and he inherited the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us for inheritance.’ Wherefore say unto them: ‘Thus said the Lord God: You eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes unto your fetishes, and shed blood – yet you expect to possess the land? You have relied on your sword, you have committed abominations, and you defile every one his neighbor’s wife; and you expect to possess the land?’”<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to go back in time and undo past injustices; we can’t reverse our driving out of over 700,000 Palestinian refugees and neither can we fully dismantle over 250,000 Jewish settlers and their communities in the West Bank – not to say the least of the East Jerusalem corridor and the Golan. While we can’t make up for the mistakes of yesterday, we can surely approach today with greater sophistication and sensitivity – to recognize that one can be both a victim and a perpetrator,

to be at once a David and a Goliath. We must realize that confessing and correcting our crimes is not a sign of weakness, but instead the greatest sign of strength – for, when we act immorally we lose our legitimacy vis-à-vis both the world and God.

Looking back, part of me wishes I still had that enthusiastic fervor; that black-and-white perspective so very simplistic in scope. I now know though, that such an approach is appealing because of the assumed security it provides – concealing reality’s troubling texture. Sixty years have gone by and Israel is no more secure than it was at Independence – clearly the status quo isn’t working. Perhaps it’s time we collectively emerge from our adolescence, pause in our wisdom and reflect: are we acting with the responsibility expected of a people who have endured our history and a nation founded on the principles of justice and morality – are we losing our legitimacy?

Gilah Kletenik is a Managing Editor of Kol Hamevaser

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 33: 23-25

## AN INTERVIEW WITH RABBI DR. NORMAN LAMM: CONTINUED

*What role does Am Yisrael's status as the am ha-nivhar play within our belief system?*

The comparison to the foul ideology of Aryan racial superiority is a vicious canard that has been with us since the Enlightenment, but ratcheted up since the appearance of mass anti-Semitism in the twentieth century. The non-ideological discomfort that some modern Jews feel is more of a social nature — “what will my non-Jewish neighbors think of me/us when they hear of this boast?” and underlies a good deal of the embarrassment with the *am hanivchar* idea. And not far removed from this concern is its enfeeblement and eventual excision from the prayer book and educational material by many liberal- modernist Jewish groups.

The doctrine of election is accepted by all great Jewish thinkers but not necessarily to the same degree. Thus, for instance, Rambam and a number of other Sephardic scholars of the Middle Ages accepted it, but did not give it the prominence accorded it by other Jewish thinkers. Rambam does not include it in his *Ani Ma'amins*. Other prominent sages, from Yehudah Halevi to the Maharal to the Tanya to Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, expounded on the doctrine of chosenness and

[illegible]

The first to be chosen by God to bring His message to mankind was Abraham. His loyalty, his faith and his self-sacrifice made him the chosen one, and his children after him (the “seed of Abraham”) were to carry on this tradition despite all difficulties. At the Revelation at Sinai, the Divine Voice informed our ancestors that we are chosen to be a “holy nation” and His *segulah* or “special treasure,” and that He desired us and chose us not because we were numerous or great, for we were the smallest of all the peoples. Rather, we were chosen because He loved us and had promised our forefathers that He would redeem us from slavery. He wishes us to know at all times that He is faithful and keeps His promise made to our forebears in the covenant with them, and extends His Love for their descendants “unto a thousand generations” (Dt.: 7:-6-8).

I believe that both versions must be read together; both, paradoxically, are equally and simultaneously true. There was and is a mutual “choosing.” When we are born, we are inducted into the Covenant of Avraham and confirmed as members of the Chosen People — whether we like it or not. We are the chosen, not the choosers. But as we learn and mature, we come into our role not by coercion or habit but by will and love and eagerness. Jews who reject the “yoke of Torah” are condemned to being the subject of Divine duress. They are, no matter how much they try, Jews by birth only. They often suffer from their Jewish identity — anti-Semitism and confusion about the State of Israel and spiritual rootlessness — and do not taste of the glory of Jewishness. Only when we turn around and choose Him and His Torah, of our own free will, do we experience the dignity and delight of being Jewish. Our

*“Academic” approaches to the study of Jewish texts - from Tanakh, to Gemara, to responsa literature - are sometimes perceived as being in conflict with certain aspects of Emunah. How would Rav Lamm assess this perception of academic Jewish studies? What sort of role should “academic” methodologies play*



in a Yeshiva University curriculum?

In answer to your question, I do not believe that academic approaches to sacred texts are necessarily in conflict with *emunah*. After all, our faith is challenged and often attenuated by hunger, luxury, persecution, the ubiquity of sexual temptation, and so on. Popular culture is usually in conflict with some of our received teachings and is menacing to our way of life. Yet we do not and should not condemn all of contemporary culture, even when it is in occasional conflict with principles of Judaism. Scientism (the worship of science) is deplorable, but science must be treated with respect. Popular literature is usually of no importance to a serious *ben Torah*, but truly great literature is serious and should not be dismissed although certainly it need not be accepted as authoritative. As for potential problems posed by academic approaches, we should not minimize them, but put them into perspective. People of genuine *emunah* were and are almost always faced with challenges. It was true in the ancient world and is true today in our contemporary world. Yet we managed to survive without banning all human thinking from our learning and teaching—at least not in our Torah UMadda circles. Avoiding a challenge may be temporarily soothing, but ultimately self-defeating.

Essentially, academic approaches should be subsumed under “Madda” which, in turn, can be divided into two parts: first, that which has no direct bearing on *Talmud Torah*, but which impinges on one’s religious consciousness. This can sometimes prove deleterious to our spiritual sensitivities, but equally can reinforce and deepen our faith and *yirat*

*shamayim*. Example: contemplation of the vastness and the overwhelming complexity of the cosmos may make us question the significance of individual human beings and the ultimate meaningfulness of life itself. But more often, this becomes the spur to *ahavat ha-Shem* and a rousing affirmation of the wisdom of the Creator and the justification of our faith in Him - which is what Rambam explicitly writes in his *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*.

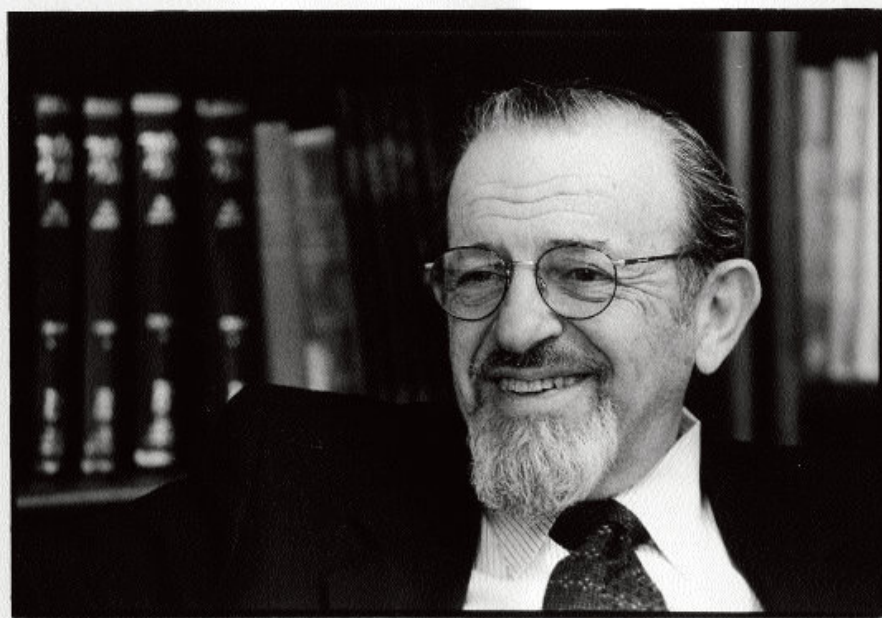
The second aspect is that which concerns itself not with our overall faith commitments but with specific parts of *Talmud Torah*. Here too the brunt of such academic interpretations of halakhic texts can be harmful or helpful. It is worth examining each in turn.

Let us say that in the course of academic research you conclude that the Gemara’s interpretation of a *baraita* was mistaken, as a result of which the *pesak Halakha* should be reversed (assuming, of course, that the process of so deciding is compelling). We are then indeed faced with a problem of considerable significance. Should we continue practicing the traditionally accepted *Halakha* and be false to our conscience, or should we change our conduct and fly in the face of centuries of sanctified practice? Which prevails: truth or tradition?

My approach is that we err if we put the question in such stark either/or terms. Halakhic truth differs from historic or factual or conventional truth or any other kind of truth. (It is, I believe, wrong and even immature to aver

that there is only one truth and no other.) Proof: *Tanur shel Akhnai* (B.M. 59b): the Talmud records a debate amongst the Tannaim as to the purity or impurity of a kind of earthen oven. R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus declared it tahor, while R. Yehoshua considered it tamei. Whereupon the former invoked all kinds of supernatural miracles to support his halakhic decision. R. Yehoshua dismissed all of them, including the final “proof” of R. Eliezer, namely, the *Bat Kol* which favored R. Eliezer. In other words, halakhic truth, decided by majority vote of great but ultimately fallible human beings, prevails over a direct revelation of the divine will!

Halakhic tradition is decided by the halakhic process, not by some external (even divine) standard. That being the case, even if our research leads us to conclude that technical errors crept into the *Mesorah* in the course of history, we can live with such “error.” This is



another example of the view that halakhic practice is not ontological; it is not a statement about objective, ultimate truth, but rather it addresses our subjectivity, it is about a way of living a life of sanctity. This is made clear in a statement by Rav (Ber.R. 44a) that the *mitzvot* were given in order to purify people, to make them aware of the Divine Presence, to train them to a life of *kedushah*; the *mitzvot* are not intrinsic, but a means to a higher end. Hence, even if by the standard of academic Judaica there was positive proof of a wrong decision at one time, the “erroneous” decision has already been incorporated into the body of *Halakha* and is as binding upon us as if it were a *Halakha le’Moshe mi’Sinai*.

For further evidence of the non-ontic nature of the *mitzvot*, note *ki im tzadakta mah titen li* (Job 35:7), which freely translated means, “even if you are righteous, it is not for Me but for yourself” (and see Ramban to Dt. 10:12). Also, since all the *chagim* depend upon when the Sanhedrin declares the new month has begun, their *kedushah* is not inherent but derives from human activity.

But, as I indicated, academic skills can certainly be used to enhance our *Talmud Torah*.

More than once, in my own learning, have I found myself puzzled in trying to penetrate a *sugya* which I considered opaque, and found so-called “academic Judaica” to be of great help. An alternate reading found in a Ms. cited in the *Dikdukei Soferim* can help elucidate many a passage that is otherwise puzzling or even incomprehensible. While personally I do not as a matter of practice spend much time on variant readings, they do prove most helpful in many cases. There is no one methodology or *derekh* that is inherently superior to others; it is all a matter of intellectual conviction, taste, orientation, and personal choice. Hence, everyone is entitled to use whatever satisfies him in attempting to understand *devar Hashem zu Halakha*. But there is no reason, other than habit or intellectual comfort, to fail to make use of parallel sources such as Yerushalmi, Tosefta, the halakhic Midrashim, etc.

wistful remark as to what gives him personally the most spiritual pleasure - it is Torah, in which he delights - and that is certainly no surprise. I assume that all of us, me included, feel that we derive our greatest intellectual fulfillment and spiritual enjoyment from the study of Torah even though we do not denigrate the independent role of Madda in our lives.) What the Rambam is doing is saying that the “other wisdoms” serve two functions: on one level, they have innate value because they explain the world which the Almighty created, and this contemplation leads us to a genuine religious experience; this is Torah UMadda in its broadest sense. And second, they serve specifically to enhance the study of Torah. This latter function fits nicely into the rubric of academic study as propaedeutic to our *Talmud Torah*, enriching it - and us. In this sense, of course, academic study of sacred texts can certainly be considered as helpful.

A word of caution: When the *ben Torah* undertakes to study any academic discipline, whether scientific or humanistic, he should bear in mind that each discipline must be pursued truthfully, that is, without prejudice to its principles or conclusions. Each discipline deserves to be studied with an open and honest mind. Only afterwards should we look back and see how this comports with our understanding of Judaism - halakhic or aggadic. But we must treat each non-Torah discipline according to its own methodology.

Finally, just as in learning Torah we must bear in mind the importance of human dignity, *kevod ha-beriot*, so when we engage in “secular” studies must we not forget the centrality of the human being, who was created “in the image of God.” Whether engaging in a laboratory sciences or business or literature, the integrity of the human soul must always be respected even if, as often happens, it is neglected by practitioners in the field.

In all cases, we must accept as a foregone conclusion that while a great deal of what we study in the academic world may be helpful in support of religion, much of it is certainly antagonistic. While it is important for all of us to have a “taste” of those worlds, we must leave deep involvement in such disciplines to those who are ready to devote their time and energy to fully explore them and to remember that their first obligation is to Torah and their ultimate commitment is to the Almighty, and not to submit to the latest fashionable *apikor-sus*.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm is the Rosh ha-Yeshiva of RIETS and Chancellor of Yeshiva University

Ari Lamm is the interviewer for Kol Hamevaser

I am convinced that this form of academic assistance in learning too is a form of Madda; it is using non-traditional methods to assist us in understanding Torah. Indeed, an excellent example of this can be found in the Rambam in a famous *teshuvah* in which he refers to “secular wisdom” as *rakkachot ve’tabbachot ve’ofot* - a locution denoting servants or helpers, preparing the way for Torah. Opponents of Torah UMadda quite erroneously point to this responsum to argue that the Rambam regretted his high estimation of philosophy and science in the hierarchy of disciplines contained in the *Pardes*, thus undermining the usual conception of Maimonidean espousal of a positive view towards Torah UMadda, reducing all worldly knowledge to the rank of mere instruments, devoid of any inherent value.

However, I believe this is simply not so. (In my Torah UMadda, chapter 4, I point out that some of the most significant authorities on Rambam, such as the late R. Kapach, have questioned the authenticity of this letter. Moreover, the overwhelming weight of Rambam’s writing solidly supports the autonomous role that *chokhmah* plays in Maimonidean thought. In all probability, therefore, he is offering a

# Continuing the Discussion: Derekh Ha-Limmud and Religious Growth

## DECIPHERING A SPITTING IMAGE: TO LIVE AND TO LEARN

BY RABBI ELCHANAN ADLER

*Author's Note: This essay is a transcript of a talk given several years ago. Its thesis, the link between aspects of Miriam's childhood and the episode involving her critique of Moshe Rabbeinu, is, in effect, a piecing together of disparate midrashic sources. The observation that the divine rebuke in the latter episode served to reopen an emotional wound from Miriam's youth is based on the comments of R. Zev Wolf Einhorn (MaHarZu) to Shemos Rabba (1:22), and elaborated on in his treatise Nesiv Chadash (P. 14).*

*The drasha raises a number of important issues of hashkafa; among them, the balance that must be maintained when analyzing the conduct of gedolei hauma – Torah giants whose sanctity and piety defy description. On the one hand, the fact that the Torah does not obscure the mistakes of our leaders suggests a certain license to probe such matters, ostensibly in order to draw inferences which may be of moral value to us. Yet, the very enterprise of scrutinizing individuals of enormous spiritual stature carries the risk of introducing biases borne of our small-mindedness and limited understanding. With this in mind, it behooves us not to lose sight of Miriam's own grandeur within the mesorah. To the extent that our approach affords us fresh insight into this Torah narrative, it should be emphasized that the dynamics must surely have played out in a far more subtle manner than words can convey. I share this drasha in the hope that it will foster an appreciation of "dekula ba" – that there is no element of truth regarding human nature which is not contained and elucidated in the Torah.*

Have we ever stopped to think about the connection between who we are today and our experiences during early childhood? About how a poignant feeling or instinct we had in early life continued to resonate within us, consciously or subconsciously, only to manifest itself again many years later? How the nature of our earliest relationships with our parents and siblings became inextricably linked with our self-image? Or how a private act of kindness performed as a child can unexpectedly provide solace for us many years later?

These issues are largely the domain of psychoanalysts who posit that our adult "personalities" – our feelings, tastes, attitudes, interests and personalities – can be traced to childhood experiences. While there are some who invest vast resources of time and money in

therapy as a means of gaining deeper insights into the underlying origin of their "here and now" reality, most of us are content living our daily lives without the need to discover underlying patterns from the distant past.

Yet sometimes we stumble upon a particular incident where the impact of a person's early personal history is so powerful that to overlook it would be to miss an important part of the story. I believe that such an example can be found in the Torah at the conclusion of Parshas Behaaloscha (Bemidbar Chapter 12) in the episode dealing with Miriam's slander against her younger brother, Moshe. (I say



Miriam because while both Miriam and Aharon were faulted for the error, it was Miriam who initiated the conversation and was primary judged for the misdeed.)

The essence of Miriam's slander was that she equated Moshe's level of prophecy with that of her own: "Was it only to Moses that Hashem spoke? Did he not speak to us as well?" For this insensitive remark, Miriam was chastised by Hashem who made it unequivocally clear that Moshe's prophecy was in a class of its own – qualitatively different than that of other prophets.

In the wake of the divine rebuke, Miriam was stricken with *tzara'as* (a skin ailment which was inflicted upon slanderers during biblical times). Aharon turned to Moshe and implored him to pray on behalf of their sister and Moshe obliged. Hashem responded by ordering Miriam to be secluded outside the camp for seven days. The people postponed their journey for a week until Miriam could rejoin them.

There are two critical aspects to the story

that link it to an earlier episode in Miriam's childhood. The first is the topic of Miriam's slander; the second is Hashem's introductory remarks before issuing Miriam's sentence of seclusion.

In addition to devaluating Moshe's level of prophecy, Miriam also spoke "about the Kushite woman" to whom Moshe was married – who, as we know, was Yisro's daughter, Tzipora. As Rashi explains, Miriam was critical of Moshe's separating from Tzipora. Moshe had done so in order to remain "on call" for prophecy at all times. Though Hashem had sanctioned Moshe's decision, this was not known to Miriam.

In effect, Miriam's critique of Moshe had two components: first, she underestimated Moshe's status as a prophet; second, she considered it wrong for Moshe to deprive himself of a normal family life. And these two components were interrelated. Because Miriam failed to appreciate the uniqueness of Moshe's prophecy, she saw no justification in Moshe's decision to divorce his wife. After all, she too was a prophet who nonetheless lived a normal family life. From Miriam's perspective, it was presumptuous and inappropriate for Moshe to be different.

The clue that this story finds its roots deep in Miriam's past can be detected in Hashem's statement prior to ordering Miriam into seclusion: "Were her father to spit in her face, would she not be humiliated for seven days? Let her be quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and then she may be brought in" (v. 14). Simply stated, Hashem offered a logical justification for His sentence – just as a rebuke by her biological father would put her to shame for a week's time, so does the divine rebuke – by the Heavenly Father – deserve no less. But why, we may ask, did Hashem use the metaphor of a father's rebuke? Is this analogy merely hypothetical? According to various midrashic and talmudic sources it is not. It is something that Miriam actually experienced in her own life.

If we flash back to little Miriam – age five and a half – we would find her during one of the cruelest, darkest periods of the Egyptian exile. (Even the name Miriam is synonymous with the Hebrew word for bitter.) The Jewish sojourners in Egypt had been transformed into slaves. Originally recruited into building large storage houses for Pharaoh, they gradually found themselves subjected to a daily regimen of back breaking field labor. Their lot grew bitter by the day and their spirits were demoralized. To make matters worse, Pharaoh

had just issued a royal edict ordering every newborn Jewish male to be cast into the Nile. At this depressing juncture, Miriam's father, Amram, a prominent leader in the community, made a fateful decision to divorce his wife, Yocheved. Amram reasoned: What purpose could there be in bringing children into a world where they might be forcibly drowned! His decision sent shockwaves through the community and many others followed suit. But soon afterwards, Amram was rebuked by his daughter Miriam who argued: "Father, your edict is more drastic than that of Pharaoh! Pharaoh's edict was directed against the Jewish males, yours is directed at the males and females, for you are not allowing either gender to be born." Whereupon, Amram reversed his decision and reunited with his wife. This, in turn, led all those who had divorced their wives to return to their former marital relationships.

What was it that prompted young Miriam to boldly challenge her father? On one level, it must have been a powerful instinct about the profound importance of family life. Miriam understood that the family is the symbol of Jewish continuity, and that even extraordinary circumstances do not justify breaking up the family unit.

But there was another factor as well – an actual prophecy that Miriam received at this young age – a prophecy informing her that her mother was destined to give birth to a son who would eventually become the redeemer of Israel. Indeed, it was out of this "reunion" between Amram and Yocheved that Moshe Rabeinu was born. [This is why Miriam is referred to elsewhere (in parshas Beshalach) as "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon" – because her first prophecy came to her at a time when was still merely the sister of Aharon prior to the birth of Moshe.]

It should now be obvious how Miriam's critique of Moshe's separation from Tzipora and her equating of Moshe's prophecy with her own find their roots in the events of Miriam's childhood. As we can see, both of these issues were intertwined with the events leading up to Moshe's birth. It was then that Miriam championed the cause of the family in persuading her father to reunite with Yocheved. And it was then that Miriam began her own career as a prophet in predicting the birth of her brother. No wonder that Miriam felt justified in criticizing Moshe on both of these counts.

But the story does not end yet. Both of these issues – Miriam's strong feelings for family and her identity as a prophet – were destined to become enmeshed with a third dimension –



that of her father's love and acceptance. When baby Moshe was born, the entire house filled with a spiritual light. Amram then turned to his daughter and gave her a warm kiss on the forehead, saying: "My daughter, it seems that your prophecy will indeed be realized." But a short three months later when the baby could no longer remain in hiding, Moshe was placed in a wicker basket to virtual abandonment and concealed among the reeds of at the bank of the river. At that point, Amram turned again to his daughter - this time in great disappointment - slapped her face, and cynically asked: "My daughter, what has happened to your 'so called' prophecy?"

As little Moshe lay in his basket upon the water, a pair of watchful eyes gazed anxiously from afar, waiting to learn the fate of the newborn baby: "*Vateisatav achoso merachok le'deah ma yeiase lo*" - "And his sister stationed herself at a distance to know what would be done to him" (Shemos 2:4).

Miriam, Moshe's eldest sister - the human being perhaps most responsible for this baby's existence - stood "*merachok*" - from a distance - not just distant from the baby in a physical sense - but distant from her father who had snubbed her - distant from her own self who had felt so certain that this baby needed to be born ... "*lede'ah ma yei'ase lo*" - to know not just what would become of the baby but what would become of her prophecy which now hung precariously in the balance. Miriam knew that the fate of this baby was inextricably linked with that of her own - her belief in the preservation of the family unit, her career as a prophet, and her reconciliation with her father. So Miriam waited as only a loving sister could.

And suddenly Moshe's life was miraculously saved by the most unlikely of sources - Pharaoh's daughter, Basya. When Basya requested a Jewish woman to nurse the baby, Miriam suddenly emerged and offered the services of the baby's own mother, Yocheved. Miriam had now found peace with herself and with her father. Her prophecy was authentic after all... her faith in the power of the family had proved correct... her father's love would yet return...

This was Miriam at age six. Many years later, these same factors resurface, in *Parshas Behaaloscha*, but in a different context. Once again, we find Miriam championing the cause of family unity - this time in her criticism of her brother, Moshe, for separating from Tzipora. And once again, it was Miriam's confidence in her own status as a prophet that led her to equate herself with Moshe. This time, however, she was not right. Moshe's situation was different because Moshe was different. And Hashem knew that Miriam had to learn this lesson in a painful manner.

When Miriam was stricken with *tzara'as* and sentenced to seclusion for her sin, it reopened old wounds from her past by triggering bitter memories of her estrangement from her father. Now we understand why Hashem drew the analogy of her father having spat in her face - "*Ve'aviha yarak yarak befaneha*." The divine rebuke was to Miriam at that moment what her father's slap must have felt like

many years before. To Miriam, this experience of abandonment must have indeed kindled a *deja vu* reliving of the paternal rejection that she felt as a child.

But at the same time that Hashem offered rebuke, He also extended a warm, comforting hand: "And the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in" (v. 15). As Rashi explains, Miriam was granted this special tribute of being "waited for" just as she had "waited" in her youth for her baby brother by the river bank.

Yes, Miriam was grossly mistaken in her criticism of Moshe. Her championing of family values in this case was misplaced. Her equating of Moshe's prophecy with that of her own was fallacious. But her instincts as a young girl were still valid. All that she did to bring Moshe into the world was still appreciated - her standing up to her father... her prophecy... her watchful devotion as a sister... She may not have risen to be a prophet in the caliber of Moshe but she was a prophet nonetheless... And her passionate desire to preserve the family was a positive one. It was just that Moshe was exceptional. Miriam remained beloved even at this vulnerable time. All of this was being conveyed to Miriam's through the nation's postponement of its journey.

It is truly remarkable to see how Miriam's current experience had opened up a window to her past. On the one hand, the divine punishment reawakened old wounds - images of paternal rejection - "Were her father to spit in her face." At the same time, she was also provided with an opportunity for healing her past - "and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in."

As we go about the business of our daily lives, we all carry within ourselves imprints of our youth. We are, after all, an accumulation of our personal histories. We are, at times, inclined to harbor early feelings and to reenact deeds prompted by those feelings. Every so often, we become aware of these forces through powerful experiences that reawaken our past. Sometimes, these experiences - like Miriam's - re-open old wounds that may be painful. But as with Miriam, the suffering is meant to help us expand our wisdom and consciousness. It is this very process that allows for healing. As we struggle through the hurt of old wounds, we can, hopefully, come to realize that despite our disappointments, we still remain worthy of Hashem's love - that making a mistake doesn't mean that our instincts were all bad or all wrong. Life is about living and learning ... and about healing the past.

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## SHIVAT TSIYON,

## PROPHECY AND RAV KOOK

BY YOSEF BRONSTEIN

There are many positive elements that one can point to when describing the uniqueness of living in *Eretz Yisrael*. Some focus on one's ability to fulfill a larger scope of the gamut of mitsvot,<sup>i</sup> others point to the very living in the Land as a mitzvah,<sup>ii</sup> a third group mentions an internal, objective holiness that G-d endowed it with,<sup>iii</sup> while still others will emphasize the higher level of *hashgahah* that one lives under in the Land.<sup>iv</sup> However, there is another aspect that is developed in certain schools of thought upon which I would like to elaborate from both a theoretical and practical perspective - the Land as imbuing one with the ability to transcend the limitations of the intellect.

If I understand correctly, the roots of this theory begin with the Tannaitic assertion that one is only privy to prophecy in *Eretz Yisrael*.<sup>vi</sup>



Prophecy is clearly a phenomenon that surpasses the restrictions of the intellect and requires a strong imaginative faculty (as even the rationalist Rambam admitted<sup>vii</sup>) and it would therefore be tempting to link this limited geographic area to its effect on the imagination. However, Rambam himself marginalized the concept of the limitation of prophecy to *Eretz Yisrael* by maintaining that if not for the troubles of the *galut* a person would be able to perfect himself in the Diaspora to the level required for prophecy.<sup>viii</sup> Even the *Kuzari*, which has a much more fundamentalist approach to the restriction, does not explicitly tie the uniqueness of *Eretz Yisrael* to the Land's effect on the potential prophet's mental faculties.<sup>ix</sup>

However, for some this connection actually exists. Rav Kook, for example, describes the "imagination of *Eretz Yisrael*" as being "clear, clean and pure, specially fit for the revelation of the Divine Truth ... prepared for the explanation of prophecy and its lights, for the brightness of *ru'ah ha-kodesh* and its shining."

This is as opposed to the imagination of *Huts La-Arets* which is "murky, mixed with darkness ... and cannot serve as the basis for the

bounty of the divine light that rises from all of the lowliness of the worlds and their confines."<sup>x</sup> In other words, the Land is endowed with the ability to allow its inhabitants to experience a purer form of imagination that in turn capacitates them to see beyond the confines of physical reality.

It is important to stress that Rav Kook did not stop on the level of a theoretical connection between *Eretz Yisrael*, imagination and prophecy. Rather, the beginnings of the return of *Am Yisrael* to *Eretz Yisrael* that he was witnessing and advancing indicated to him that prophecy was once again becoming a reality. He asserts with daring certainty that "the shoots of prophecy are sprouting and the sons of prophets are stirring, the spirit of prophecy is about in the Land,"<sup>xi</sup> affirming that in his own times the divine spirit was slowly returning. It is clear that Rav Kook viewed himself as partially tapping into that nascent spirit since the above quotation in the original manuscript is preceded by an attempt by Rav Kook to locate the sources of his own ideas and theories.<sup>xii</sup> One of his prime disciples, Rav David Cohen, the *Nazir* of *Yerushalayim*, took his mentor's notion to its extreme but logical conclusion and spent many years preparing himself to become a full-fledged prophet. In a diary entry written on the boat taking him to *Eretz Yisrael*, the *Nazir* wrote "the spirit, the *ru'ah ha-kodesh* and the revelation of His word in the future is my ultimate goal in the Holy Land... this is inexorable."<sup>xiii</sup> Even if one would disagree with the *Nazir*'s sense of the immanence of prophecy and contend that his methods, which included fasting, vows of silence and other acts of *perishut*, were extreme and too early, one can still affirm that his general aspiration of the return of prophecy is laudable.<sup>xiv</sup>

While Rav Kook writes of his yearning from the perspective of one who is viscerally suffering from the lack of full spirituality in the current state of affairs, I think that for many of us a semi-halakhic argument would be more understandable. The Gemara in Shabbat (31a) relates that one of the questions that a person will be asked upon arriving at the Heavenly Tribunal is "*Tsippita liyshu'ah* (Did you long for the redemption)?" *Mefarshim* point out that "*tsipiyah*" connotes a more active anticipation than other parallel verbs,<sup>xv</sup> and Rashi defines "*yeshu'ah*" as "*kiyyum divrei nevi'im* (the fulfillment of the words of the prophets)". As the prophet Yo'el speaks of a prophetic renaissance as part of his eschatological vision,<sup>xvi</sup> a yearning for the return of prophecy should fall under the mandate of "*tzippiyah liyshu'ah*."

I think that it is no coincidence that the fulfillment of this charge requires the activation of the imagination in order to properly envision the Messianic age in the mind's eye. It is as if we are showing our desire for the return

of the ideal form of imagination that enables prophecy by using our limited imaginations to envision such a reality.

The goal of this essay is twofold. First, I want to raise awareness about a potential ramification of *Shivat Tsiyon* that I do not think is emphasized in our community. Second, Rav Kook thought that the percolation of these ideas in a public forum is not only helpful for their clarification but also contributes to the realization of the ultimate goal of redemption, as *tsippiyah liyshu'ah* is not only symptomatic of an assured future but actually has a causal relationship with it.<sup>xvii</sup> It is in that spirit that I have written this essay.

To conclude, I would like to cite the Ran's comments on the query of *tsippita liyshu'ah*. While Rashi formulates it as "*kiyum divrei nevi'im*" the Ran adds in one powerful word – "*be-yamekha*" (in your lifetime). *Ve-khen yehi ratson*.

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<sup>i</sup> See Sotah 14a, Rashbam to Bava Batra 91a c.v. *ein yotse'in*, *Gilyonei Ha-Shas* to 110b, and Rav Ovadyah Yosef's article in *Torah She-Be'al Peh* 11.

<sup>ii</sup> Ramban's additions to *Sefer Ha-Mitsvot* of Rambam, Mitsvah 4

<sup>iii</sup> Tashbets *Responsa* 3:200 and *Kafor Va-Ferah*, chapter 10.

<sup>iv</sup> Ramban to Leviticus 18:25 and *Penei Yehoshua* to Ketubot 110b c.v. *tanu rabbanan*.

<sup>v</sup> Though I present them as four distinct factors, I think that it is reasonable to assume that if thought about, there is much overlap between them.

<sup>vi</sup> *Parashah* 1.

<sup>vii</sup> 2:36

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>ix</sup> 2:13-14

<sup>x</sup> *Orot Erets Yisrael*, keta 5. The rough and imprecise translations throughout the article are my own.

<sup>xi</sup> *Orot Ha-Kodesh* I, pg. 157

<sup>xii</sup> *Shemonah Kevatsim* 4:17

<sup>xiii</sup> *Mishnat Ha-Nazir*, pg. 42

<sup>xiv</sup> However, I recently heard from *mori ve-rabbi* Rav Rosensweig that notions of *nevu'ah* are not really part of the worldview of the Halakhic Man as described by Rav Soloveitchik.

<sup>xv</sup> I have heard this from several rabbinic figures but cannot currently locate a specific source.

<sup>xvi</sup> Chapter 3

<sup>xvii</sup> *Orot Ha-Kodesh* III, pg. 355

# HOLY LAND, HOLY PEOPLE

BY LEAH KANNER

"Look at the beautiful palm trees!" my mother exclaimed. But to my almost-twelve-year-old eyes, it was all wrong. Palm trees belonged in California; here things were supposed to be different. As our taxi wound its way between the offending trees<sup>i</sup> and out of the airport, the paved highways and modern buildings only added to my distress. Where was *Erets Yisrael*, *artsenu ha-kedoshah*, the land I

home. One such "*Mi ke-amkha Yisrael*" story occurred when we realized our new camera was missing from our car about twenty minutes after leaving *Kever Rabbi Akiva*. We returned, and as my father began looking around, he saw his anxiety mirrored on the face of a man running over and saying, "Is this camera yours?" and his subsequent relief matched by that same man's instinctive reaction, "Thank God that I was able to fulfill the *mitsvah* of *hashavat aveidah*!"



had learned about and dreamed of visiting? My only solace during that early morning drive from Ben Gurion Airport to Jerusalem was the view of the *kever* of *Shmuel ha-Navi* perched upon a hilltop. At last, a landmark that I recognized, right out of a drawing in the *Sefer Shmuel* I used in school. However, only the next day, when we visited the Old City, was I truly satisfied. This was the Israel I had seen in my mind's eye; the stone buildings and narrow alleyways left no room for mistake. Finally, I knew that I was in a place unlike any other, a place where I could imagine walking in the footprints my ancestors had worn into these same cobblestones.

As I think back to those first impressions, I realize that at that point I saw the uniqueness of *Erets Yisrael* as solely dependent upon its history. Therefore, only when I could see remnants of that past did I feel like I was in a land of holiness. During that trip, I learned from various experiences to expand my conception of sanctity, and find it not only in the history of the land, but also in the people who call it

I think that these two ideas, holiness of place and of person, can be traced back to the conceptions of Ramban and Rambam of *kedushat Erets Yisrael*.<sup>ii</sup>

Ramban is known for his emphasis on the primacy of the land of Israel in Jewish thought and practice. He considers living in Israel a commandment that is obligatory even in a time of exile,<sup>iii</sup> and states that the ideal place to perform all commandments is the land of Israel.<sup>iv</sup> Although Rambam does not explicitly list living in Israel among the commandments, he does not ignore the land or its sanctity in his halakhic writings.<sup>v</sup> In fact, the omission of *mitsvat yishuv ha-arets* may be attributed to a technicality of its being subsumed under the prohibition against settling in Egypt,<sup>vi</sup> as the two are discussed together in Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*.<sup>vii</sup> According to this approach,<sup>viii</sup> we can use the reason specified by Rambam for the prohibition of living in Egypt to shed light on his conception of living in Israel. This reason given is "because its actions are more corrupt than those of other nations." Conversely, it

would make sense that the implied reason to live in Israel would be, "because its actions are better than those of other nations."<sup>ix</sup>

In his commentary on the Torah, Ramban emphasizes the uniqueness of *Erets Yisrael* as a land that is "*nahalat Hashem*"<sup>x</sup> and attributes the gravity of punishment in some situations to the fact that the sin was committed in Israel.<sup>xi</sup> He does not distinguish between different periods in Jewish history with regard to the land's sanctity, and seems to think of *kedushah* as an intrinsic property of the land that lasts forever. Ramban, on the other hand, sees the land of Israel in a more utilitarian light. Based on his rationalist approach, he is wary of attributing intrinsic differences to different countries in a given region,<sup>xii</sup> or claiming that God's presence is more directly in one place than another. Therefore, he focuses on the fact that Israel, in its ideal state, is populated by those who keep the Torah and observe the commandments, and therefore, it is the best place to do so.<sup>xiii</sup>

While Ramban thinks that Israel is the best place for a Jew to perform the mitsvot because it is holy, Rambam thinks that its holiness stems from the fact that it is the best place for a Jew to perform the mitsvot. Therefore, we could say that Ramban, seeing the holiness as intrinsic to the land, might focus on the inanimate manifestations of its holiness, while Rambam would place more emphasis upon the people who can impact its holiness through their actions.

Yehuda Amichai underscores the conflict between these two sources of holiness in his poem, "Tourists."<sup>xiv</sup> He tells of a tour guide who drew attention to a person only in order to point out, "a bit to the right of his head there's an arch from the Roman period." Then offering his commentary, Amichai berates the tour guide for emphasizing the place at the expense of the person saying, "redemption will come only when they are told: You see over there the arch from the Roman period? Never mind: but next to it, a bit to the left and lower, sits a man who bought fruit and vegetables for his home."<sup>xv</sup> To Amichai, it is the person who is primary.

I prefer to think of these two sources of holiness as complementary, since in my mind, neither is complete on its own. It should also be noted that the distinction made earlier between the ideas of Ramban and Rambam is merely a difference in focus; it would be difficult to claim that either of them sees the two sources of holiness as mutually exclusive like Amichai does. Relegating the land's sanctity to a function of the past makes it independent of our ac-



# RELIGIOUS CIRCLES IN AMERICA AND THEIR ATTITUDE TO THE STUDY OF HEBREW

BY DR. SHMUEL SCHNEIDER

*Translated from the Hebrew  
by Goldie Wachsman*

So said Rav Yehuda in the name of Rabi: “The Sons of Judah were careful in their speech; thus, their Torah was perpetuated through their actions. The sons of Galilee were not careful in their speech; their Torah was not perpetuated”

-Eruvin 53a

One would have expected the study of Hebrew to serve as the cornerstone of Jewish education in today’s Orthodox schools. After all, if the bedrock of Jewish education is *Torah she-bikhtav* and *Torah she-be’al peh* (Bible and Talmud), which are taught from the original Hebrew, then acquiring the skills to facilitate such study — a thorough grounding in Biblical and Rabbinical Hebrew across the ages, from the Sages to the present — has to be a priority.

Yet against all logic, the study of Hebrew is relegated to a corner and some religious institutions even consider it a hindrance. True, the study of the Hebrew language had its heyday, in particular, right after the establishment of the State of Israel. At that time, even Jewish day schools that did not excel in the “*Ivrit be’Ivrit*” system (Hebrew-only total immersion) tended to reinforce the study of Hebrew, and many switched to *Ivrit be-Ivrit*.

Israeli instructors were hired, and principals and teachers began to perfect and deepen their knowledge of the language. Nevertheless, after only the briefest honeymoon, signs of a lengthy withdrawal process became apparent, one that reduced Hebrew to the status of a marginal Regents course. Gone was any identification with the language; instead there was capitulation to and exploitation of regulations issued by secular state authorities, who required the study of a foreign language.

Moreover, as Hebrew assumed the role of a “lowly Egyptian maidservant,” Jewish educators and leaders developed an ideological-conceptual justification for their attitude. None of the above is ever publicly discussed in the panels, symposia, and “*Yemei Iyun*” (intensive day-long workshops or study groups) so typical on this continent. Usually the issue is raised unofficially in conversations among the teachers themselves, in informal contexts that lend even greater credence to the opinions expressed.

The professional Jewish educator whose expertise transcends the PR hype fed to Anglo-Jewish media is fully aware of the negative attitude in some circles toward the study of Hebrew. The dichotomy “we teach/they teach” is trumpeted with satisfaction and pride, as in “We teach *Yiddishkeit* and not *Ivrit*” — the final “t” exaggerated to mock a Sephardi Hebrew accent. The tone faintly echoes that of the Old Yishuv in Palestine, an era in which young *halutzim* (pioneers) during the early waves of aliyah were dismissed by some as “Hebrew-speaking *goyim*.”

The claim “we teach *Yiddishkeit*” clearly implies that the *Ivrit be-Ivrit* approach — with its emphasis on Hebrew and its systematic study as an autonomous discipline — is inimical to the study of sacred texts (*limudei qodesh*). Thus, an antithetical relationship is struck between the study of Hebrew and the study of Judaism. Liberate yourself from Hebrew and you fortify the ranks of the Torah army.

To be sure, there are a good number of Orthodox schools that stress the study of Hebrew and integrate it into the Jewish curriculum, but of late, these institutions have been placed on the defensive. For the decisive vote belongs to those who regard Hebrew as deterring the growth of *Yiddishkeit*, better known in English as Torah-true Judaism. These circles view themselves as the guardians and watchdogs of Jewish education — and their influence in restricting the study of Hebrew is considerable.

B.

Reservations concerning the study of Hebrew reveal a strange paradox and reflect the anomaly of Jewish cultural life in the United States. On the one hand, this milieu vaunts the fact that its schools teach “real Judaism,” rather than courses about Judaism. In other words, texts in the original Hebrew are examined, as opposed to lengthy introductions and surveys (in English) surrounding Judaism. They declare with pride that the Bible is taught in their schools from Genesis to Deuteronomy as the genuine Hebrew article, in contrast to other schools where the Hebrew writ is dwarfed by lectures on the Bible’s historical antecedents or by comparative analyses with ancient Eastern cultures and their impact. As for the students themselves, they may never even get to see or read Hebrew Scripture with their own eyes.

The success these religious circles can claim in educating students to remain fully

committed Jews is the source of their pride and open militancy. Undoubtedly, graduates of institutions with a “right-wing” agenda possess a profound religious awareness and identify viscerally with the Jewish people. One rarely finds radical leftists or disseminators of pro-Palestinian propaganda in their midst, which is far more common among “alienated” Jews. This point is often raised as proof that “Look, we don’t teach *Ivrit* but our graduates are far more Jewish than their peers who are enrolled in schools that invest heavily in teaching Hebrew.” Yet that argument misses the point. Learning classical Hebrew text without the fundamental and systematic study of Hebrew is self-defeating. If Orthodox Jews had supported the ideological premise that religious texts can be studied in translation, the problem would be solved. Instead, of *shenayim miqra ve-ehad targum* (lit. , reading the Scriptural portion of the week twice in Hebrew and once in translation), everything would be translated, which is the practice in some circles to this day. Such was the case for the Jews of Alexandria de facto if not de jure, who managed to create an impressive exegetical and cultural monument on the basis of translated text. The irony is that these institutions of Jewish education see themselves as the heirs of Slabodka and Volozhin, basing their educational philosophy upon the “*Ivri*” and the thorough preparation of a page of Talmud. Consequently, even studying from a Soncino Talmud is tantamount to heresy.

Willy nilly, a covenant is stuck with the Hebrew language as a result of this guiding educational philosophy. Nevertheless, misgivings about Hebrew — dating back to the days of the Berlin *Haskalah* — which one would have thought had dissipated by now, resurface from time to time. Rather than grapple with Hebrew and adopt it wholeheartedly because it is the sacred tongue in which the holiest texts were rendered, some educators ‘hung it. It is hard to imagine how depth or mastery are attainable in *limudei qodesh* without a solid linguistic base. So long as Orthodox education is modeled on the “*Ivri*” and “*shenayim miqra*,” those schooled in that system cannot do without a proper linguistic background. *Lamdanut*, or real scholarship, is impossible if the linguistic foundation is systemically flawed.

Religious educational institutions that minimize Hebrew often justify their approach with the theological argument that they are not in the business of teaching modern secular Hebrew, which they deem an indulgence or at best

tions and therefore, less meaningful. At the same time, limiting it to a function of its present-day inhabitants is dangerous since it all but erases our link to the land. Synthesizing both of these ideas empowers us not only to walk in, but to deepen the footprints of our ancestors, and perhaps chart our own ground in a land that is ours *me-az u-le-tamid*.

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<sup>i</sup> Which may have been less offending had I realized that without palm trees, Israel would be missing one of the *shiva’at ha-minim* as well as *lulavim*

<sup>ii</sup> I would like to thank Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Cohen for informing my understanding of this topic through assignments and class discussions.

<sup>iii</sup> Nahmanides, *Hasagot ha-Ramban le-Sefer ha-Mitsvot*. Omitted Positive Commandment 4.

<sup>iv</sup> Nahmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Leviticus 18:25 s.v. “*va-titm’a ha-‘arets*”

<sup>v</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah. Hilkhhot Terumat 1: , Hilkhhot Bet ha-Behira 6:14-16*

<sup>vi</sup> Maimonides, *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*. Negative commandment 46

<sup>vii</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah. Hilkhhot Melakhim 5:7-12*

<sup>viii</sup> Jacob S. Levinger, “The Uniqueness of Israel, its Land, and its Language,” *Maimonides as Philosopher and Codifier*. (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1989) 90-94 (The discussion in this paragraph follows his argument)

<sup>ix</sup> Levinger, “Uniqueness” 93

<sup>x</sup> Genesis 12:1 “*‘el ha-‘arets*”, Genesis 19:5 s.v. “*ve-ned’a ‘otam*” Leviticus 13:47 s.v. “*ve-ha-begged ki yehiyeh*” Leviticus 18:25 s.v. “*va-titma’ ha-arets*”, Numbers 35:32 “*ve-lo tahnifu*”

<sup>xi</sup> See Genesis 19:5 s.v. “*ve-ned’a ‘otam*” (destruction of Sodom), Leviticus 18:25 s.v. “*va-titma’ ha-arets*” (the punishment of *tsara’at*),

<sup>xii</sup> See Levinger, “Uniqueness” 93 and footnote 9. Like other philosophers of his time, Rambam did think of the Middle East as the ideal climate for human development, however, this would not account for his distinguishing between Egypt and Israel.

<sup>xiii</sup> Levinger, “Uniqueness” 93

<sup>xiv</sup> I would like to thank Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter for drawing my attention to this poem at a lecture entitled, “History, Truth, and the Jewish Experience” on March 21, 2007 at Yeshiva University

<sup>xv</sup> Yehuda Amichai, *A Life of Poetry, 1948-1994*, page 333

an amusing distraction. Words like *gelidah* and *kadur regel* (Hebrew for ice cream and soccer) and the lexicon of everyday Hebrew are of no interest because the primary subject matter is *limudei qodesh*. Even those who would reject this approach because they identify with Hebrew and the Zionist dream that adopted Hebrew for practical use, will admit, if only out of respect for democracy and freedom of choice, that everyone is entitled to an opinion, including the foregoing one. But the reality is that the discomfort with secular Hebrew leads to the suppression of language study as a discipline crucial to the comprehension of the written word, a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Because the Hebrew of *gelidah* and *kadur regel* is suspect, administrators of some schools have built a wall around the language and neglect their dual obligation to impart strong language skills to students and to simultaneously and unconditionally insist upon the study of text in the original tongue. Hence, the paradox: How can one achieve real depth in a genre of Torah learning seeped in traditions of *hakha garsinan*, *ve-dog*, and *tzei u-lemad*<sup>i</sup> when the students lack the tools to comprehend, deduce, or extrapolate meaning from the words of the argument? If the fury has been unleashed against the *parparaot*, why the attack against the *miqraot*?<sup>ii</sup>

C.

The dismissal of careful reading and interpretation necessarily lowers the standard and the *lomdus* prized by leaders in Jewish education. It's difficult to take the self-congratulatory "we teach" posture seriously if what's being taught is sacred text with classical commentary and novellae and when any greenhorn knows that the students' ability to decipher unvocalized, rabbinic text is poor.

The scores on a single surprise quiz generally suffice to expose this self-congratulation for what it is. The achievements, such as they are, are meager. There is no yeshiva that can honestly bask in the glory that its graduates know how to translate a Biblical verse properly and read Rashi adequately. Nor should the failure of the after-school Talmud Torah network be used as a comparison to measure the success of the yeshiva world. Those who boast that their students know how to translate a verse of Biblical Hebrew after twelve years of study are virtually advertising the bankruptcy of the system. Such accomplishments are the fruit of rote and repetition, a professionally useless education. A decline of standards in Jewish education is consequently inevitable because the method is at fault, much like the deterioration in the public school system, primarily in major cities.

The worst part of the deficit is that it prevents students from learning on their own. Effectiveness, albeit hard to measure, is the very touchstone of Jewish education. Academic

achievement is assessed first and foremost by the ability of students to study independently, i.e., to read, analyze, and comprehend material at the proper level. Would anyone deny that textual comprehension is one of the aims of a yeshiva education? Yet how many high school graduates meet that criterion? How many can read a book in *halakhah* in the original and understand it well, let alone a more esoteric text of *piyyutim*?

There seems to be no correlation between the quantity of hours or years devoted to studying religious texts and the level of linguistic achievement. Small wonder that the translation

אני	- I ; Ani
אתה	- You (male) Atah
את	- You (female) At
הוא	- He (male) Hu
היא	- She (female) He
אנחנו	- We; Anaknu
אתם	- You; Atem ( m/f) --> M
אתן	- You (female) Aten
הנה	- they (f) Heinah
הנה	- they (m); Heimah

industry is booming. Yet despite the industry's loyalty to tradition and the best of intentions, its results are highly questionable.

D.

In discussions of an informal nature about the level of Jewish day schools, when administrators are pressed to the wall they attribute their problems with Hebrew (the gap between reading and comprehension) to the ubiquity of English. In other words, children are immersed in a corrupt, alien culture that includes television, radio, newspapers, etc, etc. This makes it extremely difficult to overcome the language hurdle, especially since Hebrew is a Semitic tongue that differs from English in structure and form. In fact there is some truth to this claim, since even students in Torah institutions are exposed to the influence of American culture and lifestyle.

Yet this alibi begs the question. If the diagnosis is that Hebrew is the source of the problem, then the treatment needs to address the illness, or act upon the logical implications of the diagnosis: Either eliminate the problem or make your peace with it. Assimilated Jewish theologians have always seen Hebrew as a hindrance whose disadvantage outweighed its benefits. Hebrew, they maintained, prevents those who don't need it from understanding the

text on a deeper level, which makes for an "impoverished religious experience." In truth, this conclusion was consistent with the observation that Hebrew is an obstacle. Thus, in order to reinforce the religious experience, a new ritual based on the lingua franca of the time, usually German, was established.

The fruits of this "non-Hebrew Judaism" and the poverty of its religious experience are a lesson that Jewish history has been learning since the close of the eighteenth century, both in Europe and the United States. To their credit, let it be said that at least they were consistent. In contrast, the Orthodox milieu rejects "non-Hebrew Judaism" and its lifestyle and cleaves to the *kotzo shel yod*, the Hebrew letter of the Law. That being the case, why do they insistently remain betwixt and between? Those who predicate Jewish survival on the dictum *ve-shi-nantam le-vanekha* — the Biblical command that requires parents to speak, teach, and verbally drill their children so that they will love G-d — must transmit the verbal skills, or the *darkhei shinun*, that inform the fully committed Jew.

The paradox of Torah education is that it ridicules the assimilated Jews who can't read a word of Hebrew at the same time that it mocks the study of Hebrew, owing to the fear, dating from the Mendelssohn era, that language is an untrustworthy child, the idolatry of *maskilim* and grammarians. Apparently these misgivings persist to this day. But rather than shun semantics and syntax, it would be wiser to embrace them and apply them to the study of sacred texts.

Sometimes another excuse is used, one that lays the blame on the shoulders of young teachers — the yeshiva graduates and "field workers" who interact with the real world of Jewish pedagogy — who, it is claimed, are unable to teach students the basics of Hebrew. They are not trained to think linguistically because the yeshivas will not validate linguistic study of Hebrew sources.

Textual comprehension in this milieu is usually gained by reading the text over and over during many long hours at the desk, which is an admission of failure. Yet that's the way it is and it is up to the prime movers in religious education to do something about it — to train teachers how to teach Hebrew. Just as English instructors shouldn't be allowed in class unless they know the language, and math teachers shouldn't teach unless they know their algebra and geometry, instructors of *limudei qodesh* should not teach the subject unless their mastery of the sacred tongue is thorough.

A paradoxical attitude to the study of Hebrew characterizes a significant segment of the Conservative movement as well. Strangely, their rationale is similar to that of the yeshiva world, although the terminology differs. The yeshiva world favors expressions like Torah-true Judaism and *Yiddishkeit*, whereas the Conservatives prefer the expressions "Jewish

Heritage" and "Jewish Ethical Values." These educators likewise maintain that Hebrew gets in the way of teaching and absorbing Jewish values. They claim that with the limited time at their disposal, not only can't they devote hours to the study of Hebrew as a language but they can't teach *limudei qodesh* in the original either. For the most part, that is the argument of after-school Talmud Torah teachers. Although their time is certainly limited, the perception that Hebrew is some technical or decorative fixture is a complete distortion of the basic values of Judaism. Anyone who has tried to teach Jewish values in any context other than the right one — in Hebrew garb — ends up teaching neither Hebrew nor ethics.

So long as translation served as a bridge between the Jewish experience and the external world, the Jewish framework was not weakened. Without a doubt, when translation ceased to be external but was internalized as an organic part of the religious experience, it became a factor in the forces of assimilation.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, leaders of Reform Jewry have spoken from the lofty peaks of justice and prophetic morality. Their speeches, however, end on the other side of the mountain, sans Jewish ethics, sans prophecy, and in distant, alien pastures. All that is left of their intellectual and historical opus is the dry bones of ideology. The religious and social history of European Jewry bears this out. What happened in Western Europe has been happening in the United States in the last few generations.

One cannot transmit Jewish values by making noble speeches about "Judaismus" in German or even in new English translations (notwithstanding their innovation and fine technique). Similarly, one ignores the essentiality of Hebrew at one's own peril. At the very least, it behooves the decision makers and policymakers in the world of Jewish education to face the facts.

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<sup>i</sup> 'Talmudic terms that mean "this is the way it should be read," "examine" and "corroborate for yourself."

<sup>ii</sup> Parparaot, literally "dessert"; by extension, something sweet but insubstantial. Miqraot, literally the "texts to be read."



# AN INTERVIEW WITH RABBI ZEVULUN CHARLOP

BY ARI LAMM

Editor's note: In the course of his interview with Ari Lamm, Rabbi Charlop made extensive reference to two letters that his grandfather, R. Yakov Moshe Charlop wrote to R. Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Kook, and to a letter that his father, R. Jechiel Michael Charlop received from several Rabbinic leaders of the old Yishuv. R. Charlop was gracious enough to share these letters with us. They can be found on the pages following this interview.

We would like to thank R. Charlop for presenting these letters to the readership of Kol Hamevaser.

*As the grandson of a renowned talmid haver of R. Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, could Rav Charlop share his perspective on the legacy of his grandfather, the legacy of Rav Kook, as well as on the broader issue of the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in our lives?*

I have been asked whether we should still retain "*Reshit Tzemihat Ge'ulatenu*" (the beginning of the redemption) in the *Tefillah li-Sh'lom Medinas Yisrael*. I remember that R. Moshe Tzvi Neria *zt"l*, who was very close to my grandfather, Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop *zt"l*, and was one of his premier *talmidim*, excised *Reshit Tzemihat Ge'ulatenu* from the *Tefillah le-Medinat Yisrael* after the Oslo Agreement, and Israel began retreating, or at least advocating retreat from parts of Judea and Samaria. However, I don't feel that I can stop saying it, or that anyone should stop saying it, even in the face of disappointment and foreboding.

May 4, 1948 (5 Iyyar 5708) is indelibly impressed on my memory: How we Bronxites trumpeted the fact that there were more Jews in the Bronx (660,000) than there were in the newly founded State of Israel (600,000). Today, the Bronx has barely 35,000 Jews, while Israel (*ba"h*) has a population of over 7.2 million, about 5.5 million of who are Jewish. I think that by all current calculations and statistics, Israel has, in the last year, superseded America as the world's largest Jewish community. It has been the center of a *kibbutz galuyos* the likes of which we have never seen before. After the Babylonian captivity only about 40,000 Jews heeded the call to return to Israel and rebuild the Temple. And in the centuries that followed, we do not hear of great masses of Jews that came later. The Jewish population in Eretz Yisroel at its height, more than 400 hundred years later, hardly reached 5 million.

...And now, after only 60 years, we have reached that number and perhaps surpassed it.

In light of this, in light of tremendous economic and scientific progress, and most importantly, in light of the tremendous resurgence of authentic Torah learning, one wonders whether at any time, even during the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods, there has been so much Torah learning – at least quantitatively if not qualitatively.



I want particularly to address two kinds of disappointments, and anchor my comments on a letter written by my grandfather to Rav Kook, and on a letter received by my father from *haverim* with whom he learned in Jerusalem. As is well known, my grandfather, Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop *zt"l*, was a *talmid chaver* of Rav Kook *zt"l*. My grandfather – born in Israel and never to leave for the duration of his life – was reared in the same environment in which most Yerushalmi Jews of the *yishuv ha-yashan* were born and raised; he was integral to that *yishuv* and part of its *neshama*. At a very early age he gave the highest *shiur* in Yeshivas Etz Hayyim, which was the leading *makom Torah* in Eretz Yisroel.

Somewhere in his early twenties, he became seriously ill. The doctor prescribed a period of rest in Jaffa. It was then that he met Rav Kook who was recently appointed rabbi of Jaffa. The first Shabbos afternoon he spent in that port city, he went to hear Rav Kook's *derasha*. As my grandfather listened to Rav Kook speak for the first time, their eyes locked. Their legendary relationship grew from that initial encounter.

Near the end of the First World War, when hunger stalked the streets of Jerusalem,

owing much to R. Yitzhak Yeruham Diskin *zt"l*, son of that *Gaon ha-Ge'onim* R. Yehoshua Leib Diskin *zt"l*, a small complement of young, outstanding *talmidei hakhamim* was formed – attached to the Yeshivas Ohel Moshe in the Old City. Its chief purpose was to keep these *talmidim* from starving in those desperate days, and thereby ensuring the survival and perpetuation of *Talmud Torah*.

My father, R. Yechiel Michel Charlop *zt"l*, only sixteen years old then, was selected to give the *chabura* to these budding Torah luminaries. Among this group, in addition to my father, were several other *talmidim* of my *zeide*, R. Yaakov Moshe Charlop – including R. Amram Blau *zt"l*, R. David Ha-Levi Jungreis *zt"l*, and R. Yaakov Yerucham Ha-Levi Katzenellenbogen *zt"l*, figures whom later generations would never think to identify as *talmidim* of my *zeide*, or colleagues of my father.

Indeed, around 1924, my father – then serving miles and miles away from Jerusalem as rabbi in Omaha, Nebraska – received what must be reckoned today, in the passing of decades and generations, a memorable letter from Rav Dovid ha-Levi Jungreis, who later became the Rav and *av beis din* of the Edah HaChareidis of Jerusalem. Appended to the letter were personal, handwritten messages by R. Amram Blau, who was to become the head of the Neturei Karta and the fiercest antagonist to Zionism, and R. Yaakov Yerucham Halevi Katzenellenbogen, whose role was no less noteworthy as a no-holds-barred opponent of that movement of Jewish national rebirth. The letter was published, not long ago for the first time, in the Torah journal *Moriah*. In the introduction to this letter, the editors of *Moriah* describe the senders – Rabbis Jungreis, Blau and Katzenellenbogen – as *talmidim* of R. Yaakov Moshe, as we indicated before.

The letter was in response to one written by my father, commenting on an article recently published by R. Jungreis. As a postscript to this letter R. Amram Blau, incredibly, asks my father, whom he refers to as *yedid nafshi*, to help him (and presumably Rabbis Jungreis and Katzenellenbogen) in building a *moshav* outside Jerusalem devoted to *Talmud Torah* and working the land – *Torah ve-Avodah*.

As a counterpoint to this correspondence is an even more remarkable postscript in one of my *zeide's* letters to Rav Kook in which he describes a series of private meetings between himself and Professor Chaim Weitzmann. These meetings took place either immediately

or shortly after the British broke the grip of the failing Ottoman Empire and General Allenby marched into Jerusalem. My grandfather tells of urging Professor Weitzmann to go see Rav Kook upon his return to London (where, at the time Rav Kook served as rabbi), and strongly encourages Rav Kook to make every effort to see Weitzman. In that selfsame letter, my *zeide* recounts the discussion he had with Professor Weitzman focusing upon the bedrock need for Eretz Yisroel to be a land of *kedusha*, to which Weitzman responded "*ani dogel la-zeh*," "I [too] stand for this!"

These letters carried great hopes and, most importantly, the glimmering possibilities of their fulfillment. Can you imagine those who eventually became the Neturei Karta building *moshavim* in *Medinas Yisroel* for the purpose of *Talmud Torah* and working the land? Can you imagine Professor Weitzmann being *dogel* for a land of *kedusha*? Yet somehow, all of this went tragically awry, and it is a *bekhi le-doros* – a lament, a cry, for the generations.

Nevertheless, I still believe that we are living in a time of extraordinary *nissim* embodying, albeit not always as robustly as we might wish, the *aschalta de-ge'ulah*. My grandfather already used the term *aschalta de-ge'ulah* in a letter he wrote several days after the United Nations voted on the partition plan. He was upset by the partition, because the very idea of partition, the very idea that Jerusalem or any other part of Eretz Yisroel is not ours, was anathema to him. Nevertheless, he wrote to my father that this is undoubtedly *aschalta de-ge'ulah*. Indeed, while we have been faced with many disappointments, we must put history in perspective and realize that the path of *ge'ulah* may not be smooth, but is certainly in forward motion – perhaps sputtering forward, but always forward nonetheless.

*Rabbi Zevulun Charlop is the Max and Marion Grill Dean of RIETS*

*Ari Lamm is the interviewer for Kol Hamevaser*

**On the following pages:**

**Pages 12-13: Letters sent from R. Yakov Moshe Charlop to R. Kook towards the end of the First World War.**

**Page 14: End of a letter sent from R. David Ha-Levi Jungreis, R. Amram Blau, and R. Yaakov Yerucham Ha-Levi Katzenellenbogen to R. Jechiel Michael Charlop.**



## מב

בעוה"י אך כסלו עשרה ב' וישב יעקב.

הוד כבוד אדוננו מורנו ורבנו הגאון הגדול  
האמתי רכב ישראל ופרשיו עמוד העולם אשר  
כל בית ישראל נשען עליו הרב הדומה למלאך ד'  
קדוש ד' מרן רבי אברהם יצחק הכהן שליט"א.

בחיל ורעדה ורוב פחד, הנני נגש לפני אדמו"ר  
אור העולם שליט"א להגיד, כי כמראה הבזק הבריק  
לפני מכתב קדשו מיום כ' אלול העבר, ב"ה שזכיתי  
לכך לראות גלילי ידיו הקדושים, ומה מאד ישמח לבי  
כי מכונים המה הדברים אשר כתבתי במכתב גלוי  
שהוצאתי לאור, אל מגמת פני האיריאל של מע"כ מרן  
שליט"א להשתדל בכל עוז לייסד ישיבה עולמית בעיר  
קדשנו ותפארתנו ירושלים תובב"א, שיהי זה כח מכריע  
על תגבורת החול, צריך אבל שלא לרפות הענין  
הקדוש ולהביאו לידי פועל גמור, ולו הייתי כדאי  
הייתי מציע למע"כ מרן שליט"א, לפני שובו להופיע  
בשמי ארצנו הק', יעבור נא אדמו"ר שליט"א בכל  
הערים הגדולות שהיו מקומות המרכזיות להישיבות  
והקבוצים הגדולים ולהתחיל תיכף בליסוד הישיבה  
הישיבה העולמית, לקבץ אתו לכה"פ כשש מאות  
צעירים ולעלות אתם יחד, והיו הם החלוצים הראשונים  
העולים ירושלים עיר קדשנו, ואולי יעלה גם ביד

מע"כ מרן שליט"א למעול שעכ"ס כל עיר ועיר אשר  
תוציא מקרבה א' או שנים להישיבה העולמית הירושלמית  
תשלם כל ההוצאות הדרושות להצעירים של בני עירה,  
ובדרך עברו ונסיעתו יוכה ד' בידו לאחר לב כל  
גדולי עם ד' ויראו לעבוד שכם אחד בעד גאולתנו  
וגאולת תורתנו הק', ובעניי הנני מוצא נסיעתו נחוצה  
מאד מאד מה דלא סגי בלאו הכי.

בימים אלה אשר הרבה גם מאלה המתימרים  
בשם טחוקי התורה מחליפים את צורת הלימודים  
הקדושים לתור מדעי, והשתמשות לכלי חפץ למדעיות  
ודברי הימים וכיוצא חפצתי מאד, לשוב ולחדש  
קביעות של לימודים בעיון ובהרחבה גדולה החריפות  
עצומה ופלפול ישר ועמוק, והנה בזה החורף קבעתי  
עצמי עם בני יחיו ועם אינו תלמידים ללמוד במס'  
כתובות, על איזו שעות ביום, אבל לפי שכל צעיר  
נכתב על דגל ישיבה אין החלמידים פנויים להחבר  
עמדי כחפצי ורצוני, לקבוע אתם שיעורים פשוטים  
ורוחניים עם קביעות הגונה מאיזה שעות רצופות  
להעמיק בכל שיטה וסוגיא, בכל העולה מדברי רבותינו  
הראשונים ז"ל ולמזג את הבבלי והירושלמי יחד  
בחידושים נפלאים ומחודדים והכרעת ההלכה בכל  
ענין.

יעורר נא מע"כ מרן שליט"א רחמים גדולים  
עבורי לרוממני ולנשאני למען כבוד שמו הגדול

יתברך — לע"ע אין לי חדשות להודיע לו ד'  
ירחם.

אני עבדו ותלמידו המונה ומחשב שעות סתי  
אראה הוד סניו הקדושים המצפה ליסועה קרובה  
הצעיר יעקב משה הרל"ס.



בעה"י כ"ס תמוז ג' דברים פעה"ק ירושלים תיבכ"א הרע"ה לפ"ק  
סציון מכלל יופי יצו ד' את הברכה להוד  
מע"כ אור עינינו ציץ מחמדנו אדמור הגאון  
הגדול אור ישראל וקדושו נור אלהיו\*) על ראשו.  
ראש גולת אריאל מרן אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק  
שליט"א.

בטורא ופחד הנני גש למע"כ מרן שליט"א  
להודיע ע"ד קבלת הכספים הן זה לפני שבועים קבלתי  
עשרה ליטראות ע"י הא' פניגשטיין ביד שטעמפער.  
וסלסום קבלנו עוד הפעם עשרה ליטראות מיד אחיו  
ד"ר הר"ש קוק ג"י. תודה רבה. פי מלא תהלות לר'  
הטוב על כל החסד שגומל עמדי.  
מליאה נשגבה לא אוכל לה מדוע לא נתקבל  
לי שום מכתב כתי"ק של מרן שליט"א. להאיר עיני  
ולשפח לבבי לטובת שמחת כל ישראל. בגילוי פני  
שכינה בעיר ד'.

ע"י רוב העסקנות שנמשכתי בעל כרחי בעניני  
העיר, מהדברים העומדים על הפרק, וע"י המור"ם עם  
הפרומ' וויצמאן, בשיחות ארוכות, בפני רבים וביחידות,  
שהנהו סטור אלי בהתמסרות הכי גדולה, הגעתי  
לדיעה זו. שאעפ"י שיסוד תעמולנו דרוש להיות על  
(\*) כתב באלף-למר מורכבות.

ירושלים עיר קדשנו, לשכללה ולסארה בכל קדשי  
הקדשים. בכ"ז בהיות שדראבוננו עדיין לא עלה בידנו  
לאחזה כל הקרעים, להתאחדות גמורה. אלה משמאל  
מהם רוצים להסוך קערה על מיה. ואלה מימין  
סחזיקים במעוזם מבלי לתת און קשבת כלל ועיקר  
להתנועה הכללית והשינוי לטובה לחדש חיינו על  
אדמתנו בחיי קודש של עם ישראל ולאומיותו. ומתוך  
זה הריעות שונות זה מזה, וגם ועד הרבנים שנתכונן  
מתרוסף ומתנונה, ובעיקר חסר תכונת המשמעת שכל  
צעיר רוצה לנהל את הכל עפ"י דעתו הפרטית מבלי  
ירצה להתאבק בעפר רגלי חכמים וצדיקים. ולכת  
באורחותיהם, ומגיע מזה כי גם אלה אשר כמעט כל  
המפלגות מכבדות אותו מוצא תמיד מעקשים על דרכו  
מפני אלה הרוקדים ותלמידים שלא הגיעו — בענין  
זה — להוראה ומורים. שמפני כל זה וביחוד למען  
לברוא משמעת הגונה אצל הצעירים, וביחוד אותם  
שמתחנכים עפ"י החינוך הטהור של התורה והיראה.  
דרוש לעת עתה לתקן ישיבה גדולה בחוץ לירושלים.  
שאל"י ינהרו כל צעירי ירושלים ושמה יחונכו בחינוך  
קדוש של יראת ד' סהורה עפ"י השפעה הגונה של  
הישרות המדות והשלכת כל החשדות הנמבזות, וביחוד  
העושר הגדול של הרחבת הבקיות והפסול בכל  
המקצועות עם שיעורים רוחניים בהצדדים הרוחניים  
שבחורה. באופן שהתלמידים יבואו שמה לשנים קבועות.

באופן שבנין אומתנו יבנה על טבעו האמיתי  
והפסיכולוגי הטהורה שלו, והוא התענין מאד בהצעותי,  
והיתה תשובתו "יאמין לי מר, כי עתה גם אני  
דוגל לזה. אבל דרוש לזה שיחות ארוכות, ועוד  
נקדיש עתים על זה". ובהיות שכמובן וכפי ידיעתי  
שם מרן מע"כ גאוננו שליט"א רם נשא ומרומם גם  
אצלו על כל ברכה ותהלה. מהראוי שמע"כ מרן  
שליט"א ימתיק סוד עמו אודות זה במכתב, וביחוד  
כשישוב ללונדון יאריך מע"כ מרן עמו אודות ענין  
הק' הלזה. ואני מלא תקוה שיד ד' מנהלנו לטוב  
לגילוי שכינתו ואור תורתו.

עברו הנרעש והנפחד מפחד קדושתו

במסך אלו השנים יגיעו להשתלמותם להכנס אח"כ  
בית ועד הגדול שיתכונן בעה"י בעיה"ק ירושלים.  
ואני מקוה לחסדי ד' שגם מע"כ מרן שליט"א  
יכניס להצעתו זאת, ולהישיבה הזאת ינהרו ככל  
אח"ק ומסאר ארצות למען לארוג דור רענן וחי  
מסלא בכל חסדת קודש על אדמת ישראל. להכשירו  
לכל התחיות הנשגבות שהננו מצפים אליהם, ושהננו  
מתנצצים לפנינו וסתרמים ומתגלים. — ואפשר גם  
סבהמסך הימים תוכל הישיבה הזאת לעבור אל עיר  
הקודש. אבל לעת עתה לפי הכרתי עדיין מוקדם הוא  
הזמן להיות פעה"ק. כי ליסוד ישיבה כזו על יסוד  
בלתי איתן והסכמה בלתי הודית פעה"ק לא תוכל  
לפרוח ולהגיע למה שצריכה ומוכרחת להגיע. ועל כן  
היותר נכון לע"ע שתהי' הישיבה חוץ לירושלים.  
דברתי מעט מעל לבבי לפני מרן אדמור שליט"א.  
והנני יוצא בקידה והשתחוי' בחרדת קודש עברו  
ותלמידו החפץ לשרתו הסחכה ליסועה קרובה.  
יעקב משה הרל"ם.

באחת השיחות עם הפרומ' וויצמאן נגעתי  
בענין הכנסת זרם הק' של קדושת קדשנו בבנין  
אומתנו. להפסיק על כל ענין צורה של קודש. בהמסך  
הדברים בטור שיחתנו בארתי לו. שרק הוא יכול  
לפטר לסבב הדבר להכניס זיקי קודש בלב אומתנו



מאת ידידך ורעך המאחל לך הצלחה מרובה ברוחניות ובגשמיות דורש שלומך הטוב  
 דוד הלוי יונגריץ  
 פ"ש מבני ישיבתנו הירו.

אני ר' יצחק מאת יצחק ויזק המאחל לך הצלחה מרובה ברוחניות  
 והגשמות ציגל אלעזר הטוב צ"צ ראו יצחק פ"ש מאת ישיבתנו הירו

בעזרה

גם אני דורש את שלום ידיד"נ הרה"נ ר' יחיאל מיכל חרל"פ נ"י.  
 ודאי תקבל באלו הימים את הקונטרס של חברת "רמתיים צופים" אשר גם אני מהעוסקים בה.  
 נא מלא את בקשתי ועמוד לימינה בכל מה דאפשר לך.

ידידו מאז עמרם בלויא

ידידו מאז עמרם בלויא

כ"ה כבוד ידידי היקר הרה"ג הרי"ם חרל"פ נ"י  
 שלום וברכה וכט"ם.

הרבה פעמים חפצתי ליקח לי מועד לכתוב לו מכתב ידידות בארוכה אבל טרדות רבות עמדו לי  
 ולא יכולתי. כעת שהראה לי ידידנו הרה"ג ר' דוד נ"י את מכתבו אליו, אמרתי הניע תורי גם כן  
 לכתוב אליו, אם כי מוכרח אני לקצר, אבל אבקשהו שיכתוב לי בארוכה על דבר מצב אחינו  
 באמריקא כי מתענין אני בזה הרבה.

ידידו עו יעקב ירוחם הלוי קצנלנבוגן

ד"ש מאחינו רפאל יצחק.

ידידו עו יעקב ירוחם הלוי קצנלנבוגן

\* חברת רמתיים צופים נוסדה בשנת תרפ"א ע"י הגאון רע"י שלזינגר זצ"ל, במגמה להקים יישוב תורני שיעסקו  
 בתורה ובעבודת הארץ. הקמתה זכתה לברכת הגאונים, מוהר"י דיסקין, מוהר"ח זונפלד, מוהר"ם קלירס זצ"ל.  
 בהנהלת החברה היו שותפים רבים מטובי בניה של ירושלים, ומזכיר החברה היה הרב ר' עמרם ברש"י בלויא.

מוריה, שנה עשרים, גליון א—ב (רכס—דל), כסלו תשנ"ה



# A New Zionism

BY DR. RUTH A. BEVAN

As Zionists, we need to reassess the nature of our Zionist commitment as Israel celebrates its sixtieth birthday. We need to fashion a New Zionism. The old Zionism produced the revolution in the life of world Jewry. It brought Jews across the world out of the *galut* and inspired them to rebuild Israel out of the swamps into the advanced society it is today. It produced the self-directed “new Jew” epitomized by the Israeli. We must never forget those initial swamps or that hellish *galut* in order to appreciate the revolution wrought by the old Zionism. We now need a New Zionism to sustain and further this revolution, one attuned to the rhythms and demands of our globalized world. This new Zionism must “go with the flow,” meaning it should rest upon an appreciation and use of the world’s current fluidity. Let me elaborate.

The world has changed drastically since Israel’s rebirth in 1948. Perhaps the key characteristic of our globalized world, as opposed to the world of 1948, is continuous and massive *movement* across borders, actual and virtual. Jets transport us physically while the internet transports us virtually across borders wherever they exist – every minute of every day. Competing groups attempt to give coherence to this fluid world through the imagery and (des)information they channel across the globe through mass communications. A group’s size is less important than its strategic leverage and financial backing. Herein lies the challenge for the New Zionism. Despite the physical dangers confronting it, Israel can not rely solely on military prowess for its security. The larger battle to be won has to do with the world of public relations and with education; it entails conveying information about Israel across the world.

At a recent conference on Israel at Brandeis University, the signature donor of the University’s Center for Israel Studies remarked that the Center seeks to spread the truth about Israel through research. We must participate, in our own way and through our own resources, in this important mission. Gratefully, Yeshiva University now has its own Center for Israel Studies with Prof. Steven Fine as its director. Such centers are springing up all over the country. Our YU Center will have its inaugural conference this month. These centers will be a much needed counter-weight to those universities whose Middle East departments have become anti-Israel propaganda mills. Let us remember this vital point: the facts about Israel speak for themselves. We do not have to manufacture an apologia for Israel. This ennobles our task.

Each one of us needs to be informed

about Israeli history and contemporary issues. Ideally, each student should take a course on Israeli Politics (my apologies if this sounds like a self-interested plug for our Political Science Department but, in this case, our Department has an important role to play.) Notice that we are specifying Israeli politics, not Middle East politics. Our reasoning on this score is as follows: every Zionist needs to have factual information about Israel in order to inform others as well as to counter false accusations about Israel. All of us have a lot of work to do in this regard. We must accept this as a personal obligation.



gation. Toward this end, we propose that students on both campuses form Israel Study Groups. Perhaps they can connect in some way with our Israel Studies Center. There should be a specified reading list for the year that students must accomplish and which they come together regularly to discuss. I volunteer myself as a faculty participant. These study groups might also watch films about Israel. Furthermore, such study groups should connect with students from other colleges and universities. One efficient way to connect with other colleges would be to establish a YU blog devoted to Israel, with possibility for a chat room.

Students should seek to do internships in Israel – at least once in their college career. At YU we shall need to help students make these connections. Ideally, we should have summer school classes in Israel, featuring, collaborative teaching with Israeli university faculty. A long-distance learning with Israeli universities should at least be considered at YU. Would it be possible to have an ulpan instituted at YU (perhaps in the summer) so that students and faculty can become functional in modern He-

brew?

While in Israel last summer as a fellow of the Brandeis University Israel Studies Summer Institute, I was struck by a significant change in attitude among Israelis concerning Diaspora Jewry. A faculty member of Bar Ilan, himself religiously orthodox, remarked in a public forum that he favored strong Diaspora communities. This, of course, means essentially a strong American Jewish community. Clearly, *aliyah* remains a Zionist priority. It now becomes supplemented, however, conceptually as well as actually, by the Diaspora community



(to be differentiated from the *galut*). This means, however, that we American Jews can not, or should not, take refuge in the American “good life.” It means, rather, that we must fulfill our responsibilities by being active citizens and Zionists.

In his latest book, *Uncouth Nation* (Princeton UP, 2007), political scientist Andrei Markovits discusses “why Europe dislikes America.” Markovits advances the argument that anti-Americanism shares the same roots as anti-Semitism, maintaining that while one can talk about anti-Semitism without considering anti-Americanism, the reverse is not true. In analyzing anti-Americanism one must, by definition, include anti-Semitism. This syndrome predates the rebirth of Israel, taking shape, rather, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Europeans view American bourgeois, capitalist democracy as “Jewified.” Jews and America are seen as “paragons of modernity – money-driven, profit-hungry, urban, universalistic, individualistic, mobile, rootless, and hostile to established traditions and values.” (Markovits, p. 155) Of course, the present day

USA-Israel alliance re-enforces the prejudice. Furthermore, Markovits points to the low incidence of anti-Semitism in American history and subscribes to the idea that, regarding its attitude toward Jews, America is “different.” The point to be made here is that Jews have an important stake in American democracy. Our Zionist activities must include strengthening American democracy in whatever way we can and continuing to advocate for Israel in the American public forum. We must be informed and active citizens.

Today’s college students will be the crux of tomorrow’s Zionist movement. This New Zionism must be information-oriented and Diaspora-active. In this globalized world individual Jews can share living and working space between Israel and the United States. One can work for an American firm, for example, that operates in Israel. Or vice versa. Think about choosing professions that facilitate this kind of New Zionism. Think about professions in communications. In political activism. In teaching. Perhaps we need workshops for this purpose. Contemplate also that your generation will have to shoulder philanthropic and other financial obligations that allow the Jewish world to operate. There is important and exciting work to be done.

Let me leave you with one Israeli’s vision. At the Brandeis University conference Shlomo Avineri of Hebrew University was the keynote speaker. Listening to his inspiring words created in me the sensation of sitting in the midst of a new Zionist congress. Avineri dreamed aloud that each Jew should be given the chance to spend one year living through the Jewish calendar in Israel. How could one forget a *Yom Kippur* in Israel? Would it be surprising to learn that *Hanukkah* does not exist *because of* Christmas? One woman in the Brandeis audience, affiliated with some Jewish organization in Boston, became fascinated with the mechanics of such a program and it’s financing. Let us all reflect on Avineri’s dream and how each of us might help realize it. Remember Herzl’s words: if you will it, it is no fairy tale!

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# MOSES LEIB LILIEBLUM: A REVISED LEGACY OF AN EARLY ZIONIST

BY SHIMSHON AYZENBERG

Moses Leib Lilienblum was part of the third and last generation of the Russian Haskalah before he became an ardent Zionist. The story that is tendentiously told of his transition corresponds to that of another early Zionist, Leon Pinsker: Sudden waves of pogroms in 1881 forced Lilienblum to reject assimilation and adopt Zionism. This is the conventional storyline, cast completely in the shadow of Pinsker, the more popular associate in the Hibbat Zion movement. But, in fact, as a former maskil, unlike Pinsker, Lilienblum never wanted to assimilate. Historians have had difficulty reconciling Lilienblum's conflicting statements between his Russian and Hebrew articles from this period. Yet, these statements are less of a conundrum if we were to consider Lilienblum's entire life-work.

Lilienblum was born in Kardainai (in the province of Kovno) in Czarist Russia and was recognized by his mentors as an *illuy* (wunderkind) for mastering the entire Talmud at an early age. After he wed at fourteen he was provided for financially by his in-laws to study the Talmud. He moved to Wilkomir with his wife and opened his own Yeshiva. There he began to read maskilic literature, which often stressed Jews' need of social affinity with the "benevolent government" of Czar Alexander II. By the 1860's "the Czar Liberator" not only emancipated the Russian serfs, but abolished his father's ruthless cantonist system, and allowed for certain well-to-do Jews to settle outside the Pale of Settlement.<sup>i</sup> In this period of heightened hope, unparalleled in the history of Czarist Russia, Lilienblum became more convinced that Jews had to be "men who accomplish worthy things, assisting the king's country in their actions, labor and wisdom," as Naphtali Hertz Wessely, an early maskil, wrote in 1781, in order to attract further economic and social betterment from Alexander II as his valued subjects.<sup>ii</sup>

But, Lilienblum felt, the Shulkhan Arukh prevented Jews from being worthy of the Czar's acceptance. Contrary to the first two generations of Russian maskilim, notably Isaac Leib Levinsohn ("the Russian Mendelssohn") and Samuel Joseph Fuenn, who courted the government to impose upon the Jewish masses the new school curricula and modern dress, the third generation realized that change cannot be imposed. The rabbis must be persuaded of the maskilic cause to invite reform peaceably. Thus, in 1868, Lilienblum published his first article, *Orhot HaTalmud* ("The Way of the Talmud"), in the main literary organ of the Russian Haskalah, *Hamelitz*, asking the rabbis to join his humanitarian cause. He averred that

the intrinsic authority of rabbinic law was intended to be commensurate to particular historical circumstances. Now that the excess of these laws, from over the ages, is unsympathetic to the Jews living in abject poverty in the Pale of Settlements, Lilienblum prodded the rabbis to organize a synod to make Shulkhan Arukh less burdensome. The crop failures of 1867 and 1868 seasons bolstered his claim.

The rabbis, however, considered his article too rash, too radical. Thinking that he sought to undermine their authority, they hissed and cursed at him, mostly in the pages of an ultra-reactionary orthodox paper, *Ha-Levanon*. His article even aroused a storm of

cialist and revolutionary groups, self-professed delusions of the "benevolent government" were revealed for their foolishness and inanity. The maskilim, thus, moved ever closer to the liberal Russian intelligentsia, which stood at odds with the Romanov monarchy.

From the Russian intelligentsia, Lilienblum learned of Nikolai Chernyshevski's novel, *Shto Delat?* ("What Is To Be Done?"). It was about an ascetic revolutionary dedicated to the Realism and Positivism of Dmirti Pisarov, an austere-looking Russian philosopher, who famously cried that a person's pair of shoes was more important than all of Shakespeare's plays.<sup>v</sup> With this practical advice,



copious criticism from his friends and family. Passersby on the streets of Wilkomir accused him of monstrous heresy. He was forced to close-down his Yeshiva. The harassments got to the point that Rabbi Israel Elhanan Specter, the Rav of Kovno, used his esteemed influence to curb the disreputable overreaction.<sup>iii</sup>

A year later, Lilienblum published the *Nosafot La-Ma'amar Orhot Ha-Talmud* ("Additional Remarks to Orhot HaTalmud"). This time he accused the rabbis of purposefully fossilizing Judaism, who, through their manifold stringencies would lead to many Jews to leave fold of Torah. Subsequently, Lilienblum was compelled to flee to Odessa, then the capital of an acculturated version of the Russian Haskalah. He automatically joined forces with a legendary radical maskil, Judah Leib Gordon, to crusade for reform in Judaism spearheading the Reform Controversy of 1868-1871.<sup>iv</sup>

But by the 1870's it was already quite evident that the Haskalah movement had undergone a tremendous ideological change. As the Czarist regime grew reactionary, threatened by the emergence of many small anti-Czarist so-

Lilienblum lambasted the previous two generations of maskilim for their cockeyed set of priorities, spending their days immersing in historical and philological research when millions of Jews were in a more urgent need of "bread, a sense of life, knowledge of the necessities."<sup>vi</sup> Great and highly advanced nations like Britain and France could invest appropriate resources, time and money, for such nebulous subjects, but the Jews, who evince a most dreadful appearance, require advice on how to raise their meager standard of living. The bickering over Jewish chronology or grammar is vainglorious and unhelpful.

But with time and with a modicum of change Lilienblum's patience simply faded. Doubtful of its strength, he ceased to think that Haskalah could reform Judaism. As he lost hope in Judaism itself, he disqualified himself from the Reform Controversy. He began to study the Russian language more fully to enroll into a university, which was his life-dream. However it should not be assumed that he abandoned his people for assimilation. The Jewish Question and religious reform were still

on his mind. Finding no answer to these questions, he put his public advocacy on hold.

Then, as pogroms ripped through the Pale of Settlements in 1881 and Lilienblum hid from the marauding peasants, the answer became clear. The *Narodnaya Volya*, a radical terrorist group assassinated Czar Alexander II during a royal procession in St. Petersburg. Since one of the assassins was a Jewess, Hesya Helfman, the Jews were blamed forthwith. To the consternation of the younger maskilim, much of the Russian intelligentsia was either blissfully indifferent or downright proud of the pogromchiks. Even Leo Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev, internationally most respected Russian humanists, were peculiarly quiet. In response to these appalling collision of circumstances, Lilienblum wrote a series of articles for the popular Russian Jewish journal, *Rassvyet*, which were collected and published in book form in 1886 under the Zionist title, "On the Regeneration of the Jewish Nation" (*O Vozrazhdeniye Evresskavo Naroda*).

The answer was Zionism/nationalism. Lilienblum's Jewish nationalism starts out with Risorgimento and arrives at close proximity of the *raison d'être* of "integral" nationalism. In fact, his formulaic explanation is kindred to Pinsker's *Autoemancipation*. It became obvious to Lilienblum that land is what feeds this frenzy of hate and anti-Semitism. Can one blame the natives for rebuffing their strangers? Strangers are tolerated until they become parasitic, taking substantial amounts of the natives' food and employment. Once that happens, the stranger could be politely bid to leave, or forcibly kicked out. It is "an *instinct* of self-preservation."<sup>vii</sup> "A new age is upon us," Lilienblum proclaimed. "It is possible to say that... the pogroms are but a flower of the birth of national consciousness across Europe and the fruit is only starting to bud."<sup>viii</sup> "We must know that now begins the second chapter in the history of our suffering, a chapter of 'national fanaticism.' Any short peaceful time in the past" when Jews were accepted by liberal governments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century "was only a break between these two chapters.... How many bloody pages will be in the second chapter cannot be known. Therefore, we must strive to colonize Palestine."<sup>ix</sup>

He later elaborates in more pronounced "integral" terms: "History entered into a new motif, a nationalistic motif... History may develop slowly and allow for a reaction, but once it entered into its predestined path, it will go fully into the direction of its end-point. And what will be then? One need not be a prophet to confidently propound that the nationalistic civilization will ultimately be triumphant over cosmopolitanism... [and there] will be a pre-



destined, recognizable, and irrevocable arrangement of each nationalistic society according to the racial right of each nation...<sup>x</sup>

There is no escape for Jews anywhere in Europe. In Russia there are physical pogroms, men beaten up, houses looted and burned, women raped, yet wherever Jews live in Western Europe as strangers, there are “paper pogroms,” laws that restrict them from fully participating in the country’s social and political spheres.<sup>xi</sup>

Only a physical homeland could transform the Jews from a “ghost-like people,” as Pinsker put it in his *Autoemancipation*, which roams aimlessly around Europe like a tribe of gypsies, in Lilienblum’s analogy, into a full-blown nation. The fact that unlike gypsies, the Jews have a history, language, and culture would, in itself, denote that their racial identity is salvageable and can be rehabilitated.<sup>xii</sup>

The process of rehabilitation is twofold. First, poor Jews would be concentrated in Palestine. The rich Jews would pay for their transfer, so they build the infrastructure for future immigrants. Then, as more immigrants arrive, the religious and cultural questions would naturally solve for themselves by molding a new Jewish society when the settlers would need to inevitably find ways to cooperate with each other in a single piece of land.<sup>xiii</sup> Thus, with Zionism, solves the Jewish Question and the question of religious reform: the physical safety of Jews from any more persecution and the cultural regeneration of the Jews via the natural reformation of Judaism on their own land.

In the pages of *HaMelitz*, Lilienblum challenged Judah Leib Gordon, about his continued call for religious reform in lieu of the pogroms. Specifically, in an article directly responding to Gordon called “Ein Ma’avirin She’elah Be’She’elah” (Let’s Not Confuse the Issues), Lilienblum mentions emphatically that religious reform is not as pivotal as “plainly and simply a matter of life and without whose solution we are doomed as a people,” – the settling of Palestine. We might have our own individual prejudices, but where a nation is concerned, it should be dearer to us than any division. “There are neither a modern, old-fashioned, pious, nor freethinking men, save for the Children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”<sup>xiv</sup>

At the very same time, however, Lilienblum wrote three long articles in the Russian Jewish literary journal, *Voskhod*, which, seemingly, directly contradict his position in *HaMelitz*. In the first article, “On the Necessity of Reform,” Lilienblum confronts this glaring contradiction. In case any of his bilingual readers would be taken aback by his duplicity he asks, “Is it really in order that we should now, troubled by the pogroms, fires, social and political infringement, just wave away by hand all that is happening to us, and accept the suffering as our forefathers who were inclined to forget their bitterness” and grapple with religious reform? Yes, he answers, because it is precisely at this time when the Jewish people need unity the only source of their unity is Judaism. But, the present, antiquated,

and divisive Judaism is in dire need of reform.<sup>xv</sup> However, why would Lilienblum use the Russian press to send this message out? It seems that Gordon and Lilienblum were targeting different audiences. In that case, what kind of religious reform was Lilienblum regarding?

The only sector of the Russian Jewry that would read his Russian articles is acculturated or even assimilated. Unlike Gordon’s articles, none of Lilienblum’s Russian articles speak to orthodox Jews. Lilienblum uses language, rhetoric, and witicism, that could only inspire the assimilated Jews to carry on the work of his Haskalah days and facilitate the process of reform in Judaism. The Jewish Question was answered with Zionism. Now, the question of religious reform can also be solved. In view of the aforementioned catastrophes predicted due to history’s determined march toward “the nationalistic motif”, Lilienblum reached out to the assimilated Jews in order to save them from existential harm that would fall upon them as strangers in Europe.

Convincing the assimilated Jews would take a great amount of inspiration. As during the Reform Controversy a decade earlier, he still considered the rabbinic authorities as the only legitimate source for bringing about reform in Judaism. He, perhaps naively, relied on the assimilated Jews to come back to their Jewish roots in droves to drive the rabbis to rewrite the Shulkhan Arukh.<sup>xvi</sup> But, Lilienblum was not going to tailor Judaism for them as, he expressly pointed out, Reform in Germany. The synod of rabbis “may invent ways to circumvent laws of Moses but cannot negate them.” This statement puts the “Revelation” as the cornerstone of Judaism and Jewish identity. “The entire authority of the Laws of Moses is founded upon the idea that it is the product of the heavenly will of the Lord, without this admittance the Jews would not have a religion. Frankly, could anyone, even the smartest of people negate the laws that were established by G-d?”<sup>xvii</sup> He devotes an entire article, the second in the series, to explain how the Mishnah and the Talmud acted as guidelines for reform and renewal of Judaism for every generation, nearly reiterating his *Orhot HaTalmud*.<sup>xviii</sup>

One of Lilienblum’s main tasks is to identify “the explanation for our religious indifference.” He opines that Jews assimilated because of “the superiority of various formalisms, little detail, and punctiliousness in the ceremonial part of” Judaism, “to the extent that even Jewish patience could not bear it anymore.”<sup>xix</sup> Originally there were people who attempted to separate this minutia from Judaism, and cast aside its “medieval gloom,” – the early maskilim. But other Jews, who did not care for any principle, also began to cast this minutia aside en masse. It is a telling admittance, on Lilienblum’s part, that the first wave of maskilim opened a floodgate of dropouts. For a healthy process of reformation our task is to remove the reasons for this indifference: the systematic removal of the minutia of the Shulkhan Arukh.

In stark contrast to *Orhot HaTalmud*, where Lilienblum called for reform to allevi-

ate the toil of the rural religious Jews of the Pale, now he is willing to compromise for the well-to-do Jews, largely secular and urban, so they would have the means to come back to their people. He did not completely disregard his earlier religious reform work with Judah Leib Gordon. He placed it in the second category. The solution to the Jewish Question is for the Jews to immediately establish their own nationalistic state, where religious reform will evolve by itself. He criticized Gordon out of his positivistic attitude toward the earlier maskilim for wasting their time on objectives that were automatically futile. But religious reform should not be totally forgotten in the Diaspora, for the assimilated Jew needs to find his or her way back to Judaism, which is the only true identity of the Jew.

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## MAMLAKHTIYUT

BY GILAH KLETENIK

There is much to be said about *Mamlakhtiyut* – Ben Gurion’s term for Jewish sovereignty – its definition, its compatibility with traditional Judaism and, further, the feasibility of its implementation by a nation foreign to self-rule. However compelling and complex these conversations are, they are essentially conceptual in nature – concerned more with the philosophical “what” than the practical “how.” Thus, a more relevant question is: how ought the modern Jewish state act?

Considering that the State insists on being a “Jewish” one, it is not inappropriate to explore the religion’s classical texts in addressing this question. The obvious challenge to this method is that the Torah never directly, or even indirectly, entertains the notion of Jewish sovereignty independent of a Jewish monarch, bound by halakha, empowered by God’s mandate. However, this is not to suggest that there is no wisdom to be gleaned from the Torah on this matter. To the contrary, the Torah is rich in insight, universal in scope, and also very applicable to the deliberation at hand. This essay will focus on a fundamental Jewish idea, that of moral responsibility and its pertinent relevance to Jewish governance.

The Torah is in many ways merely a book of commandments and Judaism but a religion of laws. However, the system of *mitsvot* rests on the notion of responsibility – accountability to someone, something or some idea – the recognition that an entity beyond oneself is that which informs one’s actions. This responsibility often takes the shape of moral imperative. The Torah is filled with commandments demanding responsibility rooted in morality and justice.

The Jewish call for moral responsibility transcends time, place and circumstance; it is incumbent upon all, no matter when or regarding what, to stand up for morality. This all-encompassing accountability is particularly poignant in Abraham’s conversation with the Lord concerning the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In their exchange, Abraham calls God to task for what he views as unjust: “Shall not the Judge of all the Earth deal justly?”<sup>i</sup> Abraham’s audacity to challenge God’s justness stems from responsibility and his perception of God’s responsibility to be just as well as an understanding of his own responsibility – to challenge anyone, even God, when justice is at stake. Moses follows in Abraham’s footsteps when, as leader of the nation he stands up to God, convincing God not to exterminate the Children of Israel following the sin of the Golden Calf.<sup>ii</sup> These powerful confrontations with Heaven underscore the Jewish value in justice – to challenge even the morality of God’s actions. While these powerful episodes speak to all, they certainly provide particular potency for Jewish leaders, empha-

<sup>i</sup> Fiener, Shmuel. *Haskalah and History*, (Littman Library, 2004) p. 205.

<sup>ii</sup> *Divrei Shalom Ve’Emet*, 13, (Vienna, 1826). Wessely wrote this pamphlet, which became the first official document of Haskalah, in similar hopeful circumstances, after the enlightened despot, King Joseph of Austria, proclaimed the Edict of Tolerance on January 2, 1782, which allowed for Jews to study in German schools.

<sup>iii</sup> Zinberg, Israel. *A History of Jewish Literature*. Vol. XII (Ktav 1972). Ch. 8.

<sup>iv</sup> Vilna, was the other center of a more Beit-Medrish type of Haskalah.

<sup>v</sup> Vital, David. *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford 1980). 113.

<sup>vi</sup> Fiener, 278

<sup>vii</sup> *O Vozrazhdeniye Evresskavo Naroda* 4

<sup>viii</sup> *O Vozrazhdeniye Evresskavo Naroda* 9

<sup>ix</sup> *O Vozrazhdeniye Evresskavo Naroda* 12

<sup>x</sup> *O Vozrazhdeniye Evresskavo Naroda* 43

<sup>xi</sup> *O Vozrazhdeniye Evresskavo Naroda* 27

<sup>xii</sup> *O Vozrazhdeniye Evresskavo Naroda* 16

<sup>xiii</sup> Kol Kisvei Lilienblum, (1902) 13-15

<sup>xiv</sup> Kol Kisvei Lilienblum (1902) 29

<sup>xv</sup> Lilienblum, Moses Leib. “On the Necessity of Reform.” *Voskhod*. Vol. 1, 1882 p. 160

<sup>xvi</sup> Lilienblum, Moses Leib. “On the Necessity of Reform in the Jewish Religion”, *Voskhod*. Vol. 3, 1883 p. 85

<sup>xvii</sup> Lilienblum, Moses Leib. “On the Necessity of Reform in the Jewish Religion”, *Voskhod*. Vol. 3, 1883 p. 93

<sup>xviii</sup> Lilienblum, Moses Leib. “On the Necessity of Reform in the Jewish Religion”, *Voskhod*. Vol. 1, 1883 p. 135

<sup>xix</sup> Lilienblum, Moses Leib. “On the Necessity of Reform.” *Voskhod*. Vol. 1, 1882 p. 170



sizing the inherently moral side to Jewish leadership as embodied by Abraham, Moses, and by God himself, the leader par excellence.

Maimonides, in his *Guide of the Perplexed* discusses the necessary attributes of a Jewish leader based on the notion of *imitatio dei*, imitating the actions of God in His own leadership and relationship with humankind. Moses turns to God and asks “show me thy glory”<sup>iii</sup> and God responds with the Thirteen Attributes: “The Lord! The Lord! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the



iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon third and fourth generations.”<sup>iv</sup> Maimonides derives from this conversation that to God, a Jewish governor ought to imitate His moral attributes and only in that way fulfills the Torah's vision of Jewish leadership.<sup>v</sup>

The Torah and Jewish tradition do not imagine the possibility of a Jewish democracy. Nevertheless, Judaism has much to say about Jewish leadership – that a true Jewish leader is one who, like God, the archetypal leader, embodies morality. This analysis obviously invites the question: what exactly is morality? Some, chief among them Yeshayahu Leibowitz, would object to the premise of this inquiry entirely and maintain that there is no morality beyond halakha and that Jewish obligation stems exclusively from halakha; that it's not a question of morality, but rather a question of *halakha*.<sup>vi</sup> If this is indeed a question of *halakha*, then the very essence of morality lends itself to *maḥloket* – that lively Jewish discourse wherein all angles are considered and no stone is left unturned. In the struggle for the “right” answer it soon becomes clear that there really isn't one “right” answer, a single definition of morality. Instead, there are endless possibilities, circumstances and realities. The discourse is live and organic; it leaves room for nearly any reasonable position.

What emerges from this analysis is that a

Jewish government ought to be moral and that the precise parameters of morality are left open. There is enough room in Jewish law to accommodate most, if not all positions. Is it moral to siege Gaza and deprive innocent Palestinians of electricity or is it moral to accommodate continued firing of Qassams on Sderot's innocent population? Further, does the former only encourage the latter or is the latter but a response to the former?

The particular benefits of this moral-minded approach to *Mamlakhtiyut* are primarily twofold: its universalism and its sensitivity to Jewish national history. The Tanakh's call for justice and morality is not directed exclusively to the Jewish people. To the contrary, it is instructed to all of humankind. In fact, many of the Torah's moral tenets have been accepted as universal, or at least as Western values. Thus, this approach need not be in conflict with Israel's western democratic nature; rather, the two might even compliment each other. Beyond this, the moral charge holds a particular poignancy to the Jewish people. It seems obvious why a nation oppressed for thousands of years and the victim of countless injustices ought to feel a unique responsibility to uphold justice and act morally.

In conclusion, framing the conversation about *Mamlakhtiyut* around its applicability lends itself to everyday practical implementation. Viewing *Mamlakhtiyut* through the lens of moral responsibility is not only informed by Jewish heritage, but is universal in scope, while at the same time uniquely suited to the Jewish ethos. Herein lays the richness of this approach – it is both very Jewish while at the same time entirely secular. It is at once a submission to God's ancient command while at the same time an expression of western modernity – in essence, the very epitome of the modern Jewish State of Israel.

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<sup>i</sup> Gen. 18: 25

<sup>ii</sup> Exo. 32: 9-14

<sup>iii</sup> Exo. 33: 18

<sup>iv</sup> Exo. 33: 6-7

<sup>v</sup> *Guide* I:54

<sup>vi</sup> Leibowitz, Yeshayahu, ed. Eliezer Goldman. *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

# PRACTICAL ZIONISM: R. YITSHAK YAAKOV REINES AND THE BEGINNINGS OF MIZRACHI

BY YOSEF LINDELL

Religious Zionism is heavily associated with the thought and efforts of R. Avraham Yitshak Ha-Kohen Kook. More than any of the other early Religious Zionist thinkers, R. Kook was responsible for creating a theological framework for Zionism that ensured the compatibility of national aspirations and strong religious values. R. Kook believed that the secular Zionist movement could be made holy by directing its efforts to the settlement and cultivation of Israel in preparation for the Messiah. Developing the land and infusing it with spirituality could hasten the coming of the long-awaited Redeemer. Under this umbrella of religious destiny, cooperation with secular and even anti-religious Jews could be sanctioned. This novel stance perturbed many of his religious contemporaries, and seemed to undermine the prevailing tradition for centuries—that the Jewish people must wait passively for the Messianic era to be brought by divine grace alone.

When one thinks of Mizrahi, the political arm of Religious Zionism, this Kookian view, which advocates a commitment to the Land and now to the State by virtue of its religious and ultimately Messianic importance, probably comes to mind. But Mizrahi's beginnings were much different. The movement was founded by R. Yitshak Yaakov Reines (1839-1905), a man driven by a very different spirit than that of R. Kook. Where R. Kook was a dreamer, poet, and an idealist, R. Reines was a realist, activist, and pragmatist. The pernicious and unrelenting nature of anti-Semitism, not Messianic idealism, brought R. Reines into the Zionist camp.

The Chief Rabbi of Lida, a mid-sized city near Vilna, R. Reines was a brilliant Torah scholar and autodidact—he published works that presented an entirely new logical method for the systematic study of the Talmud. R. Reines was also a courageous and outspoken activist on many issues concerning Eastern European Jewry. His establishment of the Mizrahi Party within Herzl's Zionist Congress in 1902 earned him the condemnation of many within the traditionalist camp. The story goes that the saintly Hafets Hayim himself came to visit R. Reines to plead with him not to ally himself with the Zionist cause. And, in 1905, R. Reines established the first yeshiva in Eastern Europe to teach secular subjects and the Hebrew language in addition to the traditional Talmud curriculum.

But despite these achievements, R. Reines did not consider himself a visionary. Throughout his voluminous prosaic writings, he constantly speaks of the dire exigencies that drove him to his novel conclusions and the necessity that pushed him to follow through on his projects. It was the immediate needs of the nation, not an idealistic vision, which drove R. Reines' creative spirit.

R. Reines concluded that in order to ameliorate the troubles besetting the Jews they needed a safe haven—a homeland—where they would be free from oppression and persecution. In *Kol Mi-Tsiyon*, a letter to Mizrahi constituents, he passionately painted a dire picture: “The blood of our brothers is now being spilled more and more like water everywhere, the hatred for our nation is increasing in all the lands, pushing the Jews more and more from [a normal] life and bringing them to poverty, famine, sickness, suffering and submission of the spirit. ... Our sons and daughters are being sold to another nation. ... Judaism is being pushed aside more and more for other cultures and the name of Israel is being erased from the face of the earth.”<sup>i</sup>

For R. Reines, Zionism was a purely pragmatic political movement necessary to save the Jewish people from physical and spiritual danger. In stark contrast to the position of R. Kook, R. Reines believed the efforts of the Zionists had no connection to the Messianic redemption at the End of Days. In *Sha'arei Orah ve-Simhah*, he wrote: “And in all their [the Zionists'] actions and efforts there is also no hint or mention of the final redemption. Their entire intention is only to improve Israel's [the Jews'] situation and ennoble it with dignity ... so that Israel should know that it has a safe place. ... It is only an effort for the improvement of the nation's physical situation.”<sup>ii</sup>

To counter the arguments of those who maintained that making a concerted effort to settle in the Land of Israel before the proper time ordained by God violated a prohibition against hastening the Messianic redemption, R. Reines responded that pure political Zionism had no connection to the Messiah. In this aspect, R. Reines' ideology was similar to that of Theodor Herzl. Disillusioned by the growing anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe despite the emancipation of the Jews, Herzl gathered the Zionist Congress in 1897 for the express purpose of obtaining a homeland for the Jews that would guarantee their security. His approach, known as political Zionism, made him and R. Reines' Mizrahi movement natural allies in



the Zionist Congress.

Although R. Reines evinced strong inclinations toward political Zionism, this ideology itself was not the catalyst that led him to establish a new party within the Zionist Congress. Rather, R. Reines established Mizrahi in 1902 to oppose the Democratic Faction, a cultural Zionist party headed by Chaim Weizmann and Ahad Ha-Am. Hostile to traditional religious belief, Weizmann and Ha-Am wanted to appeal to discontented Jewish youth by reformulating Zionism upon secular nationalist lines, stressing the synthesis between Jewish culture and Western intellectualism, as well as the revival of Hebrew language, literature, and art. R. Reines and others started Mizrahi, a party closely allied with Herzl, in an attempt to mitigate the Democratic Faction's influence by focusing on what they believed to be the essence of Zionism—political activism in search of a Jewish homeland.<sup>iii</sup>

R. Reines' strongest affirmation of Zionism's political side can be seen in his support of the Uganda Proposal. Although the Zionist movement desired a homeland in Palestine, the



Ottoman Turks, under whose jurisdiction it lay, rebuffed Herzl's propositions. Therefore, in 1903, Herzl proposed an alternative based on an offer from the British: an autonomous Jewish state in the African nation of Uganda. While, understandably, this famous proposal precipitated enormous controversy within the ranks of the Zionist Congress for two years until the plan was dropped, in a letter to Herzl R. Reines enthusiastically endorsed it: "We agreed to the African proposal because we paid attention to the needs of the nation that is dearer to us than the Land [of Israel]—and the needs of the nation that is deteriorating both physically and spiritually requires a secure refuge wherever it may be."<sup>iv</sup> It may seem strange that such support would be forthcoming from a traditionalist rabbi who identified with the Land of Israel on both historical and religious grounds. Yet, in light of R. Reines' pragmatic approach to the Jewish problem of his time as he understood it, his strong supportive position regarding Uganda comes as less of a surprise.

This pragmatic approach to Zionism is also what, in R. Reines' eyes, ameliorated the concern of working together with the non-religious: "There are those who claim that since

they [the non-observant] are involved in the Zionist movement, there is reason to be concerned that it will result in ruinous breaches in religion. ... I clearly demonstrated that there is no concern at all that it will affect religion because, essentially, it is an idea whose fundamental principle is to improve our physical situation and to obtain for our brothers of the House of Israel who are oppressed and pursued without respite a place of secure refuge in our Holy Land. This has nothing to do with spiritual or religious matters."<sup>v</sup> In order to respond to fears that the Zionist movement would precipitate "ruinous breaches in religion" by virtue of the Democratic Faction's attempts to inject it with an ideology of cultural and religious reform, R. Reines reaffirmed that Zionism's agenda was purely political. He stressed that it only sought relief for the oppressed and therefore should not be usurped by those seeking a platform for social and cultural change.

Because R. Reines desired to distance Mizrahi from the Democratic Faction as much as possible, he maintained that the movement should have nothing to do with religious education. Purportedly, he even kept the finances of his yeshiva in Lida separate from the Mizrahi treasury. R. Kook, on the other hand, saw religious education as an integral component of Zionism.

Yet despite the fact that R. Reines divorced Zionism from Messianism and religious education, he still saw the yearning for Zion expressed by the Zionist enterprise as an expression of deep religious identification. The return of even secular Jews to their Jewish national roots was, for R. Reines, the kindling of a dormant spark of spirituality latent in every Jew. He wrote, "The awakening of the non-observant to the Zionist idea is not at all because of an irreligious [nature] but because of their rejection of an irreligious [lifestyle]."<sup>vi</sup> Zionism had a great ethical potential, particularly for the Jewish youth, as it would "turn their hearts away from the delights of the larger world to gaze upon the light of Judaism and to see the radiance of their nation and its splendor."<sup>vii</sup>

Indeed, with euphoric conviction, R. Reines proclaimed Zionism's ability to unite the Jewish people in a national renaissance: "Zionism powerfully raises the flag of Zion and rallies around it all the dispersed and unites them as one. It calls out from the heights the name of Israel, it goes out to fight bravely against the tendency towards assimilation and self disparagement. ... It calls out to the nation to stand up for itself and not to give up anything. It brings national pride (*ga'avah ha-leumi*) to the hearts of many."<sup>viii</sup> Thus, despite his constant pragmatic presentation of Zionism, R. Reines did not see it as devoid of religious value. For ideological reasons, Mizrahi had to remain a purely political arm of the Zionist movement, but at its core, Zionism was a spiritual awakening.

With this more nuanced understanding of R. Reines' conception of Zionism, I would propose that R. Kook and R. Reines are not quite as far apart as many have supposed. They differed fundamentally on Zionism's Messianic

virtues, and R. Reines took a much more political approach in working from within the Zionist Congress. But both thinkers cast Zionism in a profoundly religious light. Both saw it as a movement of rebirth, a spark of holiness in an age of secularism, and a measure of national distinctiveness and unity in a time of rampant assimilation. And through this, both built bridges to non-religious Jews, confident that the goals they shared in the Land of Israel stemmed from the same love for the Jewish people.

But as Mizrahi's influence spread and its center of gravity and leadership moved toward Austria-Hungary and points further west, R. Reines quickly became a marginal figure in the movement he founded. The intellectual foundations of Mizrahi, which were akin to those of political Zionism, did not provide satisfaction to most of its adherents.<sup>ix</sup> As we noted, R. Reines maintained a strict separation between politics and religion by divorcing Mizrahi from all aspects of religious education. Yet many felt that it was Mizrahi's duty to develop a plan for religious education and that the best way to combat those who sought to merge Zionism with cultural Judaism and religious reformulation was to open schools that espoused Zionism and traditional religious values. Thus, Mizrahi, the movement founded upon the strictures of political Zionism, became an organization with a mandate to openly instill religious revival into Jewish education.<sup>x</sup>

With Mizrahi's shift, R. Reines' pragmatic political Zionism was all but forgotten in religious circles. The arguments for or against Zionism began to center exclusively on the movement's religious legitimacy. Was there a prohibition against attempting to hasten the Messiah? Or, just the opposite – could the Messiah only come if we work to bring him closer?

After the Holocaust, when the tens of thousands of Jewish survivors who crowded the DP camps found refuge in the newly established State of Israel, one prominent thinker transcended this debate of religious legitimacy and in doing so reaffirmed R. Reines' position. R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in his moving essay *Kol Dodi Dofek*, argued that the religious imperative to support, sanction, and settle the State of Israel comes not from its Messianic character, but rather from the covenant of fate that binds all Jews to actively insure their mutual survival. To R. Soloveitchik, it did not matter whether one believed that the State was a manifestation of the beginnings of the redemptive era or that one saw its secular government as a legitimate expression of Jewish authority. The refuge it provided in the wake of the greatest tragedy of Jewish history unequivocally confirmed its providential nature. Like R. Reines, R. Soloveitchik saw profound religious value in Israel as a safe haven from further persecution and dislocation.<sup>xi</sup>

As I reflect upon Israel sixty years after its founding, I cannot help but wonder how R. Reines would view the contemporary situation. Ahad Ha-Am's cultural Zionism has been forgotten. Even sixty years later, whether Israel represents "the first flowering of our redemp-

tion" remains elusively difficult to predict. Yet it is clear that this modern miracle of Jewish sovereignty in the land of our birthright represents a political and spiritual renaissance of the highest degree. Jewish pride has increased, and exiles that were dispersed to all four corners of the globe have found respite, rejuvenation, and a new life in the land of our ancestral heritage. In these respects, Israel and Zionism have exceeded R. Reines' most ambitious predictions.

But national unity was also incredibly important to R. Reines. He saw the Zionist movement as a way to bond all Jews, religious and secular, under the common banner of renewal and return. The situation in Israel today—marked by extreme divisiveness on political issues and polarization in all aspects of religious life—would disappoint this visionary. Israel faces enough enemies from among the other nations. We must learn to minimize our differences and celebrate our shared heritage.

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This essay culls material from my undergraduate thesis, "Beacon of Renewal: The Educational Philosophy of the Lida Yeshiva in the Context of Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines' Approach to Zionism," now forthcoming as an article in *Modern Judaism*.

<sup>i</sup> This letter is printed in Yizhak Refael, ed., *Sefer Tsiyonut ha-Datit* 2 (Jerusalem, 1977), 475.

<sup>ii</sup> I.J. Reines, *Sha'arei Orah ve-Simhah, Petah Tikvah* (Vilna, 1899), 24-25.

<sup>iii</sup> See Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement* (New York, 1988), 182-88, 227-31.

<sup>iv</sup> This letter (Central Zionist Archives folder no. Z1/30) is printed in Michael Heymann, *The Uganda Controversy* 2 (Jerusalem, 1977), 180.

<sup>v</sup> I.J. Reines, *Or Hadash al Tsiyon* (New York, 1946), 276.

<sup>vi</sup> *Or Hadash*, pp. 256-57.

<sup>vii</sup> From a letter to Yehuda Leib Levin printed in *Tsiyonut ha-Datit*, p. 482.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476. See also *Or Hadash*, pp. 136, 138.

<sup>ix</sup> See Luz, pp. 241-55.

<sup>x</sup> See Eliezer Don-Yehiyeh, "Ideologiyah u-Mediniyut ba-Tsiyonut ha-Datit: Haguto ha-Tsiyonit shel ha-Rav Reines u-Mediniyut ha-'Mizrahi' be-Hanhagato," *Ha-Tsiyonut* 8 (1983):138-46.

<sup>xi</sup> See responses of R. Yosef Blau and R. Nathaniel Helfgot to R. Moshe Meiselman in *Tradition* 33:2 (1999) – *Communications*. I note approvingly their contention that although R. Soloveitchik believed in a pragmatic Zionism sans Messianism, that does not make it any less religious. Indeed, R. Reines more or less felt the same way.



# IDF: PEACE-MAKERS OR WARMONGERS?

## SABBATH OBSERVERS OR HERETICS?

BY AVIVA STAVSKY

The Israeli Defense Force is known as one of the strongest, most technologically advanced military forces in the world. Strangely enough, the perpetual debate among Jewish thinkers is whether taking military action in order to gain political independence is permissible according to Jewish tradition and law. Sources from the Written and Oral Law give proof to both sides of the debate, thus causing uncertainty among modern political theorists as to whether Judaism champions or opposes war. Though one can find sources to verify both sides, a certain degree of militancy is arguably vital to the existence of the State of Israel, which is, according to many, a prerequisite for the survival of the Jewish nation. *Mamlahiyut*, a neologism coined by David Ben Gurion to refer to the political sovereignty of the Jews, would practically have to encompass both Jewish Law and modernism in order to achieve independence while preserving Jewish identity.

In the Diaspora, Jews were considered a state within a state; they were often free to practice their religious traditions, but they weren't given the rights of statehood, resulting in (This really ought to say something like "instead suffering from") political subjugation and repression. Over the centuries, the Jewish people were subject to cruel scrutiny from the other nations, possibly in part a reaction to the Jews' view of themselves as the "Chosen People."<sup>i</sup> This attitude of superiority pervades Jewish law, whether in the differentiation between Jewish and gentile blood or the "resident alien" (*ger toshav*) status of the non-Jew in the Jewish state. Such an attitude, in addition to the timidity of the Jews because of halakha<sup>ii</sup>, led to the oppression of the Jews and therefore the need for a state to serve as their safe haven.

Once the reason behind the necessity for the state is clearly stated, its goals and course of action for achieving these goals are more easily understood and justified. Because the state was established for a people who had been politically oppressed, the state does not just serve to achieve independence. It must also be a tool for the people to combat those forces of opposition who have and continue to persecute them, resulting in the conclusion, I believe, that military force is not only justified, but necessary for the goals of the state. A famous source of this rationale is the commandment by God for the Jews to destroy all of the Canaanites. This biblical reference is utilized as an example of a "holy war," a fulfillment of God's will, as opposed to an "optional" or "unholy war."<sup>iii</sup> Rav Kook builds on this distinction between holy and unholy wars and says that wars fought for Israel are divinely or-

dained and therefore do not challenge Jewish Law.<sup>iv</sup> Thus, it seems logical to conclude that military force is both a permissible and necessary component of the Jewish state.

The next question that should be raised is the balance between nationalism and Judaism; between statehood and halakha. First and foremost, it is important to recognize that a total separation of politics and religion is simply impossible in any state because deeply held religious convictions will inevitably affect one's stances on policy issues. In the case of a Jewish state, political power and halakha are used to maintain order in the state and in religion, respectively. The issue, however, with which Israel grapples is finding a healthy balance between the two forms of authority. Halakha seems to promote passivity on the part of the



Jews when it comes to war. Biblical law places limitations on the justifications for waging war, and Talmudic law expresses its strong aversion towards cruelty to the enemy during a time of war.<sup>v</sup> So it would seem that requisite for the success of Jewish statehood is a reconciliation of modern, essentially pagan, political tactics with halakha and a compromise between the two arguably opposing forces.

The issue raised, however, in Daniel J. Elazar's "Kinship and Consent," is the dilemma posed by Machiavelli: "a Christian prince has to choose between being a Christian or being a prince," claiming that such a balance would be impossible.<sup>vi</sup> Though arguably quite simple, the Archimedean point raised by Professor Nathan Rotenstreich,<sup>vii</sup> which insists that the Jews should remain true to their beliefs but open-minded to the rest of the world, which will allow the Jews to live harmoniously in the world with the freedom to govern themselves. Elazar attempts to explain the the Jews' struggle to contribute to political theory and political activism, an issue necessarily addressed in legitimizing a nation's claim to a land.<sup>viii</sup> A nation cannot claim sovereignty over a land if it lacks a political system to govern its people. Elazar argues that due to the Jews' prolonged

lack of autonomy, halakha has become antiquated and atrophied from disuse. Therefore, searching for a way for Judaism to contribute to political theory, Elazar mined the roots of the Jewish people to find a hint of political thought, discovering that the idea of transferring powers, or "social contract," is based on the original covenant between man and God. (Because the Jews asked for a king to enforce the laws of God, the ruler's powers were limited by the laws and absolute power of God, thus, as I've interpreted, establishing, in some form, a system of "checks and balances.") Thus, Elazar provides evidence for political theory penetrating Jewish tradition and law.

It is imperative, however, to establish Jewish political thought assiduously and mindfully because of the tendency of the rest of the world to misinterpret Jewish thought and course of action, resulting in oppression. While it is argued that halakha and state can coexist, based on a compromise that allows "religious Jews to live according to godly way of life in a state which lives according to its worldly way of life,"<sup>ix</sup> how is this situation any different than that of the Jews in America today? The State of Israel must, therefore, take a different approach in order to call itself

a Jewish state. There must be a balance between halakha and opposing secular ideologies rather than a mere separation of the two. The Zionist interpretation of the Holocaust has always been that six million Jews died because they lacked a military force, a state-power. And while halakha does establish certain restrictions limiting the use of force, it is also important to recognize that Jewish law, to an extent, is ever-changing, which is most clearly exemplified by the fact that many Rabbis draw disparate halakhic conclusions based on the specific case with which they are dealing and the time in which they are living. It has become evident that a military force is not only justified by Jewish Law but arguably sanctioned by Judaism in order to guarantee the survival of the Jewish people.

However, while it seems to me that Israel has been careful not to conflict with halakha in its establishment of a military force, the question that is pertinent today is the battle within the state between secular Zionists and ultra-religious Jews. A Jewish state does not necessarily mean a religious state, and without making that distinction, religious Jews will continue to feel politically inferior, and the secular Zionists will continue to feel religiously inferior.

Though many will argue that a Jewish state without Jewish laws is no Jewish state at all, I have observed that the importance of Jewish tradition takes precedence over the intricacies of halakha. For the sake of regaining and preserving the many links in the chain of Judaism, including all sects within it, Israel must recognize that the common link between all sects of Judaism is not halakha, but rather Jewish tradition and heritage.

*Mamlahiyut*, plain and simple, refers to the sovereign power of the Jews, the statehood of the Jewish people. Arguments have been raised as to the legitimacy of a Jewish state, resting on the idea that Jews have not contributed to political thought. However, once scrutinized, both the Written and Oral Law contain many hints of political theory. Once the idea of a Jewish political body is sanctioned by Jewish texts, it is inevitable that the justification for military force will soon follow. While statehood denotes independence, Jewish statehood requires a level of halakhic consciousness in obtaining autonomy. The moral values of halakha are important to retain for the success of a Jewish state, but I certainly do not believe it is necessary or appropriate for halakhic values not pertaining to political matters to pervade the Israeli government. It is important for the state to find a way to balance halakha and politics in the same way other countries do. The Israeli government should accommodate and respect the religious Jew but should not impose the views of the more right-wing Jews on those who are secularized. What I believe makes the State of Israel Jewish is that it embraces Jewish tradition and culture, thus appealing not just to the Orthodox Jews, but to all Jews

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<sup>i</sup> Ehud Luz, *Wrestling With An Angel: Power, Morality, and Jewish Identity* (Yale University Press, 2003) p. 225.

<sup>ii</sup> Nicholo Machievelli discusses this point in reference to Christian virtues. See Ibid. 27.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid. 223.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>vi</sup> Daniel J. Elazar, *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and Its Contemporary Uses* (Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2002) 446.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid. 448.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid. 447.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid. 459.



# WHAT THEY WERE REALLY SAYING AT YU IN '48

BY ZEV ELEFF

*This essay has been written in dedication to my colleagues, David Lasher and Mattan Erder, and their incalculable efforts in reviving Kol Hamevaser; their product far surpassed my initial plans for the publication. May they continue to write, inspire, and write some more.*

On the front-page of *The Commentator's* special edition issue commemorating Israel's 50th anniversary, Yehuda Burns published an article entitled, "YU, The Commentator and Israel: Through the Years." As the longest running student publication within the University, Burns correctly theorized that by "look[ing] back at [*The Commentator's*] coverage of Israeli affairs throughout the years," he would be able to gauge the student body's Zionist fervor since the newspaper started in the mid-'30s.

While culling from select issues when one might expect to find reports of Israel related news and editorials, Burns also points to growing relations between Yeshiva University and Israel toward the '60s and '70s. Indeed, in his attempt to cover over a half-century of news coverage of Israel in a single article, the writer swept through *The Commentator's* history, pointing out key articles, among other events, visits to Yeshiva's Main Center campus by Israeli Prime Ministers and chief rabbis; the development of AIPAC; and Dr. Belkin's plan to encourage Teacher's Institute students to study at Machon Gold's Jerusalem campus.

What we wish to take issue with is Burns's primary thesis, namely that "if there is an overriding trend to point out, it is how the news coverage increased as the years went by."

After reviewing *Commentator* editions from 1935-1948, it is clear that the above claim is untenable. Further, the author's charge that *Commentator* editors were guilty of "sparse reporting" of Israel pre-1948 is simply unfounded. Finally, before presenting the facts, we hope readers will understand our delay in formulating a proper response to this thesis as the present writer was still struggling with the sixth grade when *The Commentator* published the article.

Contrary to what is stated toward the opening of the 1998 *Commentator* piece, Yeshiva College journalists discussed the situation in Palestine long before the editorial entitled "Palestine – A Temporary Haven and Permanent Home" was published on page-two of the March 4, 1943 edition. In fact, one need look no further than the very first published issue of *The Commentator* published on March 1, 1935 to find student opinion about Palestine in the undergraduate newspaper. The inaugural Governing Board ran an editorial entitled "How Long Will Orthodoxy Slumber" blasting Orthodox organizations for being less involved

in fundraising for the Histadrut than their Conservative and Reform counterparts. "It is a fact," the piece claimed, "that there are in Palestine today organized groups which, while insisting on the establishment of an enlightened social order on which our friends in the Reform and Conservative Camps place so much emphasis, draw their inspiration from and remain steadfast to the principles of Orthodox Judaism."

In fact, before graduating, that inaugural Governing Board dedicated space to news on Palestine or Zionist groups on five front-pages and dedicated another five editorials to similar topics regarding Zionism. Moreover, as a final exclamation point for the 1935 Governing Board, the newspaper polled seniors on various issues. In that article, it was reported that all but five members of the senior class, at the time, planned to one day move to Palestine.

All in all, by March 4, 1943, coverage of Palestine appeared on the front-page of 21 editions and in 15 editorials. Further, aside from the annual Dean's Reception and "Charter Day" – a March 27 event sponsored regularly by alumni commemorating the day Yeshiva College received accreditation – the only yearly event covered consistently by *The Commentator* was Balfour Day held every year on November 2.

One notices early on that while the earliest governing boards challenged many institutions inside and outside the Yeshiva community to support the Zionist effort, they refused to criticize the different streams of Zionism themselves. For example, several '30s editorials demanded that Orthodox organizations take greater roles in supporting Jews in Palestine, if for no other reason than to increase religious observance in the Holy Land. However, nowhere could we find an editorial where *The Commentator's* editors openly took issue with various ideological strands of Zionism. In this way, Yeshiva College's newspaper took a very open view of all Zionist cliques, as each contributed in some way to the in-bringing of the exiles. Any Zionism, it would seem to these students, was good Zionism.

Vehement criticism of branches of Orthodoxy, on the other hand, was far from untouchable. During those years, the most scathing criticism on the subject was reserved for the more right-wing groups of American Orthodoxy. At the end of the 1936 academic year, the May 6 issue of *The Commentator* included an editorial decrying the decision of the Agudath Harabonim to refuse participation in that year's World Jewish Congress on the grounds that its involvement in a nondenominational conference would be a detriment to Orthodox Jewry. "By their indifference and even opposition to Zionism," the newspaper declared about the Agudath Harabonim, "they have already succeeded in causing the rebuild-

ing of Palestine in an irreligious spirit." Moreover, the editorial concluded with a striking criticism of the rabbinic organization's lack of presence in American Jewish society. "Such problems do not exist for people whose minds have been hibernating among the petty questions of the Polish village of last century."

Indeed, the information provided in Burns's article is incomplete if not spurious.\*\*

Despite the high volume of coverage in *The Commentator's* pages from the time of its inception, the newspaper's diligence in reporting on Zionism was at an all-time high in the months leading up to Israel's establishment. What is more, during this later period, the newspaper continued its uncompromising sup-

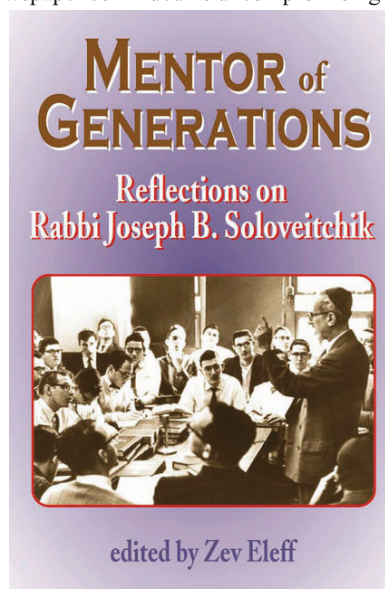
state is rapidly approaching reality. The eyes of the world are focused on Eretz Yisroel to see what sort of edifice the nation which gave the world the Ten Commandments will raise. We must show that the people of the Book can put the ideals of that Book into practice ... Every Yeshiva boy, every Jew who is not a member of a Zionist organization should join one immediately, as it is through such groups that our aid will be sought ... We are indeed fortunate to have lived to see the foundations set up for the embryonic state. Perhaps this time our age-old cry of "next year in Jerusalem" will be fulfilled."

A few issues later, in the January 15, 1948 edition, sensing that independence was near, the student journalists made an unusually big deal of Yeshiva College participants at Rutgers University's Model U.N. who, by representing the Dominican Republic, helped bring aid to Israel in the role-playing game. In a few editions later, *The Commentator* printed a banner headline reading: "Dr. Soloveitchik Asks Palestine Aid." In the article, the newspaper reported that Rabbi Soloveitchik keynoted the Yeshiva University Student Drive for New Palestine Settlements and announced the Drive's goal to raise \$15,000.

Articulating the importance of a Jewish state, the Rav was quoted stating that "the number of religious colonists will decide the future of Palestine rather than any political triumphs. The extant of the heaven over our heads will correspond with the land under our feet."

In addition, the Rav – who believed that "Yeshiva students must form the backbone of a religious pioneering movement" – stressed that although "Orthodoxy may not have a big share in the new state yet Torah will be fruitful in Palestine. Religious Jews will be able to live better in a Palestine ruled by Hashomer Hatzair than in an American Jewish ghetto like Williamsberg."

Of course, the newspaper did not limit itself to drawing its readers' attention to Israel's financial concerns. Thus, following the newspaper's history during this time, it would be remiss of any study of Yeshiva's study body during this time period if we did not make mention of *The Commentator's* stirring issue dated February 19, 1948. Before publication, Yeshiva students got word that Moshe Pearlstein, a member of the close-knit Yeshiva College class of '46, had perished in battle. Shortly after graduation, Pearlstein made aliyah and enlisted in the Haganah. Eulogizing their friend, the newspaper recalled that "Moshe always went out of his way to be a friend to all those he knew and this cordial spirit was what endeared him most to us. Arab bullets," they concluded, "cannot erase him from our minds and memories of his years as our schoolmate will never escape us."



port of all factions of Zionism. One example of the newsmen's clear support is seen in a May 22, 1947 editorial entitled "U.N. Aftermath." In the piece, the Governing Board identified and lashed out at the Jews' enemies saying that "the Arabs, by stupid political maneuvering, damaged their own case. They monopolized the floor. They threatened to boycott the session; they threatened war." Not missing a chance to criticize local opponents, the editors remarked that "the American positions can be best portrayed as a rape of justice" and ripped members of the American Agudah who "knew they had little or no hope of recognition, but sold their birthright for a hash of publicity."

Then in the following academic year, streaming across the front-page of the December 11, 1947 edition, a headline read "Yeshiva Hails Birth of Jewish State; Assemblies Celebrations Mark Event." In a dramatic and historic event, the United Nations approved partition of the Mandate of Palestine into the states, one Jewish and another Arab. Inside that issue, the editors printed two related editorials. Most significant is their following prideful sentiment: "The dream of a Jewish



Accompanying the editorial was a letter Pearlstein had sent to his parents shortly before they received the tragic news about their son. Originally written in Hebrew, the editors obtained it and had it translated into English. Just as *The Commentator* related to its readership 60 years ago, Pearlstein's letter "acts as the finest tribute to the type of man he was." Believing that Pearlstein's words carry with it the power it had many years ago, we have reproduced the letter in full and unchanged from its original at the end of this article.

A few more articles and editorials dealing with U.N. and White House politics graced *The Commentator's* pages over the next few months. Then, finally, it happened.

Without reserving any emotion, the May 20, 1948 issue of *The Commentator* hit stands announcing "Yeshiva Rejoices At Birth of Israel; Zionists Applaud Historic Occasion." In addition to reporting on a large rally held days earlier (May 16) "by all branches of the Zionist organizations" at Madison Square Garden, the newspaper's layout team inserted a copy of Israel's Declaration of Independence in the center of the front-page surrounded by a watermark of a map of Israel.

Aside from including remarks made by Yeshiva President Samuel Belkin, Teacher's Institute Dean Pinkhos Churgin and YC Dean Moses L. Isaacs, the young writers took the opportunity to reflect in a simply titled editorial "State of Israel." The piece began profoundly: "The thousand years of waiting have at long last ended. The land of Israel, built with the blood, sweat, tears and lives of countless martyrs who so longed for that land, now exists in the cradle of our religion's birth. Our persecuted and down-trodden shall flock to Zion to build anew the glory of old. At this solemn moment, we look toward the East with new hope and faith, expressing fervent thanks that our generation has been blessed with the fruition of our forefathers' prayers."

Concluding with as much passion as the editorial began, they wrote: "The members of our nation who are scattered over the four corners of the earth now have a champion, somebody to speak up for their rights, somebody to protect them against all oppressors, somebody to welcome them when they are not wanted elsewhere. They now have a defendant whose support will be constant, whose backing will not depend on bribes, oil, or politics."

Over the next year, the student newspapermen devoted ample space to the early travails of the State. On September 30, 1948, an editorial entitled "Assassination Aftermath" addressed the assassination of the Count of Wisborg Folke Bernadotte. The United Nations Security Council believed that the Swedish diplomat, who famously negotiated the release of 15,000 prisoners of Nazi concentration camps, would help broker peace between Jews and Arabs. Unfortunately, the members of the Stern Gang who ambushed Bernadotte's motorcade on September 17 disagreed. Like most columnists, *The Commentator* condemned the terrorist attack. "The murder of Count Bernadotte cannot be condoned," the editors repudiated in the editorial.

"It was the irresponsible and senseless act of an extremist fringe of an extremist organization. It is to be regretted because murder as such is wrong, no matter what the circumstances."

Soon thereafter, a December 30, 1948 editorial criticized Arthur Koestler's *New York Times* column calling for a secularized Israel to create "a system of faith and cosmopolitan ethics freed from all racial presumption and national exclusivity." Championing Religious Zionism, *The Commentator* came to the rescue asserting that for the Jewish people, nationhood "refers to bonds of a different type, bonds of common culture, history, development, ideals and – if it may be so termed – of Messianic nationalism."

Finally, on May 12, 1949, on the occasion of the first observed Yom Haatzmaut, *The Commentator*, in elegant Hebrew draped "*Techi u-tifrach Midinat Yisrael*" across its front-page. Also in Hebrew, that generation of editors proclaimed their historical position as a nexus between the "final generation of servitude" and the "first generation of redemption."

If anything is to be concluded from *The Commentator's* coverage of the Zionist efforts and the eventual establishment of the State of Israel, it is renewed cognizance of the student body's disenchantment with the Land in more recent years. Recent treatment of Israel "news" in Yeshiva's undergraduate newspapers has been ceremonial; almost like a review of news for the sake of logging a record of our Zionist conviction on campus. Although recent policies taken against reporting on Israel news is the responsibility of recent governing boards, their common rationale \*\*\*this is in no small part to the accessibility of Israel news on the Internet. While *The Observer* has certainly made more space for student op-eds on Israel, *The Commentator*, in the last few volumes, has not (for more on this see Gadi Dotz's "On the Absence of Intellection Honesty" in *The Commentator's* September 11, 2006 edition).

Perhaps this trend is captured best in Yeshiva Chancellor Norman Lamm's recently printed reference to "the Jewish experiment which has become the tragedy that is Israel." We do not contend to have an answer. With University administrators currently taking a fresh look at YU's place in Israel, others will surely offer their own opinions on the matter.

As for Burns's decade-old piece, that the data supporting his thesis is at best flawed, his final point rings true. "Nowhere," Burns writes with utmost confidence, "is there a greater indication of the strong link between Yeshiva University and Israel than through the pages of Yeshiva University's undergraduate newspaper, *The Commentator*."

Upon thorough analysis, we agree, fully.

*Techi u-tifrach Midinat Yisrael.*

*Zev Eleff is the Editor-in-Chief of the YU Commentator*

## LAST LETTER FROM MOSHE PEARLSTEIN

I don't know how you are receiving the news from Palestine these days. From the letters I've received from my friends and from the headlines of the "Herald Tribune" that I've seen, I got the impression that in New York they suppose the situation here is to be bad.

From the point of view of encounters between Jews and Arab gangs, it is clear that the Yishuv knows well how to defend itself. The truth is that a much greater number of Arabs have been killed. But the British don't tell about that, because they want to incite the terrorists and they have no desire to frighten them. When the Arabs assaulted part of Tel Aviv, tens of the attackers fell. In the Old City, too, they received a blow. Everywhere the Arabs attacked, the men of Haganah engaged in punitive action. All this in spite of the British, who do not only not aid in the maintenance of order but also harass Haganah men.

In recent weeks I have been on guard duty in the environs of Jerusalem and in different sections of the city itself. Most of the time I have been with Americans – among them Carmi and Aryeh. Understandably it has been difficult to study in recent days, even when I've been free from duty. Now there is a new schedule, according to which we shall study for a fortnight and guard for a fortnight. The natural science lectures and laboratories were halted and I shall leave for two weeks of guard duty. Should the situation continue for a long time, I don't expect to waste any time. Most of the hours on duty, we're free, though we are forbidden to leave the post. So I read and write. Now, if I find a companion, I'd like to study Talmud.

I am very happy that I have the privilege of living in Palestine today. I don't think I could suffer living in the United States in crucial days such as these. I feel this strongly when I receive letters from my friends in the United States.

About the attitude toward Jews here, I've met Englishmen filled with respect for Haganah: the Arabs generally are wary. I've heard from many friends who traveled on convoys from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem how the Arabs fled on seeing buses and trucks approaching with armed Jews on them. Sometimes I wonder: what if there was no Haganah defense? Or on the contrary: what if the Jews of Europe had known how to defend themselves?

Mother wrote about the U.J.A. committee being sent to Palestine to examine defense problems. It is easy to understand the need for money today, if one just calculates the thousands who have been mobilized who must have their needs met.

With hope for days of peace and upbuilding and with love,  
Your son,

Moshe

## A VISIT TO HAR HA-BAYIT BY SIMEON BOTWINICK

On Monday, the 4<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, 5767 (the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 2007) I was in a group of Har-etzion students led by Rav Yitzchak Levi that had the opportunity to visit Har ha-Bayit. This was no haphazard, trip-on-a-whim; we had prepared by learning the relevant *halakhot* with Rav Yitzchak Levi, by discussing the history of the site and the situation today, and by *toveling* the day before and the day of in a Mikvah. But for all the preparation we did, I can't say I was prepared.

The visit triggered in me an overwhelming rush of conflicting feelings. As we ascended the wooden ramp to Har ha-Bayit, looking down on people praying at the Kotel, it finally hit me. We were going: to the place, the place we had faced during *shaharis* that very morning back at yeshiva, the center of the Jewish nation, the place Jews for centuries visited on the *shalosh regalim*, one of which was only two days away. The feeling of return, of visiting the place where the Jewish people intrinsically *belong* was overpowering.

And yet, though my eyes wanted to see all that my heart knew they should see, they instead were faced with the present reality. I knew Har ha-Bayit wasn't in Jewish control, but actually *seeing* it made the *hurban* so much more tangible. It's one thing to know that all we have is the Kotel; it's something entirely different to see what we could have, sitting just beyond.

The trip was a mix of exhilaration at seeing Rav Yitzchak Levi point out exactly where the Kodosh ha-Kedoshim stood, and anguish at seeing a mosque sitting in its place. The trip was a mix of joy at being able to visit the site that Jewish prayers for centuries have been directed towards, and deep sadness at having to hide and disguise our prayers behind hands to protect ourselves. It was a mix of heartfelt righteousness at saying the *shir shel yom* looking at the place where the Leviim said it, and a feeling of injustice at seeing tourists standing there, laughing and taking pictures.

We were unable to take *siddurim*, pray openly, or bow, and we had guards watching over us the entire time to ensure we wouldn't try to do so. Unquestionably, things are not as they should be. However, the fact remains, we are a step closer than we have been for centuries. We may have been severely restricted, but we did visit Har ha-Bayit, the source of our nation's dreams and longings. And when we exited the area, when we all tore our shirts and danced in a circle, singing "*bimhera beyameinu she-yi-baneh*," it was with real tears in my eyes that I, for the first time, realized how important this place is to me.

*Simeon Botwinick is a Sophomore at YC, majoring in English*



## THE (ALMOST) FINAL BOARDING CALL

BY JAIMIE FOGEL

I am not a success story yet. Mine is a story fraught with trepidation, with the unknown and the undiscovered. After years of mental conditioning and preparation, the moment is quickly transforming from a far-off future endeavor into a present reality. Will the reality be as great as the dream? Certainly not, my rational mind responds, but then again, in the past few years I have garnered a greater appreciation for realities. Dreaming is step one, but dreams are intangible until *realized* and that brings me to where I am today: less than two months away from my *aliyah*, a move which will carry me—alone—across six thousand miles, far away from my family and friends. Moving to fulfill a dream most of the world views as insane—to live the rest of my life in a bona fide war zone, smack in the middle of its often depressing, post-national existence.

The attack on Mercaz ha-Rav made it all real. I kept imagining myself six months from then, answering a frantic call from my mother wanting to make sure that I and all I knew were alright. Get ready, I told myself on that awful Thursday afternoon, because this will be an ever-present element in your daily existence. We may not want to admit it, but no matter how sorrowful one feels for those suffering in Israel, we are still somewhat grateful to be able to step onto the curb of 34<sup>th</sup> and Lexington or 185<sup>th</sup> and Amsterdam where the buses are still running as scheduled and the kids are still playing rowdily in the schoolyard. But this time, after receiving the text message with the tragic news, the distance was almost entirely swallowed. After all, the homeland of the Jewish people—no—*my home* had been attacked. The friends of children I will soon know, the parents of a population of which I will soon be a permanent part were screaming in pain. That Thursday, Israel stopped being the “Jewish homeland” and became my house. My backyard. My yeshiva. No more escaping outside into the normalcy of Manhattan. No more departure dates. That Thursday I finally understood that I had bought a one-way ticket home.

One of the most startling responses I received upon revealing my future plans was from an old high school classmate with whom I had lost touch. I ran into her outside the Stern building and in the course of friendly conversation she asked me about my post-college plans and I told her about the upcoming *aliyah*. Her eyes widened in shock as she replied, “Wow! That’s, well, that’s fulfilling a life dream. Good for you!” I calmly responded, “Well, it’s the first step of a larger dream, yes.” I certainly wouldn’t call making *aliyah* my ‘life dream’ because if this were my life’s fulfillment, that would imply that I’ve reached my apex at twenty-two—quite a disturbing

thought. No, this is the first stage in a larger vision for a life steeped in service of God and service of the Jewish people in a state I like to call “an opportunity but not a promise.” For me, there is no more singing “*le-shanah habah be-Yerushalayim*” at the Pesah seder and *motsei* Yom Kippur wondering when I’ll really mean it; no more voluntary exiles in Miami and Long Island; no more desperation and longing to be anywhere but here.

Standing on the threshold of a life-altering decision which will drag me across vast oceans and which will make me a foreigner in a land I have always called my “home,” is to be



present in a complex reality. Coupled with fears, doubts and occasional loneliness are thoughts, hopes and anticipation for the start of what I hope to be a fulfilling life. The short period of irrational fear during which I couldn’t listen to the Israeli music on my iPod or eat any Israeli foods, has been replaced by a degree of calm and excitement which has come as a result of beginning to realize a dream.

It is finally happening. It’s happening because I can’t imagine beginning the next stage of my life somewhere else; because I can’t imagine falling in love, raising a family or growing old anywhere but in the place God told me to live. As the author Daniel Gordis puts it, “For after all, if there’s a place in this world that can make you cry, isn’t that where you ought to be?” If there is place that can move and stir my inner being on a morning jog through its green hills; in a *makolet* buying toilet paper that specifies which Shabbat desecrations I will not commit by purchasing it; when I wake up in the morning happy because I live in the land I know I’m supposed to call home—how could I choose any differently?

*Jaimie Fogel is a Senior at SCW, majoring in Judaic Studies and Creative Writing*

## THE FUTURE OF THE ZIONIST ENTERPRISE: LET’S NOT WORRY ABOUT THE WRONG THINGS!

BY NOAH CHESSES

I recently heard a prominent Modern Orthodox rabbi remark that “maybe the Satmar Rebbe was correct after all; maybe the State of Israel is not the beginning of the flowering of our redemption.” These words made me shiver. I can understand why the Modern Orthodox community’s attitude toward the state of Israel is being tested. The problems in Israel are many and great: failed leadership, increased violence, poor education, a growing non-Jewish population, abandoned immigrant populations, increased awareness of the external threats posed by Iran and other terrorist regimes, and an uninspired vision for the nation’s future (a partial list). *I cannot understand despair*. The very fact that our community could entertain throwing in the towel is an absurdity.

The purpose of this article is to identify the origin of this poisonous, yet increasingly popular, outlook in the Modern Orthodox community, and then to suggest how we can redirect our attention elsewhere. I will argue that we cannot let our broad worries lead to pessimism and despair, and should instead focus on more positive, constructive, and important matters. It’s a matter of attitude and focus.

In my work with Bnei Akiva and the Moshava camps over the past few years, I have heard many *chanichim* report that they are afraid for Israel because of the sudden realization that it has Iran and Hamas knocking on its doorstep. Knowing that most kids do not read the papers, I have asked where this feeling of fear came from. The *chanichim* responded that their parents speak about the dreariness and hopelessness of the situation in Israel at their Shabbat tables. Their parents are worried about the doomsday picture that more and more reporters and journalists are painting.

It seems to me—from the remarks of the Modern Orthodox rabbi mentioned above and the sentiments of my *Chanichim*—that our confidence and idealism are being swallowed by our anxiety for Israel’s future. This must not be allowed to happen. Although we cannot directly blunt the threat itself, nor control our children’s resulting fear, we can control how we deal with that fear. I believe that instead of dwelling on that fear, we should channel most of our time and energy towards dealing with domestic issues that we can make a significant impact on.

In the Purim story, when the decree of destruction was declared, Ester directed the people to look inwards, to cultivate a deeper sense of commitment and community, not to combat the external forces of Amalek. Adopting this paradigm, at least partially, will service the fu-

ture of Israel better than any platform of fear and anxiety. Especially when it comes to teaching and inspiring the next generation of American youth, educating towards the importance of building a strong community, coupled with a healthy dose of idealism, will be a much wiser recipe.

Practically, this means that our community needs to speak less about the possibility that Iran is preparing itself to destroy the state of Israel and more about a vision for Israel as a strong and competent Jewish state. We need to acknowledge our absolute uniqueness as Jews and stop worrying about “normalizing” ourselves to the standards of other European countries. At this juncture in Israel’s history, nothing is clearer than that the old biblical truth that “Israel dwells alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Bamidbar 23:9). The Jewish people’s long history is one of existential oddity and individuality. In other words, we need to build from an internalized awareness of who we are, from the inside-out, instead of from the outside-in.

When commemorating 60 years of statehood this Yom Ha’atzmaut, we will, as individuals and communities, inevitably evaluate the current status of Israel. Let us not get bogged down with heavy questions like ‘will Israel still be around in 60 years from now?’ ‘Will Iran and Hamas be successful in their plans?’ Worrying about these questions is only counterproductive to the future of our homeland.

Instead let us try to answer smaller but I believe more important questions such as, ‘where is Israeli culture headed?’ ‘How can the increasing gap between the rich and the poor be decreased?’ ‘How can immigrant communities (like the Ethiopians and Russians) be better integrated into Israeli society?’ ‘Can the internal conflict over Jewish identity be solved or simply managed?’ ‘How can the flair of Religious Zionism be rekindled?’ ‘How can we cultivate stronger religious and political leaders?’ ‘How can we be so deaf to the deafening cries of the Sderot community?’

The answers to these questions are complex, confusing, and contentious, but that is no excuse for ignoring them. A stronger effort must be made to formulate good answers and to implement them. As the young, tradition-loving Zionists, this task rests heavily upon our shoulders.

*Noah Cheses is a Staff Writer for Kol Hamevasser*





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