



KOL HAMEVASER

The Jewish Thought Magazine
of the Yeshiva University Student Body



Spirituality: Teshuvah and Tefillah

Volume II, Issue 1

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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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UPCOMING ISSUE

IN THE SPIRIT OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL SEASON AND IN ADVANCE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, THE UPCOMING EDITION OF KOL HAMEVASER WILL BE ON THE TOPIC OF POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP. THE TOPIC BURGEONS WITH POTENTIAL, SO GET READY TO WRITE, READ, AND EXPLORE ALL ABOUT JEWS, POLITICS, AND LEADERSHIP.

THINK: KING SOLOMON, THE ISRAEL LOBBY, JEWISH SOVEREIGNTY, EXILARCHS, REBBETSINS, COVENANT AND SOCIAL CONTRACT, TZIPI LIVNI, JEWISH NON-PROFITS, SERARAH, HENRY KISSINGER, THE REBBE, VA'AD ARBA ARATSOT, AND MUCH MORE!

THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS OCTOBER 12, 2008.

THE CURRENT EDITORS OF KOL HAMEVASER WOULD LIKE TO THANK AND APPLAUD OUR OUTGOING EDITORS, DAVID LASHER AND MATTAN ERDER, AS WELL AS GILAH KLETENIK AND SEFI LERNER FOR THEIR EFFORTS TOWARDS THE PHENOMENAL SUCCESS OF KOL HAMEVASER'S INAUGURAL YEAR. A FINE JOB INDEED.

SPECIAL THANKS GO ALSO TO ZEV ELEFF FOR HIS VISION, INITIATIVE, AND PATIENT PRACTICAL GUIDANCE.

THIS MAGAZINE CONTAINS WORDS OF TORAH.
PLEASE TREAT IT WITH PROPER RESPECT.

On Selihot

BY: Alex Ozar

Selihot, for many of us, is just plain hard. Forfeiting sleep to muddle and mumble through obscure and arcane liturgical poetry can be frustrating. Even when we manage to somehow penetrate the daunting, fortress-like language barrier, we nonetheless feel confounded, lost in a sea of allusions and poetic flourish. We know when to briskly mumble through the text and when to raise our voices in a tone of passionate pleading, but can this be genuine religious expression? We can grasp the broader themes of *selihot*, such as penitence, submissiveness, and our desperate need for God's mercy, but maintaining concentration on such ideas can be difficult; the boisterous chatter of our inner lives only begrudgingly affords us any respite. Surely though, whether we understand or feel what we say, or we are intently contemplating last night's baseball game, we will dutifully recite *selihot*. And surely, though it may be grossly insufficient, and a senselessly wasted opportunity for *deveikut*, it will not be meaningless; it can't be. It may be the case that, "Uttering words in the direction of another person without any awareness of what one is doing is meaningless, not because it fails to rise to the authenticity of the Buberian I-thou dialogue, but because it is simply not an act of communication."ⁱ It may be that intent-less chanting of liturgy is "a gibbering muddle"ⁱⁱ, but it nonetheless carries real religious value. But where precisely is this value to be found?

There are multiple approaches to this question, but we will focus on a line of thought originating from a most unlikely duo of Jewish thinkers: the Hazon Ish and Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Berkovits. Rambam writes, "Any prayer devoid of proper intention is no prayer, and if one prays without intention, one must pray again."ⁱⁱⁱ And in the next paragraph, "What is meant by 'intention?' One must clear his heart of all thoughts and view himself as if he were standing before the divine presence." Everybody knows Rav Hayyim's claim that the Rambam is here referring not to the demand that one concentrate on the meaning of the prayer, as this is only required for the initial three blessings of the *Amidah*. Rather, the

Rambam is speaking of a more fundamental form of *kavvanah*, one that is essential for all *tefillah*: the basic awareness that one is standing before God. Without such awareness, claims Rav Hayyim, *tefillah* is not *tefillah* at all; it is *mit'asek*, or totally intention-less activity, which has no significance. Therefore, if one prays without this awareness, the Rambam rules that he is required to pray again.

The Hazon Ish objects to Rav Hayyim's



analysis on a number of grounds. Of interest to us though is the following line: "For any man who stands to pray, it is not feasible to speak of totally intention-less activity, as he will always have some faint knowledge that this is prayer before God, only he is not cognizant of it." Apparently, the Hazon Ish felt that the Rambam could not have spoken of totally intention-less prayer, because such prayer is at least a virtual, or perhaps even real, impossibility. No one can pray without some awareness of God's presence. How are we to understand this rather bold empirical claim? Was the Hazon Ish so naively optimistic that he was convinced that no man was so low as to be capable of prayer without turning his mind to God at all? Obviously not. The Hazon Ish, as he says explicitly, was not referring to conscious awareness. The awareness the Hazon Ish says we all have is unconscious, subliminal. Fair enough, but of what use is an "awareness" of which we are unaware?

Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, in his essay en-

titled "Jewish Law and Morality," articulates a theory of *mitsvah* observance of direct relevance to our inquiry. Berkovits struggles with the following question: What moral or religious meaning can there be in rote physical actions? One has fulfilled his obligation to wear *tefillin* whether it affects his soul or not, and one is absolved of his duty to pray, according to all opinions, even if he prays with no cognizance of the prayer's meaning. What is the

utility in such obligations? Berkovits explains that the very fact of our bodies behaving in the manner prescribed by a *mitzvah*, even if our minds are totally unengaged, means that our bodies are functioning with an "awareness" of God and His will. Why do our arms wrap the strands of our *tefillin* around our arms? Yes, in an immediate sense, it may be mere habit. But ultimately, is not due to the command of God? In performing the rote physical action of a *mitzvah*, our bodies are responding to and interacting with a higher order, whether we know it or not. "The religious system of Judaism, which disciplines the Jew in every situation all through life, establishes habitual patterns of physical reaction and conduct, which testify to an acute physical "awareness" of and order of reality that is not of the body."^{iv} And as if he were speaking to us, "People who pray regularly and on all the occasions prescribed by religious law at times find that their minds have wandered far from the meaning of the prayer. Yet their lips – apparently guided unconsciously – continue to form the words automat-

ically. Such, of course, is not the ideal form of prayer; at the same time, it is no small achievement to have taught the lips to pray on their own, without the conscious participation of the heart and mind."^v If our goal is to maximize the presence of God in our lives and world, then having our bodies act in consonance with Godliness is surely a significant step in the right direction.

When we recite *selihot*, and whenever we pray, even if our hearts and minds have regrettably wandered far from *tefillah*, the very fact of our limbs groggily carrying us to *shul*, our lips forming the prescribed sounds, and our voices rising as we chant the desperate plea of the *yud gimel middot*, is in itself invaluable. Whether we know it or not, our bodies are operating with that basic awareness of God of which the Hazon Ish spoke. We are through our bodies relating to God, and are part of his mission. Optimal, authentic prayer? Unfortunately not. Meaningful, valuable worship nonetheless? Certainly.

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ⁱ R. Shalom Carmy, "Eliezer Berkovits' Challenge to Contemporary Orthodoxy", in *The Torah U-Madda Journal* (Volume 12), Yeshiva University, 2004. 200

ⁱⁱ Rabbi Shalom Carmy, *Without Intelligence, Whence Prayer?*, in *Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law* (The Orthodox Forum Series), ed. Adam Mintz and Lawrence Schiffman, Mike Scharf Publication Trust of Yeshiva University, 2005. 459

ⁱⁱⁱ Rambam, *Hilkhot Tefillah* 4:15

^{iv} R. Dr. Eliezer Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism*, ed. David Hazony, Jerusalem, The Shalem Center, 2002. 26.

^v Ibid.

On Optimism and Freedom: A Preface to R. Kook's *Orot ha-Teshuvah*

BY: Rabbi Shalom Carmy

Editor's Note: This article was originally published in Morasha: The Journal of Religious Zionism (No. 4) by Dor Hemshech, the Young Leadership and Volunteer Projects Department of the World Zionist Organization. It has been reprinted here with permission.

Orot ha-Teshuvah is one of Rabbi Kook's best loved works. Unlike many of his other lyrical-mystical writings it has a firm location in a popular genre, the *musar sefer*, and is not without a *sitz in leben*, as it were, serving as a "natural" focus of meditation during the month of Elul. It differs, however, in its basic orientation from the conventional *musar sefer*, in large part because it describes very fully the process of repentance but contains relatively few specific prescriptions. This, and several other remarkable themes, lend it a distinctive place in our ethical literature. An examination of some of them may make *Orot ha-Teshuvah* more accessible, as well as offering a convenient point of entry to the rich, inspiring, and challenging Kookian oeuvre as a whole.

The kind of ethical treatise that is commonly proffered to the yeshiva student usually falls into one of two groups. The first emphasizes the horror and variety of sin, prescribing the regimen and reinforcement needed to escape from its coils (e.g. Rabbeinu Yonah Gironi's *Shaarei Teshuvah*). The other erects a chain of ascending stages (*madregot*) that the individual must traverse, rung upon rung, with the ultimate destination being the top of the spiritual ladder (e.g., *Mesillat Yesharim* of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto). Whatever the virtues of the classical works belonging to each group, each has its practical limitations.

The problem with the sin-oriented treatise is that of motivation. To dwell primarily upon iniquity is to invite despair, to wallow in remorse instead of marching forward into the light of repentance. Many Jewish thinkers understood that the possibility of repentance is a postulate of moral reason: if man cannot repent, then the evil in man is unredeemable.ⁱ Psychologically, however, this metaphysical

postulate is insufficient. The escape from the despair often requires an invitation to repentance vivid enough to liberate man from the sadness, the diminution of being, that is sin. Now Rabbi Kook is as far from "I'm OK, you're OK" psychotherapy as Kierkegaard is from Phil Donahue: he knows all about the revulsion of the sinner from the sin, as witness his poem *Teshuva*, which is one of the most powerful evocations of remorse that I know.ⁱⁱ Yet he is the outstanding spokesman of the corrective to this approach: "At the very basis must come the general explanation of the assuredness of repentance, and the tranquility



and joyous intensity in which the soul of every man is accoutered, whose soul is illuminated in the light of repentance...ⁱⁱⁱ

Some would maintain that the "staircase to perfection" format avoids the pitfall of psychological pessimism to which the first is liable. The architecture of *madregot*, however, is not without its own difficulties. Human beings rarely climb from one rung to the next; stepladder phenomenology is neater than the human experience it means to guide. And it precipitates a perplexity that also contains a measure of despair: the reader remains in the back of the classroom, rehearsing the first les-

son without feeling quite confident enough to move on. Rabbi Kook is too all-embracing a thinker to question the characterizations yielded by this literature. He does eliminate the artificial, and potentially frustrating, results of the literature by asserting that the concept of stages is, to a certain degree, irrelevant to the act of repentance:

If it appears to him that the character [*middah*] that is called forth by reading books on ethical matters and on the fear of God, is not pertinent to him, let him study and investigate what his character indeed is and let him

become strong and courageous in specifying his essential character; but let him also not neglect the arousal through the books, although his grasp of those matters that are not pertinent to himself is very small...

One should not be exacting in repentance as regards gradation, as one would be with respect to the initial rightness of acts, for it is generally necessary to leap over several stages, in order to return to the place which they occupied before falling.^{iv}

Throughout his discussion, Rabbi Kook gives repentance a welcoming visage. Again and again he stresses that every gesture of repentance, however fleeting and ephemeral, has value: "Every thought of repentance must leave him with greater joy and satisfaction with himself than before. How much more so when the thought has already become an assent to repentance."^v Rabbi Kook extends his welcoming stance towards beginning *ba'alei teshuvah* by even modifying (apparently)^{vi} the halachic principle that atonement for offenses against one's fellow man can be achieved only after reconciliation with the victim(s): "If he discovers in himself sins against his neighbor that he is too weak to mend, let him not despair completely...for the sins towards God which he has repented have been forgiven, and therefore one may judge that those remaining parts that he did not yet mend are absorbed in the majority [*batel b'rov*], since many portions of his sins have been pardoned through repentance." Even those deficiencies which prevent repentance, according to accepted formulations, do not stand in the way of the highest type of penitence; Rabbi Kook is willing, curiously enough, to extend this notion to the list of disqualifications for prayer, as well.^{vii}

As noted above, Rabbi Kook delights in speaking of the joy connected with repentance. This joy does not imply a lessening of the element of fear and reverence before God, nor does Rabbi Kook deny that repentance is inseparable from sadness, depression, and despair. The pain of sin is the psychological equivalent of the pain that indicates physical illness; the suffering that is aroused with the consciousness of sin is like the pain that is the result of medical treatment. What is remarkable about Rabbi Kook's interpretation of the suffering engendered by repentance is his bold avowal that this enfeeblement of the human being, despite its spiritual value, is not healthy: "The enfeeblement of will, brought about by constant involvement in repentance, though it is a physical and psychological weakness which requires healing, nonetheless contains much that is delicate and noble that refines the spirit, and all sins are covered by love."^{viii}

When Rabbi Kook points to the sublimity of such suffering he is loyal to the exquisite sensitivities of religious experience. When he confesses its morbidity he is, in fact, pleading guilty to a major complaint of his irreligious peers against religious morality, i.e., that preoccupation with human fallibility is debilitating. Somewhat in a hasidic spirit, Rabbi Kook is willing to permit such considerations to intervene in the practical realm, as well: "From such ideas of sanctity and repentance, which lead to sadness, it is sometimes necessary to keep a distance, for the element of joy which is connected to the profoundness of the holy is greater than any other content of holiness and repentance. Therefore, when thoughts of fear and repentance come to him in a manner of sadness, let him get his mind away from them, until his thoughts become stable, and he will receive unto himself all the content of sanctity and the fear of Heaven in the manner of gladness and joy that is appropriate to the right of heart who serve God in verity."^{ix} Because the recoil from sin involves a contraction of the will, and this contraction affects the will to good and to purity as well as the will to evil, the full restoration of the penitent requires a rehabilitation of the joyful spirit. Hence the period of penitential contraction that reaches its culmination on Yom Kippur is followed by the joyous expansiveness of Sukkot.^x

3

We have referred to the psychological-halakhic strategies by which Rabbi Kook's seeks to transform repentance into an inviting experience. Rabbi Kook's optimism, however, draws upon more metaphysical sources, as well. While the standard understanding of *teshuvah* regards it as a return from sin, a turning away from the wrong path, it is rather, according to Rabbi Kook, a return to one's place and one's self. Ultimately this view derives from the cabalistic doctrine according to which the "Breaking of the Vessels" alienates creation from God; redemption is the return of the cosmos to the Creator. This principle has several implications in Rabbi Kook's thought:

1. Repentance is tied to eschatology. It is primarily for this reason that Rabbi Kook insists upon the indispensability, for a contemporary understanding of repentance, of a proper account for the return to Zion and all that flows from it. Repentance is thus in its highest fulfillment a communal, nay a cosmic performance. The goal of repentance is no less

than universal redemption.

2. If repentance is a process permeating the entire universe, then the healing with which it is concerned both psychic and somatic. This is linked to Rabbi Kook's affirmation of physical well-being as a component of redeemed healthy existence.

3. If repentance is a return to man's true nature, then it is natural to man; sin is nothing but a deviation from man's true nature. This implies an optimistic evaluation of the penitential process. Moreover, such a characterization offers a potent argument of the return of the wayward son to the traditional religious way of life. Turning to God is, in this conception, not a stark terrifying leap into a mysterious transcendent dimension, but a warm homecoming. In the early chapters of *Orot ha-Teshuvah* (those written before 1914),^{xi} Rabbi Kook generally speaks of repentance as a return of the Jewish people: "The first fundamental repentance is to become linked to the nation in its soul, and with this to mend all one's ways and actions in accord with the essential content in the soul of the nation."^{xii} In the post-1914 sections, "the primary repentance, which illuminates all darkness immediately, is that man return to himself, to the root of his soul, and immediately he will turn to God... This is true of the individual man, of an entire nation, of all humanity, of the mending of all being whose corruption always proceeds from self-oblivion."^{xiii}

How well Rabbi Kook understood the psychology of the second Aliyah pioneer and how well he succeeded in forging a common language with him are matters of dispute that need not detain us here.^{xiv} Suffice it to say that the most famous *ba'al teshuvah* of that generation, the fictional Yitzhak Kumer, returns to traditional Judaism, if we take his creator's word for it, for reasons not inconsistent with this analysis.

It would seem that Yitzhak resembles a tree whose roots are few, which every prevalent wind uproots and turns upon its face. But if we study his actions very well we shall see that this is not the case... Already when he dwelt among his friends in Jaffa and the settlements, he saw that the soul was seeking something that was kept from it. In those days he did not yet know that the soul sought. When was this revealed to him? Here too we must say: not at once was it revealed to him, but lit-

tle by little. At last he became like a tree with many roots, so that all the winds in the world could not budge him from his place.^{xv}

4

Within Jewish thought there exists a polarity between free will and divine providence.

The more you stress the ultimate power of God over the redemptive process of man and the world, the more you gravitate towards the pole of historical determinism. The more you eschew the eternal perspective in favor of a quotidian phenomenology, the more you will tend to think in terms of human responsibility.

This problem is one of the perennial knots of analytical metaphysics. Rabbi Kook too addresses it: his approach is interesting and, so far as I can tell, original.^{xvi} Repentance involves a return to a more ultimate, God's-eye view of the universe in general, hence acquiring a divine perspective on one's own actions specifically. By repenting, man places his actions within a larger context of God's actions; these acts are justified because all God's actions are good. It is only under the description that ascribes the actions to man himself, and not to God, that they warrant the predicate "evil."

What is interesting here is that we have, if I have followed the argument correctly, an original analytic solution to the problem of human responsibility, which proceeds from Rabbi Kook's mystical insight in to the relationship between, God, man and history. I suspect that the creative and disciplined study of Rabbi Kook's work will yield an almost inexhaustible treasury of insights, perceptions and suggestions. "From afar has God appeared to me." It is time to devote some of the energy expended on the symbolic exploitation of Rabbi Kook to the attentive appropriation his work.^{xvii}

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ⁱ E.g. Rambam, *Moreh Nevukhim* 3, 36; Albo *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* 4, 26.

ⁱⁱ Published in *Orot ha-Teshuvah*, 5th ed. (Jerusalem: Or Etzion, 1970), 127-28.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Iggerot ha-Re'iyah* (Jerusalem: Mossad

Harav Kook, 1962), 378.

^{iv} *Orot ha-Teshuvah* 9:4.

^v *Ibid.*, 7:6.

^{vi} But see the discussions of the question of pardon in R. Yitzhak Hutner, *Pahad Yitzhak* (New York: Gur Aryeh, 1971) on Yom Kippur, chaps. 2-3 *inter alia*.

^{vii} When I first published this article, I found Rabbi Kook's comment on prayer puzzling. Subsequently Rabbi Norman Lamm, in his *Halakhot va-Halikhhot* (Jerusalem 1990), chapter 6, discussed the halakhic status of the *kavanah* requirement for prayer. See his comments (pp. 72f) on R. Kook's preface to *Olat Re'iyah*, which shed light on our passage too.

^{viii} *Orot ha-Teshuvah*, 9:4.

^{ix} *Ibid.*, 14:1.

^x *Ibid.*, 7:10.

^{xi} I don't know whether there is any significance to this development. The datings are based on R. Zvi Yehuda Kook's preface to the first edition (5685).

^{xii} *Orot ha-Teshuvah* 4:7.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*, 15:10.

^{xiv} See my brief remarks in "Man of Love and Confrontation" (*Hadoar* [New York: Hadoar Association, 1986]).

^{xv} S. Y. Agnon, *Temol Shilshom* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1968). Of course, one must always consider the possibility that the famous Agnonian irony is at work, particularly when we read the additional explanation: "When the rational soul awoke in him he changed his opinions and with them his actions." As a description of the Yitzhak Kumer of the previous five hundred pages, this is either ironic or breathtakingly incredible.

^{xvi} *Orot ha-Teshuvah* 16:1 (in the additional not introduced in the 5th ed).

Levinas and the Possibility for Prayer

BY: Emmanuel Sanders

Introduction

One of the cornerstones of almost any religion is the idea of prayer, the ability to communicate with the Divine. Although the following discussion of prayer will take place within the context of Jewish prayer and within a Levinasian framework, we believe that the issues raised and answers offered will be of use within the wider religious spectrum. We will first raise a number of issues that arise when looking at prayer in view of the ethical nature of religion, and, in attempting to resolve these issues, the true nature of Levinasian prayer will be revealed.

The Problem

We will begin the discourse by asking a simple question: How is prayer possible? The question here is directed specifically at prayer of request, or petition, for reasons which will become apparent, and the entire line of questioning to follow shall be framed within a Levinasian understanding of the Jewish Tradition. We will explore this question in a number of ways, each one revealing a particular dilemma regarding the issue of prayer.

Of What Use is Prayer?

We start with an eye to He toward whom prayer is directed. God, at least within mainstream Jewish Tradition, is thought to be both omniscient and omnipotent. Additionally, many verses in the Bible attesting to God's justice and His mercy. For instance, "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth Me, that I am the LORD who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."^{vi} This verse affirms the ethical nature of God, at least vis-à-vis His relationship toward the world. This being the case, it is unclear as to why prayer of benediction is necessary within the Jewish faith. God, being omniscient, knows my needs and, in that He is an ethical God, will provide for them as He sees fit. Unlike a king of flesh and blood, God is unaffected by flattery and bribery, and my prayers should not be able to change that which God has already decided.

One may attempt to answer this question by taking the position that in truth prayer is not meant to affect the course of God's actions in any way, but is, in reality, simply a means for human beings to focus on those things which should be important in their lives. For instance, one of the prayers in the Eighteen Benedictions (*Shemoneh Esreh*) of the daily Jewish prayer

service begins with the words "Heal us, God," and is referred to commonly as *Refa'einu* ("Heal us"). One could claim that this instance of beseeching God to heal our ailments is merely a forum for the individual to reveal both to himself and to God that his concern is for the wellbeing of his fellow. In other words, such an approach would see prayer as a means to strengthening the supplicant's own ethical vigor, and not as an actual attempt to help the other for whom he prays.

A problem with this approach is that the simple text of this particular prayer, and of most prayers of petition, does not seem to indicate catharsis as the initial intent of the composers of the Eighteen Benedictions. If what was intended was catharsis, why were the prayers written in the form of requests? Another problem with the above approach is that it runs in contradiction to various stories in the Bible and in rabbinic literature where God in fact answers the prayers of His supplicants and seems to change that which He would have done because of their prayers. Two examples of this are Moses beseeching God to spare Israel by appealing to God's Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, following which God agrees to pardon Israelⁱⁱ, as well as Hannah pleading with God to grant her a child, which God does, in the form of Samuelⁱⁱⁱ. Both of these instances prove the power prayer exerts on the Divine Will.

Therefore, the question as to how prayer affects a God who "regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward"^{iv} must be answered.

With What Right Do We Pray?

The second dilemma which we face in understanding prayer is to be raised within the context of the religious and philosophical thought of the modern Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Religion, for Levinas, finds its manifestation through the ethical deed. In his essay, "A Religion for Adults," Levinas writes: "Ethics is an optic, such that everything I know of God and everything I can hear of his word and reasonably say to him must find an ethical expression. In the Holy Ark from which the voice of God is heard by Moses, there are only the tablets of the Law. The knowledge of God which we can have and which is expressed, according to Maimonides, in the form of negative attributes, receives a positive meaning from the moral 'God is merciful', which means: 'Be merciful like Him'. The attributes of God are not given in the indicative, but in the imperative. The knowledge of God comes to us like a commandment, like a *Mitzvah*."^v In short, everything pertaining to religion, both what is commanded to us by God and what we communicate back to God, pre-

sumably through prayer, must find its place in the realm of the ethical. We might say at first that such a position works well with the concept of Jewish Prayer. In fact, we might claim, the only prayer that is possible in the Jewish Tradition is one that has an ethical expression, namely a prayer for one's fellow.

This position, however, cannot be maintained when taking into account a number of facts. We must remember that Hannah's prayer in the Bible is a prayer for herself: she is barren and wants more than anything else in the world to have a child. It would be absurd, however, to claim that her prayer was unjustified when it is this very prayer which forms the basis for many of the halakhot surrounding the silent *Shemoneh Esreh*^{vi}. Additionally, we clearly find a number of prayers in the Jewish Tradition that are seemingly concerned with the supplicant's personal wellbeing alone. For instance, The Wayfarer's Prayer is a prayer in which a traveler beseeches God to aid him on his journey. We must understand how such prayers are in fact expressions of ethics if we are to see them as conforming to Levinas' conception of Judaism.

The Solution

In an essay entitled "Judaism and Kenosis," Levinas understands the concept of prayer in the Jewish Tradition through the lens of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin's magnum opus, *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* (*The Soul of Life*). R. Hayyim, who lived from 1759 until 1821, was a student of the famous Gaon of Vilna and, like his master, was a Kabbalist. In *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*, R. Hayyim, bringing various biblical, Talmudic and Kabbalistic sources, claims that in creating man in His image, God, in a sense, subjugates Himself to man's actions. God can interact with the world either to a greater or lesser extent depending on the nature of man's actions. If man's actions are just (in that he observes the *mitsvot*), then God can relate to the world in a just and righteous way and numerous worlds that exist on higher planes than our own are created or destroyed. If, however, man's actions are perverse and evil, God is, so to speak, prevented from interacting with the world and evil prevails, destroying the supernal worlds and limiting His influence on our own world.

Levinas finds, in the cosmology described above, a religion of ethics similar to his own conception of Judaism. In responding to this cosmology, he writes: "The meaning of human action is not reduced exclusively to its natural finality in the present circumstances of being; it is, in man (as 'myself,' always chosen), that which ensures being, elevation and holiness in the *other than myself*, in 'the worlds,' depend-

ing upon whether man is or is not in accordance with the will of God as written in the Torah. God associates with or withdraws from the worlds, depending upon human behavior. Man is answerable for the universe! Man is answerable for others...As if through that responsibility, which constitutes man's very identity, each one of us were similar to *Elo-him* (God)."^{vii} We see here that Levinas draws a number of similarities between his own conception of Judaism and that presented by *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*. Both define man in terms of his awesome responsibility to that which is other than himself; both define religiosity in terms of responsibility, not in terms of personal gain and reward. It would be sensible, then, to look toward R. Hayyim's understanding of prayer for guidance.

In presenting how R. Hayyim understands prayer, Levinas writes: "He (God) needs prayer, just as he needs those who are faithful to the Torah, in order to be able to associate himself with the (supernal) worlds, for their existence and elevation...The worlds cannot continue *to be*, simply by the virtue of their energy and their substance: they must be justified in their being, they need the ethical mediation of man, they need man and man's prayer, *which are for the others*...To pray signifies, for a 'myself', seeing to the salvation of others instead of – or before – oneself. True prayer, then, is never for oneself, is never for one's own needs."^{viii}

Now, we have an answer to the first issue raised above. Despite the fact that God is both omnipotent and all omniscient, He, in creating man in His image, allowed man, through prayer, a degree of control over His ability to relate to the world, thereby putting even greater ethical responsibility upon him. God is aware of deficiencies in the world and desires that they be alleviated, but He also desires human prayer to facilitate His intervention. When looked at in this way, prayer, at least for one's fellow man, is both possible and potent, and is not merely an ethical expression but an ethical act in that the prayer affects God's ability to aid one's fellow.

Though we have answered the question as to how prayer works, as well as how ethical prayer is possible, we have done so only as per prayer for another person. What of prayer that is primarily concerned with one's own needs, such as the Wayfarer's Prayer mentioned above? If religion is synonymous with ethical obligation, or obligation to another, what room is there for personal requests within the context of religious prayer? To answer this question, Levinas invokes Psalm 91, verse 15: "I (God) am with him (man) in suffering." From this verse, as well as from Isaiah 63:9, Levinas extrapolates that when man suffers, God also suf-

An Interview with Rabbi Hershel Reichman

BY: Ari Lamm

Editor's note: A full version of the interview with R. Reichman is available online at www.kolhamevaser.com.

Throughout the ages, various Jewish movements have attempted to address a perceived lack of spirituality within daily Jewish practice. Two of the most recent and popular have been the Musar Movement and hasidut. What does Rav Reichman see as the most important contributions of these movements, and how should students at YU relate to these movements, their works and their legacies?

Both movements have made a most important contribution of making people sensitive to, and giving them methods to attain, the spiritual side of Judaism. Personally, I go for *hasidut* much more than *musar*. I've never really had a good teacher of *musar*. Some people think it's amazing. I've always found that the *musar* side is very demanding – to use a *hasidic* phrase, *musar* is coming from the side of *din*. I never thought I could do it. But when I came into *hasidut*, I found it to be more on the *hesed* side. The *hesed* side is light, more optimistic, more joyous, involves more singing, so it's positive rather than negative, and that's why I chose it.

I might be wrong, but I think that in general that *musar* has become much more *hasidic* than it ever was. I think if you go today and hear a *musar* schmooze in a regular yeshivah where there's a regular *mashgi'ah* giving *musar*, very often he's using *hasidic* sources, like the *Sefat Emet*, the *Shem mi-Shemuel*, and other *hasidic* books that are well organized. And they also have moved from the somber, morose “*din*” into the optimistic, *hasidic* point of view. So it's harder today to distinguish between *musar* and *hasidut*, because they have merged. Call it whatever you want, *musar* or *hasidut*, but it's the bright, optimistic side which talks to me, and I think it talks to the general public today more than the strong demanding side.

A common complaint is that it is difficult, after the year(s) in Israel, to maintain the spiritual high felt during the year(s) in Israel. What recommendation would Rav Reichman have for students at YU who experience this?

It's a difficult question to solve. I personally think that you have to be very innovative. If you're going to wait for YU to do it, you're probably going to become very disappointed. For example, Rav Wolfson came last night (September 15, 2008), so a lot of the boys heard, for the first time, a great *hasidic* master talk in a way that was so inspiring and so uplifting. So what's going to happen next? If a boy says he's going to wait for the next time Rav Wolfson comes to get the same kind of inspiration, he's going to have to wait a very long time. But if you're innovative, you say, “Hey, Rav Wolfson really inspired me, and he has a *shul* in Brooklyn where I hear there's a lot of inspiration every Shabbat. I'm going to make it my business to go once or twice a month.” You have to be innovative. You could go to Israel during vacations. For someone in YU, spending two months a year in Israel would be a tremendous dose of maintenance.

Now, within YU itself, which is where people are spending almost all of their time, you have to look for those pockets, those places within YU, which can help you maintain and climb the ladder to more *avodat Hashem*. The first place is the *beit midrash*. A student has to maximize his time in the *beit midrash*. He has to. It's spiritual survival. Minimizing his time in the *beit midrash* means shooting himself in the leg. If he maximizes it, he can really succeed. That includes everything he has to do in the morning, the whole nine yards, and then going at night to the *beit midrash*. That's voluntary, but he can do it, he has to. If he says, “My schedule doesn't allow me,” then he should change his schedule. I don't believe in the sixteen or seventeen credit schedule. I myself took six years to go through college.

So should everyone stay for a fifth year?

Absolutely. Everybody should take the

fifth year. You should take nine credits in the college, and three credits of *shiur*. Or if you've already maxed out with your Jewish Studies, take twelve credits in the college. You should never take more than 12 credits of secular courses. This way, you'll have the time to go to the *beit midrash* at night. So I think going outside YU to find spiritual inspiration is a great thing, but since very few boys do that, you must be in the *beit midrash*. That's the first thing.

The second thing in YU is to attach yourself to a *rebbe*. The *rebbe* spends basically his whole day immersed in Torah and *avodat Hashem*; he's not studying secular courses. He is a very holy person compared to the average student, because of how he spends his day. So if a *talmid* attaches himself to a *rebbe*, it rubs off. When I was here, I attached myself to Rabbi Soloveitchik, the Rav. Whatever he did for himself on me as a student. There's nothing wrong with a big candle lighting a small candle.

So I think that the disaster and the failures come from the boys who violate these two things. They don't maximize the *beit midrash*, and they don't have a *rebbe*. If you don't have both, you will probably have a very big fall. If you do have both, you can do very well. You can do even better than Israel.

YU students split their days between Torah study and general studies. Does the spirituality of the former relate, in any way, to the latter? In terms of religious development and spirituality, how would Rav Reichman advise students view the latter part of their day?

There's theory and then there's experience. To experience spirituality while doing secular studies is going to be a challenge. It's possible, but not very likely. The average person doing mathematics or English literature is not going to have a Torah experience. I think you have to be able to see it, at least intellectually, as a broader part of your Torah being. Let's say you look at it as a way of making a *parnasah*. Only very few people will, or are

fers. Levinas thus offers in solution to the above problem that “one prays for oneself with the intention of suspending the suffering of God, who suffers in my suffering.”^{ix} Here, Levinas allows us to turn prayer for the self into prayer for the other, in this case the Supreme Other. When one lacks that which he needs and when he suffers due to this lack, God also suffers for him. In praying to alleviate my suffering, I am also praying to alleviate His, and so my prayer again becomes an ethical act.

The ‘Thou Shalt’ and Prayer

In closing our discussion, I would briefly like to explain the purpose of prayer in Levinasian Judaism. As we have seen, prayer is an ethical act; however, we have yet to answer why prayer should be. That is, what necessitates the existence of prayer? Why does God impose upon us this further avenue of responsibility?

In discussing revelation, Levinas writes that no revelation of the infinite is possible, “unless, however, it were a question of a ‘Thou shalt’ which takes no account of what ‘Thou canst’.”^x The religious, and therefore ethical, obligation, does not ask of man what he can do, but demands of him what he must do, which overflows, at times, to what is in his power to do. How, then, is the responsibility demanded by religion to be expressed when it is in the realm of the “Thou shalt” that overflows the “Thou canst”? I would like to suggest that prayer is the expression of this overflowing of responsibility. When the individual cannot express his ethical responsibility to the other in a physical action (through a *mitsvah*), prayer allows him to fulfill this obligation and to be there for the other when it would otherwise be impossible.

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ⁱ Jeremiah 9:23. All biblical citations found in this paper not referenced by Emmanuel Levinas come from *A Hebrew-English Bible: According to the Masoretic Text and the JPS 1917 Edition*. Copyright 2005, Mechon Mamre. <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0.htm>.

ⁱⁱ Exodus, 32:11-14 and 34:5-10.

ⁱⁱⁱ Samuel I 1:10-20.

^{iv} Deuteronomy 10:17.

^v Levinas, Emmanuel. *Basic Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. 17.

^{vi} See Talmud Bavli Berakhot 31a-b.

^{vii} Levinas, Emmanuel. *In the Time of the Nations*. London: The Athlone Press, 1994. 111.

^{viii} Ibid., 115.

^{ix} Ibid., 116.

^x Levinas, Emmanuel. *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*. London: The Athlone Press, 1994. 142.

expected to, make their *parnasah* from Torah. One out of a hundred may do so. The other ninety-nine are going to, and are expected to, make their *parnasah* outside of Torah, so you have to say to yourself that God put me into this world and I see from various experiences that this *parnasah* is what He wants. A person who sees he could successfully make a *parnasah* in Torah, he should definitely go that way; it's the shorter path to the spiritual goal. And I think that even if a person has a *safek* that maybe he could make Torah his career, he should try it. It's like a Pascal's Wager: sometimes, you make a bet where you can only win. So if someone spends five years after college learning Torah, in *semikhah* or *kollel*, and then it turns out that he can't find a job, or he tries for a year to be a teacher of Torah and he's not a success, he has still won, because he got five years of Torah learning out of it. So I say that even if you have a *safek* that you could do it successfully, you should try it, because the worst you can get is five years of Torah and spirituality.

But what about the others? From the



(c) Zalman Kleinman

point-of-view of plain *parnasah*, you know intellectually that it's part of a Torah life, because God made me in a way that I have to be an *ish yotse ha-sadeh* – that's Hashem's *ratson*. A guy who makes a living and supports a wife and children – right away he's doing a *mitsvah*. So you have to look at it, at least intellectually, as a *mitsvah*. Don't think that you're a second-rate citizen, a failure. You're not a failure. You have your mission: to make a *kiddush Hashem* outside the *beit midrash*. Is that going to give you a spiritual feeling when you do it? Probably not. But that doesn't mean that it's not a *mitsvah*. As we said before, there are many *mitsvot* you can do without a spiritual feeling. In *hasidut*, we say a remarkable thing. If you are forced by life to do a *mitsvah* where there

is no spirituality, something difficult which is made even more excruciating because there's no immediate spiritual payoff, *hasidut* says that's really the greatest *mitsvah*. Hashem is testing you to see whether you are so loyal to Him and to the Torah that you will do it without an immediate payoff. So when a guy goes into general studies, he has to know that Hashem wants him to serve Him in that way. He's not going to enjoy it on a spiritual level. He's not going to come home and say that he had an *aliyah*. He may even say he went down, but he has no choice – he has to pay the bills and take care of the children. In the end, then, it might be an even greater *mitsvah*.

Having said that, you have to do things to maximize the spirituality. I say that if you have to make a career choice, you have to look and see which career choice will give you the opportunity to maximize real spirituality. Let's say one career is going to be a nine-to-three job, where you're going to make a basic income, and the other job is a nine-to-nine job, like that of a lawyer, where you're going to make much more money. The question is: if you're doing nine-to-nine in a law firm, where's the time for Torah and *mitsvot*? Intellectually, you know you're doing a *mitsvah* and being *mekhavven le-shem shamayim* when you choose to become a lawyer, because you want to be able to use the money for family or *tsedakah*, but you're not experiencing spirituality. If you choose to work from nine to three, you'll probably be a public school teacher or a physical therapist, so you're not going to make half of what a lawyer would, but you'll make enough for a living, and when you come home at three, you can teach your children Torah, you can give your wife personal attention, and you can do many things which are real, direct spiritual activities, not just an intellectual concept. So I think that a person, when making a career choice, has to put the spirituality side of things into the question. It has to be something where he can feel the spirituality, not just know it intellectually. I'll tell you the truth: I feel very saddened by the way the boys make their choices. I don't think they think about it. They think about success, but success, I'm sorry to say, is a false idol. The way the world defines success is not the Jewish concept. It's a sad thing when I see that they make choices without putting everything into the equation.

How should one view things that won't affect your parnasah, like English literature classes? Also, how would Rav Soloveitchik fit

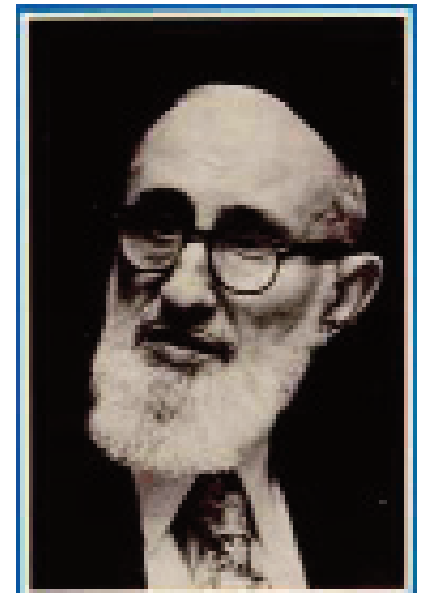
into this discussion?

The Rav, and I'm a great student of the Rav, was a man who was able to teach and to live with paradoxes. His theory of Torah and of life was that paradox, though against basic logic, was within Torah logic. The theory of the "two *dinim*" could mean either-or, but it could also mean both. What does that mean for someone who wants to say, "I want to follow the Rav." Well, the Rav is teaching a paradox. You must learn Torah on such a level that you're completely immersed in it every moment of your waking hours. You have to think about it when you walk, when you eat – even when you're talking to someone, part of your mind is still thinking about the Torah. But he then says that secular knowledge is great, it's all from God, and you can get inspiration there. For normal, everyday people, that's going to take time and mind. You can't do two things at the same time. So the Rav teaches you a paradox. He himself apparently enjoyed paradox, but most of us don't. Most of us like a simple thing. You have to have a great, philosophical mind to say paradox is essential and that you like it. So I can't really tell you that the Rav gave us a clear road through this paradox of Torah and General Studies. I, personally, go for the Torah and leave the General Studies for *parnasah*. I don't accept for myself the idea that General Studies is worth replacing time spent on Torah. My mind is one-dimensional in that sense. I knew the Rav a little bit, and I can say that from what I saw, his mind could work two tracks at the same time – no doubt about it. Maybe Rav Aharon Lichtenstein has that kind of head and he can do it, too. I, myself, am very limited. I'm a small fry, and I only work one track at a time. When I got my Ph.D., which the Rav told me to do, I did so under a lot of parental pressure, too. To me, it was taking time away from Torah, and I did it only because of *parnasah*. I *takke* used it for 5-6 years when I was a teacher of math at City College before I became a *rebbe*. So, for me, the Ph.D. gave me a *parnasah*; but what the Rav meant, I have no practical idea, because I am not at the level to deal with his dualities.

Getting back to the first question, if the College requires English literature, I need to do what the College requires for me to have a *parnasah* as a lawyer, as a doctor, or as a computer programmer. But if it were not required, I would never take it as an elective. I would maximize whatever Torah learning I could, and if I would take more courses, they would be in

my major. Let's say I had three free credits and I was maxed out in Torah – I couldn't take more *shiur*. So if I were a computer major, I would take an advanced course in computers to be a better programmer, for my *parnasah*, I would not be a dilettante and say that I want to broaden my view of the world and be more of a romantic scholar within the world of liberal arts.

I never agreed with the whole philosophy of a liberal arts college. For me, it was crazy. By studying liberal arts, you learn the philosophy and the culture of the world and that replaces the time you could be learning Torah. The Rav, until the age of 29, only learned Torah. He went through *Shas* many times and knew it on a deep level. He had a desire to learn what the nations of the world say, so he went to university. We are not like the Rav, we don't know Torah like that. 99.9% of the people I know, adults and younger people alike, can only work on one thing at a time. We are relatively simple people. Therefore, every hour of English literature I take voluntarily is an hour I take away from Torah, *hasidut*, and *musar*. This does not make sense. We don't know enough Torah to serve Hashem properly. We have to spend more time in the *beit midrash*, more time in *shiur*, more time back



in Israel in *yeshivah*. I do not believe that there is any substitution from the nations of the world which can replace our responsibility to Torah and spirituality.

We're not here to prove that someone can know a lot of Torah, Plato, and Shakespeare – that's been proven already. When the Rav was young, the irreligious Jews were claiming that in order to have a *parnasah* and be successful, you had to throw away your Judaism. So in

those years, when the Rav went to college, there was a huge cultural, social, and intellectual challenge to show that a person could be in university, learn everything they had to offer, and still stay *frum*. And that's what the Rav did. He went to show that a huge *talmid hakham* can study everything they have – Hegel, Aristotle, Plato, Neitzche – and still remain a big *talmid hakham*. This isn't an issue for us today. We don't have to prove that you can study English and stay religious; it's been proven already. The issue today is not whether or not our students/children are being drawn away from Judaism by the non-Jewish world's intellectual attractiveness. No Orthodox Jews today are going to say, "I'm going to throw out religion to make money." People would laugh. So why would someone today throw away religion? Because it is dry and boring for him. It doesn't mean anything to him. We have to give our boys a full experience of religion. Secular studies are nothing but a tool in a person's life. Do I have to prove that I can learn English and remain religious? I think it's beating a dead horse. If it helps for *parnasah* do learn these subjects, that's fine. But why pledge allegiance to a cause that is no longer relevant? The cause now is to strengthen the religious experience for people who are religious – to make it more real.

Since we are in the season now, could the Rosh Yeshivah comment on the topics of teshuvah and tefillah?

As I have said, the experiential side of Torah is what needs strengthening. Unfortunately, today the Torah education in America focuses on the intellectual side of Torah, not on the experiential side. What happened to experience? What happened to the *lev*? Gone. Our boys and girls are spiritual cripples. They are certainly intellectually trained, and maybe they can read a text nicely, but they are missing in sensitivities; they are like blind bats. So we have to shift gears to a new agenda, namely a total Jewish experience in education. Education has to move from just training the intellect to being a total immersion in Torah and Torah Judaism. That's what a year in Israel does for a lot of boys and girls. All of a sudden they say, "Wow, I like this!" All of a sudden, there is a feeling. But when they come back to America it has to be nurtured. That is the challenge for today.

Now, how do you teach *teshuvah* and *tefillah* – how do you teach *lev*? Rav

Soloveitchik said many times in his writings and teachings that he has no idea how to do it, and he said many times that he considered this a failure on his part. So how can you do it? You can read certain books that give you inspiration. You can hear lectures which focus on it and give you an intellectual appreciation. But obviously that is now going to satisfy the need. It has to move from the brain and get into the heart. I find that a *kumzits* with music is a very powerful experience, and that's what I do for myself.

Now, the boys here don't know how to *daven* at all. I am speaking in generalities; obviously, there are some that do. It is very difficult for me to remember, in my forty years here, a boy crying during his *tefillah*. It's crazy. *David ha-Melekh* is crying so much in Tehillim. You are talking to you *Abba* – how can you not cry? They are not *davening* with their hearts. Instead of talking to their Father in Heaven, they are just being *yotsei* the *Shulhan Arukh*. So what's the solution? The first thing in *tefillah* is to seek out the slow *minyan*. Sometimes, for *Ma'ariv*, I'll go to a dormitory to *daven*. I am not going to say which *minyan* it is, but this *minyan* has a rule that you have to finish in five minutes. It's crazy. Five minutes for a *minyan*? I can't believe it. The slower, the better, from my perspective. It gives you time to talk to God. If you see a *minyan* that speeds, either don't go there or take the *amud* and go slowly. Don't be ashamed. No one is a boss about the speed. There is no bylaw in the YU Catalog that *Ma'ariv* should take five minutes. The one who takes the *amud* decides. You can decide to go slow. If they scream at you, it's not your problem. Slow is the key when it comes to *tefillah*.

As regards *teshuvah*, *teshuvah* is very difficult. The thing to keep in mind, though, is that you are not expected to achieve it – just to try. You are human, so you try and continue to try. That's all that *ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* is asking. Hashem gives you a chance to clean the slate, and if you have that *ratson*, you can receive it.

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Praying with Passion

BY: Rena Wiesen

Even the staunchest *Litvaks* among us are secretly curious about, and perhaps a little jealous of, *Hasidim's* unique and beautiful mode of prayer. Many of us have learned famous *hasidische niggunim*, haunting melodies, the intensity of which can rival Beethoven's compositions. The classic *kaddish* tune that we sing after *mussaf* on *Rosh ha-Shanah* is a *Modzitz niggun*. The popular tune used for both *Shir ha-Ma'alot* and *Keili Atah* are compositions of the *Imrei Eish*, the previous Bobover Rebbe. Many of the most popular melodies used in our prayers are of *hasidic* origin. There is just something about these tunes, the prayer, the concentration, and the absolute intensity that grabs and holds a person, mesmerizing him and stirring something deep down inside that yearns to burst out.

tury brought with it a series of pogroms and tragedies that led to a decline in intellectualism and general Torah learning in Poland, as the rabbis and scholars fled to Lithuania and resettled there. These losses, along with the burden of heavy taxations and the spiritual smashing that stemmed from the conversion of Shabbetai Tsevi to Islamⁱⁱ, poor Polish Jews resorted to belief in superstitions, amulets, eschatological musings and *Kabbalah*. When Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, the *Baal Shem Tov* (Besht), emerged in the early 1700s preaching emotion over intellect, the spiritually-starved masses quickly became enamored with him and his teachings. Finally, Judaism appeared as something that they could relate to, and they saw that there were levels in the service of G-d that they could actually attain. The Besht's popularity and the rapid spread of his teachings were largely due to the fact that he taught via



Yet our wariness, or perhaps really ignorance, of *hasidic* ideology persists. We think it's not intellectual. It's based too on emotion. *Hasidim* seem to have a different practice of halakhah, praying at odd times of the day and such. *Hasidut* is strongly linked to *kabbalah* and mysticism which are topics that many of us have never learned and have a hard time understanding.

Don't get me wrong. I admit that I am guilty of having many of these thoughts. And some of those concerns certainly have some validity. Just ask the Vilna Gaon. However, in a world in which we are taught to be open to secular culture and to select and incorporate, with care, some of the positive qualities and insights it can offer us, why are we so quick to unilaterally reject another sect of our own religion? Have we really nothing to learn from *Hasidim*? Perhaps if we look closer at one of the most relevant elements of *Hasidut*, prayer, we can learn something new and broaden our perspectives just a little bit more.ⁱ

First, though, we must understand where and how *Hasidut* originated. The mid-17th cen-

stories and parables, which were easily understood by the uneducated population who did not have the capacity for understanding complex Talmudic discussions.

The Besht taught that G-d is omnipresent; all people can attach themselves to Him. As a result, prayer specifically was perceived as a unique way to connect with G-d and was performed by *Hasidim* with extraordinary fervor. Rabbi Kelonemos Kalman of Krakow writes in his book, *Meor ve-Shemesh*, on Genesis 49:22ⁱⁱ, that "from the time of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the light of prayer's great holiness has shone in the world, illuminating the way for everyone who wants to come close to G-d and serve Him. When the soul becomes purified through prayer, one can truly serve G-d and approach His Essence." Prayer was the key to special closeness with G-d.

Because of the serious nature and forceful impact of prayer, *Hasidim* used to spend hours involved in *hitbodedut*, meditation, preparing for prayer. Following in the footsteps of the first *hasidim* described in Tractate Berakhot 30b, they recognized the monumentality of

what they were about to do and supplicated G-d to draw them close to Him so they would be able to serve Him in truth. Thus, when they actually began to pray, they did not have to spend the entire *Pesukei de-Zimrah* getting into the prayers; they started from the beginning in an elevated state. One can only imagine to what heights they had climbed by the end.

Interestingly, the experience of prayer goes beyond intellectual cognition and thoughts. It is a physical activity as well, one that literally involves moving the entire body in the pursuit of a relationship with G-d. *Hasidim* would thrash about and motion wildly during prayer. The Besht likened this to a drowning man: "Of course, if someone is trying to save himself from going underwater, he will thrash about, and no one will make fun of his motions. Similarly, when a person makes motions during prayer, one should not laugh at him. He is saving himself from drowning in the Waters of Insolence, which are the *kelipot* (husks) coming to prevent him from concentrating on his prayers," he writes in *Likkutim Yekarim 66a*^v. The *Tikkunei Zohar* also refers to "hands writing secrets,"^{vii} which Rabbi Nahman explains as the motions one makes during prayer. One physically engages his whole body in his attempt to clear all obstacles and move swiftly and eagerly on the path towards G-d.

With this enthusiasm, man is supposed to jump into prayer with passion. Rabbi Nahman told his students to put all of their energy into the words.^v Sometimes, he admits, this is not easy, but people have to force themselves to pray, and eventually it will become genuine.^{vi} His students record: "There were some people who said that prayer must come of itself, without being forced. Rabbi Nahman said that they were wrong, that you must do everything in your power to force yourself." How? "If you listen carefully to your own words, strength will enter your prayers itself... Merely concentrate on the words, and strength will enter your prayers without your having to force it."^{viii}

Along with this intensity should be a great joy in serving G-d, following one of the famous *Hasidic* tenets: "Serve G-d with joy."^{ix} Joy is not just one of several good options, it is actually the most effective emotion with which to pray, according to the BeShT. He teaches that prayer with joy is even more acceptable than prayer with sadness and tears. If a poor man supplicates and petitions the king, he is only given a small sum, no matter how much he cries. But if a prince praises the king, and in the midst of this also presents his petition, the king then gives him generous gifts, as befits a prince.^x

Armed with this optimistic approach and a strong belief that G-d is immanent and listening, the *hasid* feels confident asking G-d for anything in the world, big or small, reasonable or unrealistic. In *Sihot ha-Ran*,^x Rabbi Nathan of Nemerov writes: "I once had a slight need for some small insignificant thing. When I mentioned this fact to Rabbi Nahman, he said, 'Pray to G-d for it.' I was rather astonished to learn that one must pray to God for even such trivial things, especially in a case like this,

where it was not even a necessity. Seeing my surprise, Rabbi Nahman asked me, 'Is it then beneath your dignity to pray to G-d for a minor thing like this?'" *Hasidim* turn to G-d for anything and everything, no matter how seemingly trivial it may be.

I don't have any plans to become a *hasid*. And I don't intend for the readers to become *Hasidim* either, after having read this article. But, learning these simple ideas, it's very difficult to not be inspired by the sincere and genuine desire of *Hasidim* to be close to G-d, and even more so, to be encouraged by the seeming ease with which this closeness can be obtained. No matter how we identify ourselves, if we all truly believed that G-d eagerly awaits each of our prayers and that He is willing to seriously consider providing us with anything for which we ask, prayer might flow with a little more fluidity and a little more frequently from our lips. Particularly in *Elul*, the most auspicious time of the year for these endeavors, if we can open ourselves up just a bit, we stand to gain something very special.

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Prayer in *Hassidut* is an extensive and complicated topic. In this article I will only broach a few of the more simple tenets, due to efficiency, clarity, and time concerns.

ⁱ Gershom Scholem, "Demuto ha-Historit shel R. Yisrael Baal Shem Tov." Quoted in Lamm, Norman. *The Religious Thought of Hasidism*. New Jersey 1999; p.xl.

ⁱⁱ Quoted in Kaplan, Aryeh, *The Light Beyond: Adventures in Hassidic Thought*. New York/Jerusalem, 1981; p.194.

ⁱⁱⁱ Quoted in Kaplan, Aryeh, *The Light Beyond: Adventures in Hassidic Thought*. New York/Jerusalem, 1981; pp.209-210.

^v *Tikkunei Zohar* 21 (44b).

^v *Sihot ha-Ran 66*, Quoted in Kaplan, Aryeh, *The Light Beyond: Adventures in Hassidic Thought*. New York/Jerusalem, 1981; p.216.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, 217.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, 216.

^{viii} *Psalms* 100:2.

^x *Tsava'at ha-Rivash* p.231; Quoted in Kaplan, Aryeh, *The Light Beyond: Adventures in Hassidic Thought*. New York/Jerusalem, 1981; p.213.

^x 233; Quoted in Kaplan, Aryeh. *The Light Beyond: Adventures in Hassidic Thought*. New York/Jerusalem, 1981; p.224.

The Supernatural, Social Justice, and Sp

BY: Gilah Kletenik

"Spirituality," can we even begin to know what that means? The term is vague and even intimidating. For some though, this isn't even a question. They think of the exuberant chuckling of a devoted worshipper or the ecstatic singers around the *Rebbe*. Others are inspired by nature's breathtaking beauty, while many, in earnest, turn to yoga and meditation. I have been surprised to find that my moments of greatest spiritual uplift come when I least expect them to; while lobbying on behalf of sex slaves, protesting genocide in Darfur and volunteering with the homeless. Obviously, it is a *mitsvah* to perform deeds of this nature; still, these are curious instances to feel the Divine. What stands behind these flashes of other worldly?

A good portion of the Torah deals with sacrifice. In fact, the primary means of worship and connection to God used to be through sacrifice. Temple service was once the nation's channel to God, its spiritual stream to heaven. Interestingly though, this method of relating to the Lord is not always presented in the most idyllic terms. Instead, the prophets repeatedly chastise the Jews for sacrificing from empty, evil hearts: "For I desire acts of loving-kindness, not sacrifice, acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings."ⁱ Hosea's rebuke of the people links morality with spirituality. His demand of the Jews that they abandon their meaningless sacrifices and instead recognize God by acting decently, establishes a firm connection between just action and service of the Almighty. This correlation is emphasized by Rabbi Dostai the son of Rabbi Yannai who taught: "whoever gives even a penny to a beggar merits and receives the Divine presence, as it is written, 'I through an act of righteous giving will behold your face' (Psalms 17)."ⁱⁱ The relationship between the service of man and the service of Heaven is clear. What stands behind this connection?

"Rabbi Hama the son of Rabbi Hanina said, what is the meaning of the text: 'You shall walk after the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 8:5)? Is it, then, possible for a human being to walk after the *Shekhinah*? For has it not been said: 'For the Lord your God is a devouring fire' (Deuteronomy 4:24)? But the meaning of the verse is to teach you to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked, for it is written: 'And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them (Genesis 3:21),' so you should also clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written: 'And the Lord appeared unto him [Abraham, just after he had been circumcised] by the oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18:1),' so you should also visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be He, comforted mourners, for it is written: 'And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son

(Genesis 25:11)' so you should also comfort mourners. The Holy one, blessed be He, buried the dead, for it is written: 'And He buried him [Moses] in the valley (Deuteronomy 34:6)' so you should also bury the dead."ⁱⁱⁱ

The teaching of Rabbi Hama suggests that acting morally is a fulfillment of *imitatio dei*, a notion that Maimonides emphasizes in *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Maimonides interprets God's response to Moses' request of "show me now Your ways,"^{iv} as a commandment from God to imitate His attributes as expressed in the thirteen principles: "He means that it is My purpose that there should come from you loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgment in the earth ... with regard to the thirteen principles: namely that the purpose should be assimilation to them and that this should be our way of life."^v



While this approach to justice and morality is inspiring, it invites the question, why? Why is God so concerned with justice here on earth and why are we part of this concern, charged with imitating Heaven? Abraham Joshua Heschel addresses this question: "righteousness is not just a value; it is God's part of human life, *God's stake in human history* ... For accomplishing His grand design, God needs the help of man. Justice is not an ancient custom, a human convention, a value, but a transcendent demand, freighted with divine concern. It is not only a relationship between man and man, it is an *act* involving God, a divine deed."^{vi} To Heschel, the imperative to uphold justice is not merely to imitate God; it is to partner with Him, to be Godlike.

This notion of teaming-up with God is rooted in Lurianic Kabbalah's conception of creation through *tsitsum* and *shevirat ha-keilim*. In order to conceive of the world, God had to constrict his infinite nature through *tsitsum*, thereby generating space for the work of His hands. But, God, after creating the universe, was unable to leave it empty of His presence, so He emanated His glory through rays, which were too intense and invariably shattered, scattering throughout the world – *shevirat ha-keilim*. The duty of man in Luria's mystical philosophy is to harvest these shards and repair them, *li-takken olam*.^{vii} And, while Luria perhaps did not initially link *tikkum olam* with morality, looking around the world its

Lions, Tigers, and Sin - Oh My!

BY: Simcha M. Gross

hard not to connect his conception of brokenness and the need for repair with our *Tanakh* imperative "justice, justice shall you pursue."^{viii} Even Bob Dylan has expressed this vision of broken vessels and social injustice: "Broken lines, broken strings. Broken threads, broken springs. Broken idols, broken heads. People sleeping in broken beds ... Streets are filled with broken hearts. Broken words never meant to be spoken, Everything is broken ... Broken voices on broken phones. Take a deep breath, feel like you're chokin', Everything is broken."^{ix}

The Jewish call to justice is not merely a suggestion or even a commandment; it's a responsibility, a service of heaven. "Judaism is the guardian of an ancient but still compelling dream. To heal where others harm, mend where others destroy, to redeem evil by turning its negative energies to good: these are the mark of the ethics of responsibility, born in the radical faith that God calls on us to exercise our freedom by becoming his partners in the work of creation."^x

When we fundraise to free slaves in the developing world or fight for workers' rights in New York, we are not only emulating God, we are joining the Divine, becoming Heavenly.

Whereas with prayer and study we strive to reach the Lord, when we uphold justice we work with God. Nature might give us that sense of the ineffable, but moral acts bridge the gap between us and the Supernatural. Meditation and contemplation are a turning inwards, but concern for the other is not only a recognition of the Other, it is the becomingness with Heaven. This oneness with the Transcendent is the fulfillment of our responsibility, the culmination of our spiritual struggles to reach the Divine through our endeavor to "Let justice well up like water, righteousness like an unfailing stream."^{xi}

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Hosea 6:6

ⁱⁱ Bava Batra 10a

ⁱⁱⁱ B. Talmud Sotah 14a

^{iv} Exodus 33:13

^v Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Trans. Shlomo Pines. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1963. III:54, p. 637.

^{vi} Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets: An Introduction*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962. p. 198.

^{vii} Rabbi Jonathan Sacks discusses this at length in his *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*. New York: Schocken, 2007.

^{viii} Deuteronomy 16:20

^{ix} Bob Dylan. *Everything is Broken*. Rec. 1989. Columbia Records.

^x Sacks, Jonathan. *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*. New York: Schocken, 2007.

^{xi} Amos 5:24

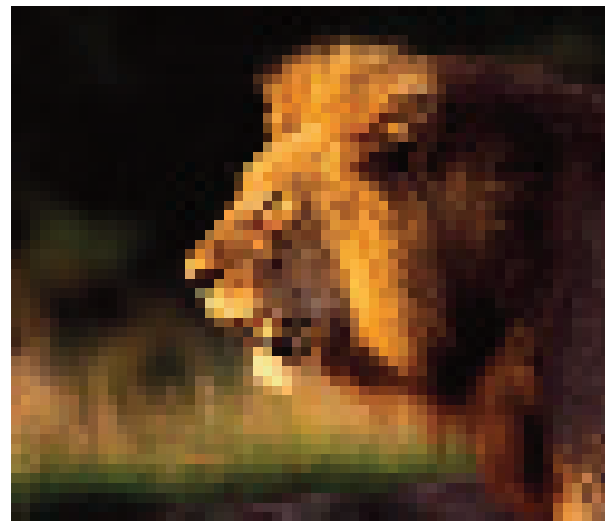
Sin confronts us in powerful ways. It often lurks in the shadows and strikes us where we are weakest, harping on the uncertainties that lie within us. At other times, it assaults us directly, overpowering even our best efforts at resistance.

Yet, unlike the imagery in C.S. Lewis' "Screwtape Letters," sin is not an external force or a devilish creature with an impish grin whose sole occupation is to misdirect unsuspecting human beings. Rather, what we call "sin" are our innermost passions that conflict with our most fundamental values and beliefs; yet when they surface, they are capable of overwhelming all our reservations. Biblical imagery therefore analogizes sin – and its embodiment, the wicked – to a lion:

"He lieth in wait in a secret place as a lion in his lair, he lieth in wait to catch the poor; he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him up in his net" (Psalms 10:1).

Like a lion, our base desires surreptitiously inch towards their unsuspecting target from a seemingly 'secret place', waiting to strike at a moment's notice.

The overwhelming power of sin has similarly been recognized by human behaviorists. In his famous essay, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, Abraham Maslow describes the hierar-



chy of needs which subconsciously motivate human behaviors. This hierarchy is rooted in the most basic desires - those necessary for survival, like food and drink - and progresses upwards to more esoteric and abstract needs, such as love, loyalty, and devotion, which Maslow finds to be less urgent and compelling. To Maslow, the lines within this hierarchy are rigid; no two motivations may exist simultaneously, and a more compelling need will always dominate a lesser one. For example, a hungry person will typically seek to satiate that need without considering the effect this may have on other, less urgent, desires. In Maslow's words: "For the man who is extremely and

dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food. He dreams food, he remembers food, he thinks about food, he emotes only about food, he perceives only food and he wants only food."ⁱ To Maslow, our base desires are all encompassing, and will inevitably dominate even our most passionate beliefs.

Victor Frankl, in his powerful book *Man's Search for Meaning*, challenges Maslow's rigid hierarchy of needs, relying on his own experiences in Nazi concentration camps to demonstrate that doctrinal considerations can overpower even the most basic needs. He describes selfless acts of benevolence and compassion that he witnessed among the camp inmates; among them, he describes a starving man readily offering his daily minuscule portion of bread to feed his dying loved ones. In Frankl's words, "even though conditions such as lack of sleep, insufficient food and various mental stresses may suggest that the inmates were bound to act in certain ways, in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision..."ⁱⁱ It is precisely man's ability to overcome his base desires that ultimately affirms Frankl's belief in man's goodness, because a man who can overcome his base desires, can ultimately overcome his inclination to sin.

Our rabbis, however, did not fully embrace either Maslow's fatalism or Frankl's optimism. Instead, they offered a more complex view of man's desires. On the one hand, they can present an imposing obstacle, but on the other hand, they can be used to propel one to loftier devotional heights. In one famous *Aggadata*, Ezra and his contemporaries beseech God to eliminate their era's seemingly unquenchable thirst for idolatry. God acquiesces, and subsequently a "lion-cub of fire went out from the Holy of Holies" which they trap in a cage. The Rabbis ingeniously use the biblical imagery of the lion to once again depict sinful desire. Ezra and his contemporaries pray for the elimination of lust, and God acquiesces, giving rise to an unforeseen consequence: not only is lust eliminated, but all desires for procreation similarly disappear, to the point that chickens cease to lay eggs. The story ends: 'they put out his [desire's] eyes, and left him [desire]' to roam free once again. The message of this *Aggadata* is clear: certain impulses, like the idolatrous need for a tangible deity, must be caged, never to be released. Others must be tamed, perhaps even blinded; but once disciplined, become necessary parts of everyday life.

This approach of channeling potentially negative desires for positive purposes is found in Shabbat 156a:

"Someone born under Meidim (Mars) will be a man who spills blood. R' Ashi said, 'he would either become a bloodletter, a thief, a butcher or a mohel.' Rabbah said 'I was born under Mars (and yet I am none of these things)!' Abaye said, 'you have punished and killed those who violated your rulings.'"

In other words, a man's nature may be predisposed to spilling blood, but that nature can be channeled to produce a judge, a butcher or a mohel, rather than a murderer. The key lies in the direction to which man's impulses may be directed.

It is often true that a negative disposition or character trait can be redirected to produce a positive outcome. Competitiveness can be redirected to encourage growth, just as arrogance can be channeled to encourage a stronger and healthier sense of self. Indeed, Freud believed that even the most basic of all drives, the sex drive, can be channeled to socially productive ends. In his words sexual desires "are diverted from their sexual goals and redirected to ends socially higher and no longer sexual."ⁱⁱⁱ Rather than suffocating seemingly negative energies, they should be refocused to produce beneficial results. Indeed this is God's message to Cain in the first *sichat musar* in Jewish history:

"And the LORD said unto Cain: 'Why art thou wrath? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up? and if thou doest not well, sin croucheth at the door; and unto thee is its desire, but thou mayest rule over it'" (Bereishit 4:7).

Sin is once again depicted as crouching, waiting to pounce on the innocent. But God's message is clear: desire should be 'ruled over,' not extinguished. Sin may indeed be couching at the door, but as it pounces, its own energies can be used to propel us forward.

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ⁱ A.H. Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, Psychological Review 50 (1943):374

ⁱⁱ Viktor E. Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Incorporated, 1997. 86-87.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sigmund Freud. *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1929. p.8.

Lord, Get Me High

BY: Ruthie Just Braffman

In the 1980's, First Lady Nancy Reagan traveled to 65 cities, 33 states, 8 countries, the Vatican, and made appearances on television shows, radio and public events to promote her anti-drug campaign. In a 1981 interview on *Good Morning America*, Mrs. Reagan explained passionately, "understanding what drugs can do to your children, understanding peer pressure and understanding why they turn to drugs is...the first step in solving the problem."ⁱ "Just Say No," the name of her anti-drugs campaign, reigned among the catch phrases of the decade, and the motto's remnant is palpable even today. Since its inception, the campaign has expanded its objective to fight drugs, and the slogan has grown to include other addictions such as alcohol and cigarettes.

Ad campaigns on TV flashed an image of eggs frying in a pan to threateningly demonstrate the effect of drugs on an abuser's brain:

"Just say No."

Teenagers hanging out in a playground where a boy offers a friend a cigarette:

"Just say No."

Celebrities joined Mrs. Reagan as spokesmen in her crusade against narcotics, and two television shows even devoted the theme of their episodes to her cause.

The campaign, while popular and world renowned, was not as successful as Mrs. Reagan had hoped. Although her efforts were of the best intentions, the campaign drew some criticism for underestimating drug abuse in America, as well as minimizing the solution to one phrase: "Just Say No." In fact, during the height of the campaign, studies indicated that the phrase had the opposite effect. In one high school, two groups of athletes were warned against the use of steroids. One group was warned using Mrs. Reagan's slogan: "'Just Say No' to steroids, they're bad for you." The other group was informed about the risks and benefits of steroids and told why people take them. The results of the study indicated that the athletes who received information about the steroids significantly decreased their drug consumption. A similar study also showed the feeble impact of the "Just Say No" campaign by performing an experiment with sunscreen. Researchers told one group of Australian beachgoers, "If you don't use sunscreen, you're going to fry," while another group was presented with skincare information that recommended sunscreen. Once again, the group that had been informed of the risks of skin exposure instead of a blind command to "say no" was more effective.

Across the world, approximately six million miles away, Rabbi Eitan Eckstein was invited to speak at an Israeli high school on a drugs-prevention day. The principal, a former army commander and highly intimidating gen-

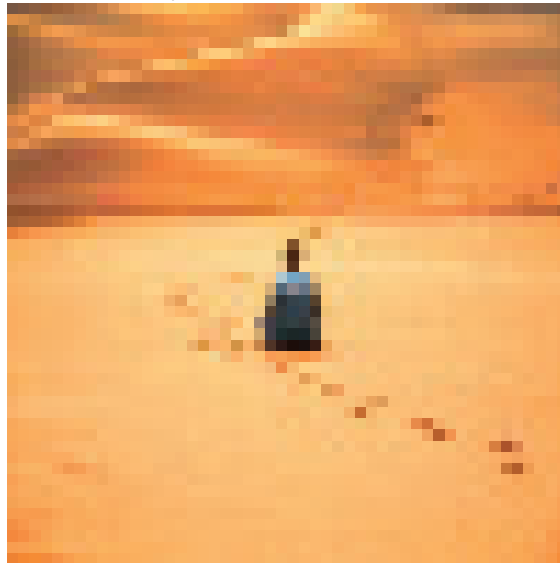
tleman spoke before introducing the guest speaker; "I just want to tell you one sentence, DON'T EVER GET CLOSE TO DRUGS, YOU'LL REGRET IT." An Israeli student in the back of the room stood up and defiantly inquired, "Yeah? Have you ever taken them?"

"Great," thought Rabbi Eckstein as he rose from his chair, "I've lost my audience before I even reached the podium."

"Every Gan Eden (Garden of Eden) has a snake," the Rabbi began. "'Come, take drugs' whispers the snake, 'take from the *ets ha-daat* ... It is *haval* if you don't' ... the snake" Rabbi Eckstein emphasized, "is not lying."

The student sat down, ready to listen.

In the hills near Bet Shemesh Israel, Rabbi Eitan Eckstein is the head of a Rehabilitation Community called Retorno. There are



no posters around the grounds that say "DON'T USE DRUGS," or slogans advising "JUST SAY NO." Rabbi Eckstein has built a "community model" facilitation that helps drug addicts and others suffering from addictions on their journey to becoming clean. Rabbi Eckstein, who spent some years on *shlihit* in Mexico, decided to name his community, "Retorno," which is Spanish for "Return." The goal, Rabbi Eckstein explains, is to lead the addict back to the crossroads where he or she made a wrong decision and help him or her veer onto the right path.

This idea, that return involves choosing a different course of action when presented with the same situation a second time is strikingly similar to Rambam's statement *Hilkhot Teshuvah*. There, Rambam discusses the definition of *teshuvah gemurah*, or complete *teshuvah*: "What is complete *teshuvah*? A person who confronts the same situation in which he sinned, and he has the potential to commit (the sin again) nevertheless, abstains and does not commit it because of his *teshuvah*."ⁱⁱ

There appears to be a strong parallel between the path of *teshuvah*, repentance, and the path for an addict to free himself of his abuse.

To further the correlation, one can also point to the central aspect of confession in both processes. Rabbi Eckstein explains that the addict's admission to his problem is the crucial component to healing, without which the effort to try and help the addict is futile. Sure enough, the next halakhah mentioned by Rambam echoes this idea: "He must verbally confess and state these matters which he resolved in his heart."ⁱⁱⁱ

Rabbi Eckstein, like the Rambam, considers *viduy*, confession, a paramount step in the journey to becoming clean of sin and addiction. The sinner or addict must realize his or her actions and acknowledge them, and only then might he or she take the first steps towards healing.

The analogous relationship between *teshuvah* and rehabilitation does not end here. In fact, what really lies at the heart of the healing process for both *teshuvah* and addiction is that which truly links the two. Continuing in *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, Rambam explains the necessary actions, *medarkhei ha-Teshuvah*, on the path of repentance. Among his roster he includes: "to change his name, as if to say, 'I am a different person and not the same one who sinned;' To change his behavior in its entirety to the good and the path of righteousness."^{iv}

Teshuvah, he says, should be a metamorphosis, leaving one feeling as if he or she is a different person. Though we may not know what the future holds, we should be able to change in a way that we can look back and say I am no longer the person who committed those sins. Shaving off the outer layers of Rambam's normative complicated wording, he adds a beautiful idea in this halakhah. In fact, he incorporates a central idea to *teshuvah* here: The *aveirah* is not the primal target of repentance. Yes, one has to acknowledge and feel regret that he spoke *lashon ha-rah* or that he did not show *ha-karat ha-tov* when necessary. However, Rambam is saying in halakhah 2:4 that the *heshbon ha-Nefesh* is not just the action, but what lies behind the action. What is it about the individual's personality, self-esteem, inner being that is causing him to speak *lashon ha-rah*, that he feels it necessary to do so? Repentance is not a task to write a Santa's "Naughty or Nice" list of one's actions. It is a requirement to really look into one self and ask, "why am I doing these things? What imperfection must I fix that is resulting in my actions of sin?" Repentance is truly seeing one's inner flaws and working on them; "to change his name, as if to say, 'I am a different person'".

Not surprisingly, the crux of Rabbi Eckstein's approach in helping addicts lies in this

idea as well. On the "Retorno" website, it states:

"During the stay at Retorno, [addicts] discover the root causes that led them to their current circumstances and learn how to overcome obstacles, including those they are likely to encounter in the future."^v

Unlike Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign, Rabbi Eckstein does not merely employ a tactic of teaching addicts to say no; to simply take away the drugs. He does not mention the need to strengthen one's resistance skills in order to not act in accordance with negative peer pressures. Rather, he discusses the causes that may lead to addiction: escape, obsession, lack of responsibility, dependence, depression, and boredom. He tells his clients, "if you're happy what you're doing then fine, don't stop - I won't say anything. But if you're not, if you're suffering, let us know." Rabbi Eckstein's principle aim is not to rid the person of the addiction problem, but he is trying to reach the roots of addiction. "Are you suffering?" he asks, "then let me help you".

Rabbi Eckstein finds an example of this approach in tanakh. After Adam sins eating a from the *ets ha-daat*, God calls out to Adam, "where are you?"^{vi} Many commentators and scholars delve into this question and ask what God meant by that phrase; how it is possible God did not know where Adam was hiding? Rabbi Eckstein sees this as God telling Adam, "go find yourself, look in the mirror, figure out where you are, who you are."

A crucial part of *teshuvah*, or of overcoming an addiction, is confession of actions. But the most difficult part is figuring out WHY one is sinning in the first place, and then having to change; having to break a normative way of life and behave differently. This is true repentance. This is true abstinence. Its not just the acknowledgement but the discovery of what is hurting.

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http://www.reaganlibrary.com/reagan/nancy/just_say_no.asp

ⁱⁱ Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 2.1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 2.2

^{iv} Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 2.4

^v www.Retorno.org

^{vi} Genesis 3:9

Finding Meaning in *Teshuvah*

BY: Joseph Attias

Last year I went with my family to Sardinia, a beautiful Italian island in the Mediterranean. Among the many things I saw, one had a most profound impact on me, and its impact is yet to diminish. This deep moment occurred in the most unexpected of places, a small, run-down, backward village that could not have housed more than one hundred families and a local fish market. Two elderly men, approximately in their mid eighties, stood staring at freshly posted sheets of paper on the side of a yellowed church wall. These posters contained the names and faces of members of the community who had recently passed away. Endless thought and cheerless reflection swamped my mind that night. Did the deceased achieve all they wanted to achieve? Did they lead meaningful lives? Rounding the last turn in their lives, what could the two older men answer to these questions? What troubled me the most was imagining myself in place of the old men; what answers would I be able to give myself in their position?

Seneca, the first century interpreter of Stoic Philosophy writes in one of his letters, "It's only when you're breathing your last, that the way you spent your time will become apparent to you"ⁱ and the message is quite simple, only towards the end of our lives do we do the serious introspection that can often be so frightening. But how do we avoid this seemingly inevitable path and inject into our lives meaning that we can be proud of at the end of our days? With Rosh ha-Shanah (The Jewish New Year) around the corner, *teshuvah* (repentance) seems like a good place to start.

As Jews we know very well where we have come from, where we are going, and the mission we must fulfill on this earth. But how does man, "half dust half deity,"ⁱⁱ return to the latter, his source and creator, in this murky process called *teshuvah*? Does God really want our *teshuvah*? Do our actions really matter? Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, the outstanding student of the Vilna Gaon, in his book *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* addresses this issue, making clear to us the weight of our actions and the danger of undermining their importance. "Every member of The Nation of Israel should never, God forbid, say, what am I? And how do my lowly actions have any effect on the world? Therefore understand, know and engrave in your heart, that every single detail of our actions, speech and thought, at every moment is never lost, God Forbid" (Chapter 1, Section 3).

Unlike Christianity, Judaism believes that the power is within each and every one of us to repent for our sins. We are free from the burden of our fathers' sins, but it is our privilege and duty to repent for what we have personally

done wrong. We are our own redeemers. The Torah tells us explicitly that God recognizes man's imperfection "For there is not one good man on earth who does what is best and doesn't err" (Ecclesiastes 7:20), yet we see that He graciously aids us in our repentance, "Thou dost reach out Thy hand to the transgressors; Thy right hand is extended to receive the repentant sinners." Furthermore, not only does God help us along in our search for him, but greatly desires our *teshuvah*, and in His compassion is willing to wait for it, "Thou dost wait for him until his dying day; if he repents



Thou readily accepts him" (High Holiday Prayer - *u-Netaneh Tokef*).

God wants our repentance so much, that should we hold back, Maimonides, in his Mishneh Torah assures us that "Even if a man was wicked all his life and repented at the end of his days, we do not remember his wickedness" (Laws of Repentance 1:3). In the Yom Kippur *haftarah* we see another example of Hashem not only yearning for our *teshuvah*, but again, helping us along the way, "The Lord says: Make a path, clear the way, remove every obstacle from my peoples path...Peace for those who have strayed far and near and they shall be healed" (Isaiah 76:14-16). Elaborating on this verse, Abraham Besdin in his book *Reflections of the Rav* remarks "Here God says to himself that He is breaking a road, clearing the encumbering jungle, opening a broad highway for the penitent to travel with ease to attain his *teshuvah*."ⁱⁱⁱ

What these sources tell us is that despite our imperfections, we have the ability to return, so much so that God even longs for our repentance. We *can* forget our past, look forward and embark on a new journey down "a road less traveled."^{iv}

Now, the theme of putting the past behind us and starting over is clearly manifest in scripture and Jewish thought by God's appointment of a Messiah, and the circumstances in which it occurred. (redeemer) from the Davidic dynasty. Peretz, the ancestor of the Messiah was conceived from an out of wedlock union of Judah and Tamar, his daughter-in-law. What is even more bizarre is that David's female ancestor was Ruth the Moabite. "Moab's lineage was more questionable than even that of Peretz, tracing its biblical origins to a relationship that was not merely promiscuous, but in-

Meaning spells out clearly that, "Man's search for meaning is his primary motivation in life...This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone"^{vi} It seems clear that to achieve fullness and completion in our lives we must have meaning; something to strive for or a goal to accomplish as an individual. As Jews this can be achieved by listening to God's words spoken through the Prophet Isaiah, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil" (Isaiah 1:16). God wants not for our destruction and demise, but rather for us to repent and live, "For it is not My desire that anyone shall die-declares the Lord God. Repent, therefore and live! (Ezekiel 18:32)"

Rosh ha-Shana is a time of deep introspection and serious thought. It has been made clear that our Master and Creator desires for each and every one of us to repent for what we have done wrong, so that we can lead meaningful lives and truly live. However, this is no pipe dream; God would not ask of us something that is impossible. The proof that we can prevail and return to God is manifest in our history. Like King David, Moses and Aaron, all of whom sinned against the Lord, yet succeed in becoming Israel's' greatest leaders, we too can override our past and dominate our future.

"Let us search and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord." (Lamentations 3:22) These words spoken by the prophet Jeremiah are particularly applicable as the New Year awaits us. In trying to fulfill the prophet's words, there will be inevitable setbacks, again no one is perfect, but we must have ingrained in our minds, that we are the masters of our own future, and no lineage or past acts can defy that

Joseph Attias is a sophomore in YC.

ⁱSeneca. *Letter from a Stoic*. London: Penguin Classics, 2004. P.71.

ⁱⁱ Byron .Lord George Gordon. *Manfred* 37-38.

ⁱⁱⁱBesdin, Abraham. *Reflections of the Rav, Man of Faith in a Modern World*. New Jersey: Ktav Publishing, 1989.

^{iv} Frost, Robert. *The Road not Taken*, 1920.

^v Soloveichik, Meir. "Redemption and the Power of Man." *Azure Winter* 2004.

^{vi} Frankl, Victor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Washington Square Press. 1984.

cestuous: That of Lot and his daughter."^v The Midrash (Gen. Rabbah 41:4) even alludes to further scandal, implying that David raped Bathsheba, and also that he himself was conceived in an unacceptable manner, finding proof in Psalms 51:17: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

The question is obvious: how can the redeemer of the Jewish People come from such a tainted lineage? But it is precisely this phenomenon that makes Judaism so special. The very fact that our redeemer will be a man with an extremely questionable past is earth shattering. It sends a message throughout the generations that we too can overcome our past and begin afresh. David, with his hazy past and questionable family tree, overcame and succeeded in becoming the King of Israel and having the honor of the Divine Presence resting on him until the day of his death, as seen in the Book of Judges: "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him...And the spirit of the Lord gripped him from that day on" (Samuel I 16:13).

The eminent Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl in his influential book *Man's Search for*

Special Feature:

Interview with Rabbi Marc Angel on His Recently Published Novel, *The Search Committee*

BY: Gilah Kletenik

You recently wrote your first novel. Would you tell us a little bit about it?

It was born one summer morning as I was walking on the boardwalk of Long Beach. Around this time, YU was looking for a new president and established a “search committee,” presenting the institution with the opportunity for self-reflection and self-definition. The book, *The Search Committee*, is about a Lithuanian-style yeshivah, “Yeshivat Lita,” in search of a new head. And even though these kinds of yeshivot don’t have search committees, this is fiction. There are two candidates for the position: Rav Shimshon, the established

son of the previous Rosh Yeshivah, and the more off-beat Rav Mercado. These candidates represent different views of the yeshivah and its future path.

The book is unique insofar as there is no narrative. Rather, the characters speak in their own words and voices. I made it this way because everyone has a voice and it is a sin to remain silent – no one should be silenced. Interestingly, save the Chairman, the Search Committee itself remains silent, anonymous. Ultimately, the question is: does the Search Committee have a voice, or the right to one?

Why did you write this novel and who did you intend it for?

I wrote the novel for myself. Writers generally write for themselves. It’s a self-expression that hopefully others will read. For example, a friend of mine is a *frum*, “Modern Orthodox” Muslim. He said that if I changed the names, it would be a Muslim story. He said, “Rabbi Angel, I want to kiss your hands.” I sent the book to another friend, a Catholic priest, who remarked: “how do you know what goes on in the Church?” It’s about how a traditional society can function in a modern world. The book explores the locking of horns between traditionalism and modernism, extremism and non-extremism.

How would you describe the difference of perspective between Rav Shimshon and

Rav Mercado? What are the merits and shortcomings in each of these approaches?















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Rav Shimshon is angry and authoritarian. Some say I've overdrawn him, but I don't think so. One fellow, who is a Rosh Yeshivah, said, "I couldn't stand him, but I know people like him who want to be boss." Yet, Rav Shimshon still represents a valid opinion – to make our own world and insulate ourselves. He represents centuries of tradition, a system that works, and the realm of the *beit midrash*, which has life and represents a powerful and compelling world. Rav Shimshon is angry because of the laymen, thinking they have no right to judge him. This is a valid, although incorrect, view.

Where does Rav Mercado come from? He is someone whose life starts in jeopardy. All odds are against him. He is from Oregon, attends Reed College, and is married to a *giyyoret* who doesn't cover her hair. Rav Yosef, Rav Shimshon's father and former Rosh Yeshivah, was a genius. He viewed Rav Mercado as the greatest proof of the Yeshivah's success: its ability to attract the greatest intellectuals and bring the vision to the outside.

I couldn't help but notice that all of Rav Shimshon's supporters refer to the institution as Yeshivas Lita, while Rav Mercado's adherents call it Yeshivat Lita. Is this coincidental?

No, it's part of the different visions they represent. Rav Shimshon wants this school not to touch on anything of the modern world; the Yeshivah's roots are European; they are old and run deep. The *tav* in "Yeshivat" is modern. Look at Artsroll – it's *frum*. They don't want to adopt new pronunciations, which is why they write "Yisroel" and not "Yisrael". They can't deal with the modern era. Rav Mercado and his followers say, "It's a new world; let's speak Hebrew." Rav Shimshon says, "Don't open the windows," while Rav Mercado recognizes that the Torah wasn't given to be a hot-house for plants – the Yeshivah should be part of the world and cope with it. And not how the world was one hundred years ago, but how it is today. He says that we can't be afraid – but yes, it's a challenge. The nagging question in the book is: "is Rav Shimshon really right? Maybe we do need to be hidden?" I sympathize with him, but think he's wrong.

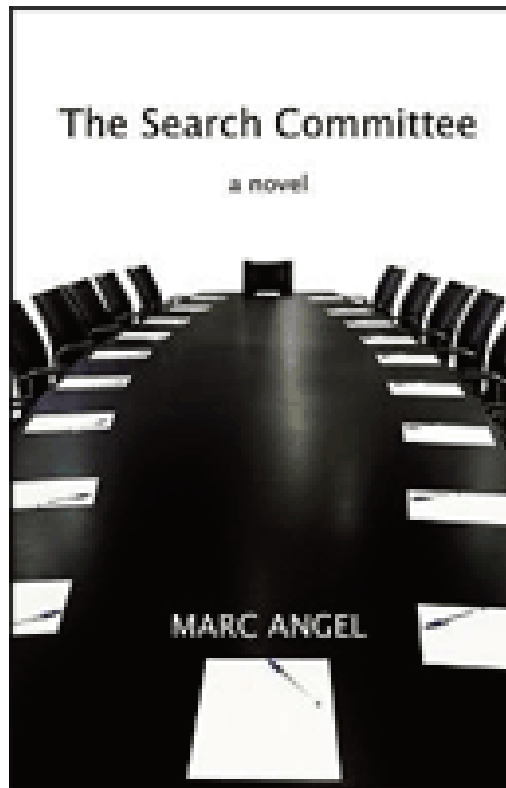
Rav Shimshon and his followers all seem caustic, even angry, whereas Rav Mercado's devotees are presented as more agreeable. Are you trying to communicate something about the schools of thought they represent by molding their personalities in these ways?

I don't know if I accept that. It's only true of Rav Shimshon and his wife because they find themselves in an offensive setting, insulted to go before the Search Committee. I think this is because in order to develop an insulated philosophy, one must denigrate the outside world and speak of it as hedonistic and sexual. It's a defense mechanism: if the outside world is not bad, then why not be a part of it?

A theme throughout the novel is the no-

tion of independence in thought, dress, and lifestyle. How much independence can there really be in a religion that requires, in every aspect of life, submission to Heaven and Halakha?

We learn, we have sources, we study with open minds. God gave the Torah to each individual; no one has a monopoly on truth: *shiv'im panim la-Torah*. There are boundaries, but there is tremendous latitude. Rav Shimshon thinks these boundaries are narrow, while Rav Mercado tries to expand them. There isn't only one way. Halakha is like a locus in geometry and not a point – there is a range. People ask a question and think there is one answer, but



that's false. God knows the one answer, but in His humor He gave us a locus. Rav Shimshon wants to give a *pesak*, whereas Rav Mercado wants to give a range of correct answers. Historically, Rav Mercado is correct.

Rav Mercado seems to represent a more sensitive, open Judaism. The dangers in this approach are obvious. How ought one to know where to draw the line in embracing the outside world and all that it represents?

It is dangerous, correct. Rav Mercado believes in teaching Torah thoroughly, thereby inculcating himself from the dangers of the outside. He believes that under proper Orthodox leadership, people can be independent enough to make the right decisions. It is a slippery slope, but becoming frozen and fossilized is also dangerous – it doesn't fulfill God's grand vision at Sinai. The best way is to face the world with strength – to train the Yeshivah students so that they have the ability to cope with the world.

The novel suggests that the power of synagogue rabbis has waned while that of

Yeshivah rabbis grown. Why might this be problematic and who is to blame for this?

I don't think anyone is to blame. There are sociological patterns at play – it's not just Jews. In their search for authenticity, wisdom, and knowledge, people think that if someone is learning in a yeshivah they know more than a synagogue rabbi. Rabbis are denigrated as glorified social workers and not viewed as knowledgeable in Torah. This view is widespread, and synagogue rabbis have played into this. A rabbi should spend the first hours of every day just learning. That's why I write books. Torah is our fuel; without it, we fizzle out. We must constantly replenish it. Rabbis have failed at

this – at devoting themselves to Torah. It's true that the new generation of rabbis is more devoted to learning than the older generation. Nevertheless, I was once at an RCA conference when a Rosh Yeshivah remarked that "rabbis must bring *shalom* to communities; the real questions should come to me." This is reprehensible. It's just the opposite of what a yeshivah is supposed to accomplish. Yeshivot should train their students to make decisions by themselves and keep them learning Torah. The Rosh Yeshivah should only be a back-up. When I would ask Rabbi Hayyim David ha-Levi, former Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Yafo questions, he would have me send my *teshuvah* and would then look it over and tell me its strengths and weaknesses. This is the way it should be.

It's hard not to pick up on the male-dominated storyline; after all, it is about a Lithuanian yeshivah. Still, certain characters advocate for an expanded, even emancipated, role for women in Judaism. What do you think is the ideal place for women within all areas of the community and how might this be achieved?

I don't have the ideal place. The issue of Orthodoxy and women exists because the world has transformed. Today, women study Talmud; this used to not be the case. But you have a glass ceiling; you can only go so far. We've created a dynamic by educating our women, and we don't know how to deal with it. We don't have an answer yet. I'm in favor of opening options: women's *tefillah* groups, women's Megillah readings, and women as members on boards. In our synagogue (Congregation Shearith Israel), we have Lynne Kaye filling the position of Assistant Congregational Leader – she does everything a rabbi would do except for the ritual aspects. Sure, these developments may be a dead-end, but how do we know unless we experiment? These boundaries – how flexible are they? A *pesak* on these matters would freeze the process. We must see how things unfold.

Is it wishful thinking to suggest, as the novel does, that the Judaism which Rav Mercado represents will eventually overpower that of Rav Shimshon?

I disagree with this assessment of the novel's direction. However, Rav Mercado is a great man. He loses this battle, but his life can't be over. I'm not sure he'll succeed, but I hope he does. His success now is that the book was published – that's his greatest victory. This plants the seeds and makes people think. If peoples' assumptions are challenged, there is intellectual commotion, which holds tremendous potential for the future, for change.

Rabbi Marc Angel is Founder and Director of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals (www.jewishideas.org); and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York. Rabbi Angel has written and edited 26 books. He is a past president of the Rabbinical Council of America and the Rabbinic Alumni of RIETS, and is currently co-chairman of a newly established Orthodox rabbinic group, the International Rabbinic Fellowship. The Search Committee can be purchased online through major bookstores or from the Institute's website: www.jewishideas.org

Gilah Kletenik is a senior at SCW majoring in Political Science and is a Managing Editor for Kol Hamevaser.



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