

KOL HAMEVASER

The Jewish Thought Magazine
of the Yeshiva University Student Body



A Nation Unto Itself?

Volume I, Issue 4

December 18, 2007



KOL HAMEVASER

The Jewish Thought Magazine
of the Yeshiva University Student Body

STAFF

Managing Editors

Mattan Erder
Gilah Kletenik
David Lasher

Associate Editor

Sefi Lerner

Staff Writers

Chava Chaitovsky
Noah Cheses
Tikva Hecht
Alex Ozar
Ayol Samuels
Shira Schwartz

Interviewer

Ari Lamm

Art and Layout Editor

Avi Feld

ABOUT KOL HAMEVASER

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

*Kol Hamevaser is a student publication supported by
The Commentator. Views expressed in Kol
Hamevaser are those of the writers exclusively.*

CONTENTS

VOLUME I, ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 18, 2007

| | | |
|---------------------|----|---|
| Gilah Kletenik | 3 | Open and Skeptical? |
| Chayim Goldberg | 3 | Letter to the Editor |
| Simcha Gross | 3 | Shiur Reconsidered |
| Tiffany Unterman | 4 | "For Every Atom That Belongs to Me as Good Belongs to You" |
| Noah Cheses | 5 | How Do We Relate to Difference? |
| Rabbi Shmuel Hain | 6 | <i>Beni Bekhori Yisrael</i> |
| Ayol Samuels | 8 | Jews and Christians |
| Aliza Hausman | 9 | Why are <i>They</i> So Weird? |
| Jackie Fast | 10 | <i>Rabim Meyad Meatim</i> |
| Ari Lamm | 11 | An Interview with Rabbi J. David Bleich |
| Erik Livak-Dahl | 13 | Open Letter from A God-Fearer |
| Shimshon Ayzenberg | 14 | Notes From the Underground |
| Alex Ozar | 16 | An Interview with Rabbi Dr. David Berger |
| Yaakov Bitton | 18 | Choosing to Be Jewish |
| Rabbi Aryeh Klapper | 19 | Is There A Mitzvah to Prevent Genocide? |
| Shira Schwartz | 21 | Messianism at the Dead Sea |
| Ari Bernstein | 22 | First Contact |
| Ami Friedman | 25 | Book Review of <i>The Israel Lobby</i> |

WE WANT TO HEAR WHAT YOU THINK!

PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR RESPONSES TO ARTICLES AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR FOR PUBLICATION IN OUR NEXT ISSUE. SUBMISSIONS CAN BE SENT TO KOLHAMEVASER@GMAIL.COM

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO DOWNLOAD THIS ISSUE AS A PDF, SEE WWW.KOLHAMEVASER.COM

COMING SOON: 21ST CENTURY TORAH U-MADDAH

Editorial

Open and Skeptical?

BY GILAH KLETENIK

I sat there nervously stirring the ice cubes of my now almost empty cup of iced tea. I did this because, well, it was too awkward to look my Indian friend straight in the face. Somehow, on this humid Washington DC evening our conversation had turned to the topic of *kashrut*. But, that wasn't really the cause of my discomfort. I was more than willing to answer his questions about *kashrut*, even the uncomfortable one about why I couldn't eat in his house, despite the strict vegetarian nature of his kitchen. In fact, he kind of appreciated my explanations about self-restraint and doing something simply because God commands it. But the conversation quickly turned when he asked about drinking wine that doesn't have a kosher symbol on it. I didn't quite know how to respond, and not because these *halakhot* had suddenly escaped me. Rather, it was because even before attempting to answer, I was struck by the irony of the question. Here I was, socializing with a non-Jew, about to explain to him how our rabbis wanted to prevent this very kind of mingling – I kind of laughed inside. But, instead of dodging the question, I felt like I had to be genuine, honest. So I pulled myself together, overcoming my hesitation and decided to put my cards on the table – really, I thought, I shouldn't have anything to hide and even if I do, why should I?

Looking back on that moment in Starbucks five months ago, I can't help but hate the fact that I hesitated to be frank and truthful with my friend. It bothers me that I even considered trying to obfuscate the truth or even ignore the question entirely. Most importantly though, I shudder at the thought that part of me wanted to hide something; that I almost felt embarrassed, or worse, ashamed of my identity. That I actually entertained the possibility of disguising who I was, that I had to overcome the strong urge to not tell my friend the truth about our halakha, highlights the profound lure to conceal the truths about our halakhic system and its underpinnings.

Perhaps this temptation to hide the truth lays in the fact that it's really easy to hide – to hide the truth, to hide ourselves, to hide from ourselves. Hiding the truth, I now realize, is something almost painless and so easily rationalized – the truth is real, painful and even dangerous. I now recognize that maybe I'm not alone in my temptation to hide the truth. That, possibly, as Orthodox Jews we play this game of cover-up all the time, albeit involuntarily. By living in our own communities and socializing almost exclusively with each other we are, in practice, hiding ourselves. This creates

a reality wherein there is seldom an opportunity for profound interaction with anyone outside of our comfortable *dalet amot*. But, perhaps most egregious of all, even more than hiding the truth and even hiding ourselves, is that we hide from ourselves – that, by living this way, we deprive ourselves of our independence and insult our intellect.

I now understand that I wanted to hide the truth about *stam yenam* from my friend because part of me felt insecure about it, even a little unsure about it. Perhaps, then, we as Orthodox Jews cling to our sheltered lives because we as a community are insecure; we're afraid of what might happen if we actually engage with the outside world. We do this because we don't own our beliefs; we lack the full assurance in our halakhic system to engage ourselves with the world around us. We don't question our beliefs nor do we challenge them. Rather, we accept them because we have "*emunah*." After all, the entire *modus operandi* of our community rests on our reliance on the knowledge and judgment of a select elite. We do this because, well, we don't know enough ourselves. We lack the rigorous, comprehensive and advanced Jewish education that would provide us with the self-belief and self-assurance necessary to confront the non-Jewish world with confidence, without ever running the risk of compromising our own halakhic observance. Until we truly own our beliefs, it's unlikely we'll ever look beyond our tight-knit communities and defy the prevalent "us and them" attitude.

Reflecting on that uneasy conversation I had with my friend, I realize that I was fortunate enough to have had the confidence in my beliefs to overcome my initial pangs of insecurity and be as open with him as possible. I think he appreciated my candidness and admired that while I embrace the halakhic system in its entirety, that doesn't mean I don't have my reservations, that I don't have questions. To the contrary, he realized that because I am firm enough in my beliefs, this is the very reason I am willing to discuss them openly and even skeptically. I think this is why, despite the discussion's obvious discomfort, we still remain friends.

Gilah Kletenik is Managing Editor of *Kol Hamevaser*

Continuing The Discussion

To the Editor:

I agree with Jaimie Fogel's praise of the so-called "New School" of Orthodox Bible study, as R. Etshalom titles it. My own experience in Israel was deeply impacted by the influence of Rabbi Menachem Leibtag. Serious Bible study, particularly in the quest for learning *p'shat* and being able to identify and separate influence of Midrash, is something that is long overdue. Thankfully, this is being spread amongst American Jewry with the rising number of students who spend a year or two in Israel and are exposed to the leading figures of this revival. The only shame is that students have to wait until after high school to finally be exposed to serious Bible study, which hopefully will no longer be the case as those who have studied in Israel begin to dominate American *chinuch* in Modern Orthodox (and hopefully all Orthodox) day schools.

I would just like to elaborate on a point that Jaimie made. I feel that the term "New School" is a misnomer because, as Jaimie pointed out, serious Bible study by Orthodox scholars has been conducted in modern times for over a century, starting with figures such as R. S.R. Hirsch and R. David Zvi Hoffman, continuing through this century with the scholarship of figures such as Umberto Cassuto, R. Mordochai Breuer, and Nechama Leibowitz. These figures all attempted to fight the spread of the cancer of Biblical Criticism and its fundamental hypothesis that the Torah is a man-made compilation of multiple sources. They did this by engaging in serious Bible study from the Orthodox perspective. Part of the fact that belief in the Documentary Hypothesis is nowadays limited to secular academics is partly to their credit. What educators such as Menachem Leibtag and Shani Tarigan have done is expose Orthodox Bible studies to the American Orthodox youth as a whole. This popularization has laid the seeds for Jewish youth to further develop and appreciate Bible study on an academic level, particularly in YU, and to spread the appreciation of serious Bible study through the American Jewish community as a whole.

Chayim Goldberg, YC 08'

Shiur Reconsidered

BY SIMCHA GROSS

Every day, we wake up with enthusiasm. Through davening and breakfast the excitement grows. We feel it inside. Throughout morning *seder* we prepare diligently for the moment, leaving ourselves only enough time to grab a bit of lunch. We are now ready for the object of all this anticipation, the unpredictable and exhilarating... Shiur Experience!

Though some of us no doubt do experience

this sense of expectation before Shiur, at its conclusion, we are almost invariably confronted with an entirely different sensation – confusion. Questions like "What was that last point Rebbe made?", "where was he going with that?" and "what was that source he quoted?" reverberate around the room. The talmid knows what this means; an hour of the Yeshiva *bocher's* bread and butter – *Chazara!*

We have become so acclimated to this routine that it somehow seems almost sacrilegious to question it. However, perhaps it is time that we question the utility of this exercise. Why the need for confusion, and the hours of repetitive review, to grasp a one to two hour shiur?

This question is sharpened by the stark contrast between the experience we undergo during shiur and our secular classes. Most secular classes do not leave the student flustered and perplexed, and as a result do not require a serious review of the material after each and every class. What underlies this difference?

The difference, I believe, stems from our contrasting pedagogical expectations of professors versus rebbeim. A professor is expected to address his class at *its* level; in contrast, talmidim are expected to follow a rebbe at *his* level. The classroom dynamic is thus completely inverted.

These contrasting expectations produce all sorts of undesirable results in a typical shiur. For example, rebbeim need not follow basic teaching protocol. Keeping the talmid interested, speaking clearly, and presenting the information in a comprehensible fashion, is no longer expected. It is the talmid's responsibility – and only *his* responsibility – to grasp a rebbe's unique mannerisms and style of delivery. After all, a rebbe should not be expected to compromise any aspect of his presentation characteristics for the sake of his audience, or should he?

I do not intend to belittle the difficulty of studying Gemara. Gemara, as a text, can be abstract and archaic, and consequently difficult. This problem is actually augmented by the talents of the Roshei Yeshiva; their analytical abilities and familiarity with the text are second nature to them. But this only widens the gap between the abilities of rebbe and those of talmid.

In the spirit of *shiur*, I propose following the Rambam's '*Shvil HaZahav*' or Golden Mean. Rather than the complete lopsidedness which comes at the expense of the talmid, a middle ground would be more beneficial to both rebbe and talmid. A more structured, organized and well-presented *shiur* would enable the talmid to follow along throughout the entire *shiur*, and even grasp those points that might otherwise be too abstract. Furthermore, a well-structured *shiur* would enable the talmid to absorb not just the information presented, but to also grasp a particular rebbe's methodological approach. This could potentially enable the talmid to apply his rebbe's methodology in his own personal learning even after he has left that rebbe's *shiur*.

Secular classes might also benefit from this approach. If the professors were to maintain their orderly structure and presentation, while at the same time encourage research and preparation in advance of their classes, the classes would become even more informative

and engaging to students at all levels.

What specific suggestions do I offer? For one thing, each *shiur* should be structured around a definitive topic, and a comprehensive list of *mekorot* should be provided in advance of each *shiur*. This would enable the talmid to better prepare before *shiur* and would make the *shiur* experience more interactive and therefore dynamic. This, in turn, would enable the talmid to gauge his own abilities and better appreciate the rebbe's style, by contrasting his own thoughts with those covered in *shiur*.

Furthermore, the *shiur* should be structured methodically in a proper pedagogical manner. The rebbe should clearly specify where one topic or subtopic begins and another ends. When quoting generally unfamiliar sources, the rebbe should first review them adequately before delving into a complex analysis of the material. If this takes too much time, then the rebbe should include the source in the preparatory *mekorot*. Under no circumstance should there be long discussions around a source never read or properly explained to the students. Finally, repetition is not a sin; if a point is made that the rebbe recognizes may be abstract or with which the class may be struggling, there is no harm in going over it one more time, or at least confirming that the class has understood it.

I am not writing this with any particular *shiur* in mind. Rather, I write from the experience of a student who has passed through a vibrant Yeshiva high-school and has spent two years in a *Yeshivat Hesder*, and has therefore attended many different *shiurim* by rebbeim of outstanding intellect. I have sat through *shiurim* which successfully integrated the above elements, but have struggled through many *shiurim* that did not. I write this with the hope that some rebbeim may, in fact, accept some or all of my suggestions, which would, I believe, enormously enrich the educational experiences of their talmidim. I also write this for those talmidim who sit through cryptic and unsystematic *shiurim*, and conclude that they lack basic abilities, or are simply "turned off" to further Gemara study as a result of their frustration. Perhaps, after reading this, they may realize that the fault is not their own.

I am certain that there will be Yeshiva talmidim who will claim that "pedagogical correctness" will strip the *shiur* experience of its luster and distinctiveness from all other areas of education. However, the Torah's distinctness should lie in its content, not in the obliqueness of its presentation. I also do not belittle the idea of "*ameylut ba-Torah*"; however, we must be true to the term. "*ameylut*" means overcoming hardships, not creating hardships to overcome. In fact, if my suggestions were to be adopted, I would fully expect that the time saved by the average *yeshiva bachur* could instead be profitably spent plunging deeper into the sea of Talmud. *Ameylut* would then be properly utilized; the talmid would not exclaim in bewilderment "I don't understand" but, rather, cry out in amazement, "how much more I can understand!"

Simcha Gross is a Sophomore in YC, majoring in English and Jewish Studies

For Every Atom Belonging to Me as Good Belongs to You

BY TIFFY UNTERMAN

Sefer Yonah has always intrigued me. Here is this prophet commanded by God to prophesy to the city of *Nineveh* that it would soon be destroyed, and he simply runs away as if he, like Adam, could hide from God. Even after delivering the prophecy and witnessing the resulting success (an anomaly for prophets) Yonah still seems to regret the prophecy. What is more surprising, since it appears to be unprecedented in *Tanakh*, is that *Sefer Yonah* portrays Yonah as a prophet who seemingly plays no part in the development of the Jewish nation. It is this irregularity – a book that deals with the betterment of a people who are not Jewish – on which I will focus.

It has happened, quite a few times, that while speaking with people about some universal social issue that requires some much needed attention, I find that in response their eyes glaze over and they bob their heads in affirmation, but not in action. Most of the time I believe that this response stems from our recognition that we are limited as individual human beings coupled with the oversaturated emphasis we place on our own desires and

tion. For Jews, this question seems to be of special import as responsibility connotes obligation and our obligations are delineated in halakha. First we need to understand, does halakha require Jews to help gentiles? But the question goes further because halakha does not mandate *hashkafa*, philosophy, or Biblical interpretation. Is there a philosophical imperative for Jews to be responsible for the well-being of gentiles? Does *Tanakh* contain a precedent for this responsibility?

Jewish law is peppered with commandments that require involvement in bettering the social welfare of others. The command of "you shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" is just one prominent example. To understand this commandment better, we must ask who is this neighbor for whom we must care? The Gemara in *Gittin* addresses this question: "Our Rabbis taught, we sustain the non-Jewish poor with the Jewish poor; visit the non-Jewish sick with the Jewish sick, and bury the non-Jewish dead with the Jewish dead, for the sake of peace."¹

Many different interpretations have been offered to explain the term "for the sake of peace." Some interpretations suggest that this

The Rambam's stance on this issue is repeated in his quotation of a Mishna from *Sanhedrin*. The Mishna states that a person who saves one Jewish life is considered as if he has saved an entire world.² The Rambam, in his quotation of the Mishna excludes the specification of a Jewish life and broadens this comment to include any human life.³

Some *halakhot* expressly dictate that we are obligated to care for the non-Jew while other *halakhot* seem to limit that obligation. I have yet to encounter a convincing halakhic argument that would require restraint in caring for gentiles, although there are some individual laws that require further investigation and understanding. What I think is of greater interest, though, are the ambiguous statements of the Rabbanim – the ones that do not specifically include or exclude non-Jews in obligations of ensuring social welfare of people, such as the Gemara in *Sotah* that calls upon Jews to clothe the naked just as God did for Adam and Chava.⁴ Of course, there are commentaries that interpret these laws both ways. What I find compelling is the argument that these non-specific laws, complemented by overarching values that are promoted in Jewish thought obligate us to be responsible for all people.

The Gemara in *Bava Metzia* relates that Jerusalem was destroyed because we judged by strict Torah law and did not act "*lifnim mishurat ha-din* (beyond the line of the law)."⁵ This statement indicates that there are detailed laws as well as basic values that we must uphold in order to serve *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* in an acceptable manner. From this passage one could conclude that there are two dimensions to serving God: keeping halakha and acting in accordance with Torah values. I find this notion wholly simplistic and too inadequate to be true. In his article, "Does Jewish Tradition Recognize An Ethic Independent of Halakha," Rav Aharon Lichtenstein expounds on this point and describes halakha as "multiplanar and many dimensional," creating a reality where we "realize that the ethical moment we are seeking is itself an aspect of halakha."⁶ In essence, halakha has many layers and transcending its full meaning means understanding and fulfilling these many layers.

It is with this in mind that I turn to an example of greatness displayed by Avraham Avinu. The *pasuk* relates: "And Avraham still stood before God."⁷ Just after hearing the long awaited news of the upcoming birth of his child, Avraham refused to rejoice in his personal good fortune. Rather, his mind was with those seemingly unconnected to his own existence. Immediately after sending the angels to inform Avraham about the birth of his son, God decreed that He would wipe out the cities of *Sedom* and *Amorah*. Avraham had the audacity to challenge the righteousness of this plan.



cares. But once in a while I receive a response that is different, and for me, astounding. For instead of simply shrugging off the issue, a person will respond: "Why should I care? I am Jewish and I only care about what Jews need. Who cares about *them*?" This response is usually accompanied with the air of one who believes that he or she is taking up the holy mantle of God.

Jewish responsibility to gentiles is an issue that is becoming more and more relevant. With the increasing connectedness of different nations around the world, the question of who is responsible to help in humanitarian crises that take place oceans away is a pressing ques-

term alludes to pacifying other nations so that we can duck from aggression and oppression and live in peace. The Rambam, however, proposes a very different interpretation and adds: "Behold, [*Tehillim* 145:9] states: 'God is good to all and God's mercies extend over all God's works' and [*Mishle* 3:17] states: '[The Torah's] ways are pleasant ways and all its paths are peace.'⁸ The Rambam's use of these *pesukim* suggests that this concept of peace expresses important qualities of God and is fundamental to understanding and fulfilling the Torah. For the Rambam, caring for the social welfare of gentiles is a way of emulating God and an aspect of observing the Torah.

This challenge has forever impacted me. Here, Avraham knows that he will for certain start and therefore lead a nation that will become the People of Israel. Nevertheless, what is the first action he takes as a father of this nation? He takes a stand against universal suffering.

I sometimes think about what would be if he hadn't challenged God. In any case, *Sedom* and *Amora* were both destroyed. But, had Avraham not challenged God I would be inclined to think that it would have been a severe disappointment and that it would have been reflected as such in the text. A perfect contrast to Avraham's action is Noah's inaction. Noah, who was a socially passive figure before the



flood, is criticized in the midrashim for not taking initiative to save the rest of humanity. This disapproval is so extensive that midrashim even go as far to point out that, had he lived in a different time period, he would not have been considered a person worthy of note.

The Rav, in his celebrated article "Confrontation" defines this common humanity (as displayed by Avraham) which binds Jews and non-Jews alike: "we, created in the image of God, are charged with responsibility for the great confrontation of man and the cosmos. We stand with civilized society shoulder to shoulder over against an order which defies us all. . . we are human beings, committed to the general welfare and progress of mankind, that we are interested in combating disease, in alleviating human suffering, in protecting man's rights, in helping the needy, *et cetera*."¹ Here the Rav analyzes the developmental process of man and his relation to his surroundings. It is obvious to the Rav that all of humanity is connected in its quest of bettering the lives of all people, and that part and parcel of that reality is that we all have a responsibility to one another to do what we can to further this mission.

I frequently look to the vibrant texts of our tradition to comprehend and to evaluate what my moral outlook and my code of action should emulate. And like Rav Lichtenstein articulated, in these dynamic sources I find a comprehensive code of ethics. But I admit that even before I examined the issue, I assumed that it would be such. For unlike Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who holds that no ethical or emotional rationale can be ascribed to Halakha, I believe that God, as described throughout Tanakh, requires morality; that to serve Him means to know and to do *Tsedek U-mishpat*, *Chesed Ve-Rachamim*.

I even find the question of Jewish responsibility to gentiles to be faulty. In his article titled "Tikkun Olam,"² Gerard Blidstein points out that the term *tikkun olam* is commonly interpreted as Jewish responsibility to non-Jews

and that this is an incorrect understanding of the Hebrew term. The English interpretation disconnects the Jew from the non-Jew in this cause, whereas the term *tikkun olam*, claims the actor as a united part with the entire world.

As Jews we have a unique identity that directs the way we live. The Rav explained that this identity is not lost but rather enhanced as we recognize our shared humanity with all of society. We recognize that *Adam ha-rishon* was created in a neutral and therefore inclusive environment, and we embrace the universality of the human experience as we begin our day with *birkhot ha-shahar*.³ Perhaps this is one of the reasons why on Yom Kippur we read the powerful story of Yonah; to remind us during this very personal day of our very universal context.

Each day, as I encounter people through what I read, through what I see, or through who I meet, I can feel the pulsing of *tzelem Elokim* inside each person. This is why social justice has no bounds. This is why human welfare is a religious, Godly pursuit. This is the impetus that stirs me to act. "The LORD is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works."⁴

Tiffany Unterman is a Presidential Fellow in the Office of the Dean at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work

¹Title taken from Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass*. 1855..

²Vayikra 19:16

³Gittin 61a.

⁴Rambam, *Hilkhos Melachim*, 10:12

⁵Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5.

⁶Rambam *Hilkhos Sanhedrin* 12:3.

⁷*Sotah* 14a, for another example of this see *Shabbat* 33b.

⁸*Bava Metzia* 30b. See also the Ramban's commentary on the concept of "*kidoshim tihiyu* in *Vayikra* 19:2.

⁹Aharon Lichtenstein, "Does Jewish Tradition Recognize An Ethic Independent of Halakha?" *Modern Jewish Ethics - Theory and Practice*, Ed. Marvin Fox. (Columbus, 1975), 70.

¹⁰*Bereishit* 18:22.

¹¹Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought*, 6:2 (1964):

¹²Gerard J. Blidstein, "Tikkun Olam." *Tikkun Olam - Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, Eds. David Shatz, Chaim I. Waxman, and Nathan Diament. (Northvale 1997), 18-19.

¹³Blidstein, "Tikkun Olam," 28. Here the Rav is quoted as describing the universal nature of *birkhot ha-shahar*.

¹⁴*Tehillim*, 145:9

How Do We Relate to Difference?

BY NOAH CHESES

They used to say about Rabban Gamliel Ben Zakai that no one ever succeeded to preempt him in extending a 'hello,' even the gentile in the marketplace.

—Berakhot 17a

I grew up outside of New York and so my social community lent itself to a broader and more diverse constituency. I had friends who were not Jewish and who had a different skin color than mine; I even had some acquaintances with religious Christians and Muslims. My experiences are not so unique. Difference has become part of the texture of daily life; at work, in the streets, and on the television set we are regularly confronted with people whose faith, culture, race, skin color, and customs are unlike our own.

If we, as religious Jews, are to live in close proximity to difference, as we do in our age of globalization, we need to responsibly



confront questions of engagement with the 'other,' questions of religious and racial tolerance. Are we equipped as a community to make space for those who are different and have another way of interpreting the world? Can we recognize G-d's image in one who is not in our image: in a Hindu or Sikh or Christian or Muslim? Can we do so and feel not diminished but enlarged?

Before addressing such questions we must fully understand the difficulty and complexity of even trying to do so. Nothing has proved harder in the history of civilization than to see G-d, or good, or human dignity in those whose faith is not my faith, whose skin is a different color, whose truth is not my truth. In approaching these questions as Orthodox Jews our challenges are even more nuanced and complicated. Because we are so firm in our religious convictions, it is much harder for us to accommodate other views. We often find our-

selves falling prey to thinking 'if we are absolutely right and 'they' are absolutely wrong, what is there to discuss?' This line of thought leads us to a very dangerous impasse. We need to find some sort of reconciliation to our particular problem of tolerance, or rather intolerance.

We must start by defining our terms. By tolerance, I do not mean to imply pluralism or even democracy. Instead, I am promoting a balance between broad mindedness and a cautious criticalness. Too often in our conversations and newspapers we use tolerance and apathy interchangeably, but there could be no greater error. Tolerance is not achieved by individuals unburdened with convictions and morals. To the contrary, I believe that tolerance means that we hold tightly to our religious values and principles and *nevertheless* listen to and learn from other people and their ideas by taking them seriously and honestly. There is much to learn from those who disagree with traditional Judaism. Yet, at the same time, views that are aggressively antithetical to Ju-

daism, must only be tolerated in order to properly address and criticize them.

The first step in addressing the issue of Orthodox Jewish tolerance must be to promote an accurate conception of ourselves. In other words, the answers to the questions that we laid out above must entail an internalized awareness of our uniqueness as Jews. Judaism is about an inspired identity, and establishing any identity involves exclusion. For every "we" there is a "them," the people not like us. Without these boundaries we would not have an identity at all. Hence the Torah tells us "your daughter you shall not give to his son and his daughter you shall not take for your son."¹ Indeed, Chazal fully understood this sociological principle and therefore instituted numerous *takanot* and *gezerot* to create distance and separation between Jew and gentile. The Talmud records, for instance, the famous rabbinical decrees forbidding gentile bread, wine,

and oil, all of which helped create social boundaries."

Another piece of the answer should emerge from our community becoming more aware of our natural predisposition towards intolerance. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of England, explains that we are uniquely situated in a Western Society that is still haunted by the Ghost of Plato, which posits the belief that those who do not share my faith, my race, or my ideology do not share my humanity.¹¹ At best, they are second class citizens. Because we, as Jews, view ourselves as the chosen people, we are more susceptible to these ideas.



In his book *The Dignity of Difference*, Rabbi Sacks asserts that there is nothing worse than elevating one's own mode of being into the universal norm and thereby denying the humanity of those whose customs are foreign to us or who sport a different skin color. Being chosen does not mean an elevated status or worth, above the rest of humanity; it means an elevated responsibility towards humanity. Diversity must therefore be ceaselessly defended against ethnocentric arrogance. Any attempt to impose an artificial uniformity in the name of single culture or faith, reflects a tragic misunderstanding of what it takes for a system to flourish. Because we are different, we each have something unique to contribute, and every contribution counts.

Another cause of our intolerance emerges from our tendency as social and competitive human beings to place a value judgment on value neutral enterprises. Instead of simply acknowledging differences between two people, for instance, we label people using words like "good" or "bad." Such assessments are the foundation of prejudicial intolerance. Why must we rank people? Why can't we realize that "different than" does not inherently mean "better than" or "worse than?" We must not be too quick to dismiss people and ideas by making the mistake of attributing worth and merit to them before fully engaging with them. Becoming more cognizant of our judgmental tendencies will help cultivate a greater and deeper sense of tolerance.

In order to formulate an ideology of tolerance, we must, of course, turn to the Torah.

The Torah certainly espouses an outlook that makes space for difference; Chazal note¹² that the Torah commands "you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself" only once, but in no fewer than thirty six places commands us to "love the stranger."¹³ Just as the Torah reminds us that we are G-d's special nation, the Torah also reminds us of the fact that G-d, as the sole creator of the universe, is the author of diversity. It might serve us well to pay attention to all his creations and appreciate their greater purpose in the destiny of mankind.

The conversation about tolerance has been going on for centuries; my only contribution is to promote the dignity of difference, the

potential value of making space for and interacting with someone who subscribes to a different world view than I do. My experiences in this area of life dictate that such encounters are mostly enriching, not threatening. Indeed, I have discovered that there are many times when G-d even meets us in the face of a stranger.

Noah Cheses is a staff writer for *Kol Hamevaser*

¹ *Devarim* 7:3.

² *Avodah Zarah* 36a. Some of these prohibitions are due to the depraved moral state of Jews living in non-Jewish society, while others are due to the inherent value of separateness, of maintaining elite conduct in order to be moral paragons for the world.

³ Sacks, R. Jonathan. *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. Continuum, New York 2002.

⁴ *Bava Metzia* 59a.

⁵ "Stranger" in the Torah is either a resident 'alien' who does not share our religion or, more commonly, a convert who does not share in our biological ancestry: "When a stranger lives with you in your land, do not ill treat him. The stranger who lives with you should be treated like a native born (*Iyikra* 19:34-37); "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger—you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt (*Shemot* 23:9)."

"Beni Bekhori Yisrael" Reflections on the Doctrine of Chosenness¹

BY RABBI SHMUEL HAIN

Long before Noah Feldman's article appeared in *The New York Times Magazine* this past summer, critics ranging from medieval Christian polemicists to Mordecai Kaplan have attacked the Doctrine of the Chosenness of Israel as denigrating to others at best, and dangerously racist at worst. Recently, a number of works, including a scholarly monograph,² a powerfully advocated essay in a popular journal,³ and an insightful chapter in a volume of the *Orthodox Forum* series,⁴ have all tackled the Doctrine of Chosenness. And yet, out of the 40 some-odd polled participants (nearly all of whom would classify themselves as Modern Orthodox Jews) in a class I taught recently on the topic of Jews and gentiles, 35 responded that they felt they were uninformed and/or were troubled by the notion of *Am Nivhar*.⁵ This essay, then, will survey and analyze some of the recent scholarship devoted to this subject and will also suggest a new paradigm in approaching chosenness.

The Selection of Abraham⁶

When approaching the concept of particularism and chosenness in Judaism, the first critical point to emphasize is the universalistic framework of the selection of Abraham as well as Judaism's universalistic vision for the end of days. This would appear to be the central message of the opening chapters of the book of *Genesis*.⁷

While we can only speculate about the purpose of creation, one plausible objective suggested by Rabbi Dr. David Berger is the opportunity for all human beings to subordinate themselves to a divine authority in order to actualize the values of justice and loving kindness. Unfortunately, Man repeatedly falls short in the attempt to bring glory to God through moral actions. First, Adam and Eve transgress the sole explicit command of God, thereby undermining divine authority. Later, the generation of the flood precipitates the destruction of the world by flagrantly and habitually violating the values of justice and *hesed*. And then, one final attempt to create a world without divisions among people is thwarted by the hubris of "the generation of division" who rise up to challenge God's authority. Thus, the universal goal of Creation tragically remains unrealized.

It is only at this point, after repeated failures on a universal level, that God introduces division in mankind. It is almost inconceivable that Abraham's election signifies a permanent abandonment of the original, universal aim of creation; even as Abraham is selected he is re-named to indicate that he is the father of a multitude of nations. Moreover, according to

Maimonides and others, the distinction between Jew and gentile will disappear with the advent of the Messiah.

Abraham's election, then, actually represents God's way of taking a surer, albeit more indirect, path to achieving the same universal goals of Creation. Indeed, Abraham's life and personality highlight the very qualities that were absent in earlier generations. First, when God informs him of the impending destruction of Sodom, Abraham humbly declares that he is as dust and ashes. And yet, Abraham challenges God after God is compelled to inform Abraham of the destruction based on the fact that Abraham "will instruct his children...to do what is just and right."⁸ Later on in his life, Abraham sublimates his own feelings of compassion and submits to God's direct command



to sacrifice his son, thereby cementing his status as a "God fearer". The realization of the goals of creation and the fulfillment of universal redemption is predicated upon the ability of Abraham and his family to impart these values to all mankind.

God's Beloved?

Notwithstanding the universal goal, the election of Abraham and the Jewish People, formalized at Sinai, established deep differences between Jews and non-Jews: Israel becomes a "kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation." The expansive set of commandments and beliefs ennoble the recipients of the revelation, and the status of Jews and gentiles with respect to ritual and other areas of Halakha is marked by sharp distinctions. How are we to formulate the idea of chosenness and the distinction between Jew and Non-Jew?

The *Zohar*, Judah Halevi, Maharal and the Ba'al Ha-Tanya articulate the Doctrine of Chosenness in an essentialist way.⁹ According to this view, Jews are distinct from, and superior to, all other peoples and this distinction is caused by a special characteristic, unique to the Jews, literally passed on from one generation to the next. Thus, Judah Halevi maintains that only the Jewish people are capable of

prophecy and subject to supernatural Divine providence.⁸

As Berger notes, there is no way to significantly mitigate the force of the essentialist position of the *Zohar*, Halevi, Maharal and *Tanya* unless one takes a purely historical approach that would seek to justify this position by seeing it through the prism of Jewish experience in the medieval and modern European world in which the authors lived. Indeed, the change in historical context is precisely what gives us the right to denounce a contemporary Jew who would use this language, while retaining our reverence for *Zohar*, Halevi, Maharal, *Tanya*,



etc. Moreover, the radical essentialist approach does not constitute binding doctrine. A believing Jew is free to reject this position and embrace the view that there is no difference in the essential makeup of the Jewish and Gentile soul.

More significantly, even when read in an historical vacuum, an unqualified affirmation that gentiles are inherently inferior flies in the face of a mountain of contrary evidence, including the notions that all human beings are created in the image of God,⁹ and have the capacity to become *hasidei umot ha-olam* with a portion in the world to come.¹⁰ It is not surprising, then, that more moderate approaches predominate the current discourse on this topic.

One such view, summarized by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik, sees chosenness as a familial, preferential love by God of the Jewish people: "This, then, is the Jewish understanding of Abraham's election: God fell in love with Abraham because he loved Abraham's desire to found a faithful and righteous family. God was drawn to Abraham's character and his hopes for the future. Most importantly, God *desired* to enter into a covenantal relationship with Abraham to make Abraham's family his own family, Abraham's dream his own dream, Abraham's children his own children. In forging a covenant with Abraham, God expressed his desire to be, along with Abraham, a father to the Jewish people, and it is on this familial

basis that God's love for Israel is founded... In the words of the theologian Michael Wyschogrod (*The Body of Faith*, p. 64), God "sees the face of his beloved Abraham in each and every one of his children as a man sees the face of his beloved in the children of his union with his beloved."¹¹

Rabbi Soloveichik has argued that this perspective eschews a Halevi-esque essentialist distinction between the souls of Jews and non-Jews. It asserts that the Jews are charged with a universal mission and maintains the equality of all mankind when it comes to justice. It does all this even as it promotes a hierarchy vis-à-vis God's love of the Jewish People and the rest of mankind. This familial, preferential love, Rabbi Soloveichik argues, explain those Jewish texts that advance the view that the Jews are not abandoned even when they sin.¹² However, this formulation of Chosenness, while certainly grounded in Biblical verses,¹³ still projects a vision of the God-Israel relationship that is preferential in nature and tainted by chauvinism, as critics have noted.¹⁴ This approach also cannot account for Biblical and Rabbinic texts which emphasize that the Jewish people must merit their Chosen status.¹⁵

An alternative approach, advanced by Menachem Kellner in his work on Maimonides, grounds the distinctiveness of the Jew in theological/religious terms: "Maimonides's attitude toward the Jewish People was one of great national pride... Unlike Halevi, however, he did not make an entire metaphysic out of this pride. The superiority of the Jews derived from two sources: God's promise to Abraham and, most importantly, the Torah – not any inborn characteristic, inherent quality or shared biological origin."¹⁶

Kellner further establishes that, according to Maimonides, the definition of who is a Jew focuses on theology and practice, not on ethnicity or biological origin. Therefore, Maimonides adopts a pro-conversion and proselytes posture; he maintains that non-Jews can achieve perfection, prophecy and divine providence, and he believes the difference between Jew and gentile will dissolve in Messianic times. Kellner further argues that individual Jews and Israel as a whole must continuously merit their elected status through proper theological beliefs and religious practice.

While Kellner does demonstrate that this view was held by Maimonides, this perspective is somewhat idiosyncratic and predicated on a number of Maimonides' unique philosophical positions such as acquired intellect and the centrality of dogma in defining who or what is a Jew. It also runs counter to the aforementioned texts that indicate that Israel, due to its covenant with God, still enjoys God's love even when it sins. We are left, then, without a comprehensive theory to explain chosenness in a non-preferential, familial manner.

Beni Bekhori Yisrael

However, if we examine the very first description by God of His relationship with the

Jewish Nation, the basis for a new paradigm of chosenness, emerges. This approach will explain how the chosenness of Israel lies in its "Abrahamic" mission to communicate and exemplify the monotheistic idea and moral ideals to humanity.

After Moses has finally acquiesced to God's demand to return to Egypt to liberate the Israelites, God instructs Moses as follows, "And thou shall say to Pharaoh: Thus says the Lord, Israel is my son, my firstborn (Exodus 4:22)." What is the significance of being God's firstborn? And why does God charge Moses with relaying this message to Pharaoh when Moses first encounters the oppressor of the Hebrews?

This description of the Jewish People as *beni bekhori Yisrael* indicates that all nations are considered God's children and part of God's family. Jew and gentile alike receive "Divine love", with the Jewish people representing the firstborn child. Being the firstborn does not mean that God showers more love on the Jewish People; no parent should love their firstborn or any other child in a preferential way. Nevertheless, the oldest child does play a unique role in the family dynamic. The oldest sets the tone for the rest of the children; how he or she acts has an inordinate influence on the behavior of all the other children. As such, parents naturally demand and expect greater responsibility on the part of the oldest child; thus, a singular bond exists between the oldest child and the parents. So too, in the family of all humanity, the Jewish people are charged with a teaching role. Jews set the tone for, and influence the values, ideals and behavior of, the rest of Mankind. This is the message that God told Moses to convey to Pharaoh. The Jewish People need to be redeemed so that they can take their proper place as the firstborn child, directing all of humanity to achieve the universal goals of Creation. The *beni bekhori Yisrael* model establishes that the Jewish People do enjoy a familial bond with God; but it is a bond that is shared by all of humanity and which makes the Jewish People responsible for all of humanity.¹⁷

This view also allows us to better understand the notion of covenant between God and the Jewish people, as well as the seemingly contradictory evidence regarding the need for Jews to merit their Chosen Nation status. The covenant between God and Abraham establishes a reciprocal relationship, with each party "contributing" to the partnership. According to this perspective, God does indeed invest in the destiny and survival of the Jewish people because of the critical role they play in achieving the ultimate goals of creation. Therefore, God does not abandon the Jewish people even when they sin. But there are times when the Jewish people must also reciprocate and demonstrate their willingness to sacrifice for God in order to fulfill their mission.¹⁸

Certainly according to this understanding of our unique covenantal bond with God, Judaism's affirmation of chosenness, rooted in God's very own terminology of *beni bekhori Yisrael*, should ennoble and inspire the Jewish people without denigrating others.

Rabbi Shmuel Hain is the Rosh Beit Midrash of GPATS, the Rabbi of Young Israel of North Riverdale, and Director of the MYP/RIETS Iyun Chabura

⁸ This essay is adapted from a lecture delivered at the conclusion of this past summer's women's Beit Midrash Program held in Teaneck, NJ.

⁹ Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People*, (Albany, 1991)

¹⁰ Meir Soloveichik, "God's Beloved: A Defense of Chosenness," *Azure* 19 Winter (2005).

¹¹ David Berger, "Jews, Gentiles, and the Modern Egalitarian Ethos: Some Tentative Thoughts," *Formulating Responses in an Egalitarian Age*, ed. Marc Stern, (Lanham, 2005), 83-108.

¹² Part of this discomfort is due to the publicity surrounding the publication of a Racist book on chosenness, "*Romemut Yisrael U-farashat Ha-galut*," by Saadyah Grama. For background on the controversy surrounding the book, see: "Charedi Rabbis Rush to Disavow Anti-Gentile Book" in *The Forward*, December 19, 2003.

¹³ Much of this section draws heavily from David Berger's chapter op cit.

¹⁴ *Hazal* underscored the universality of the original divine intent with the statement in the *Mishnah Sanhedrin* that Adam was created singly so that no one would be able to say, "My father is greater than yours".

¹⁵ *Genesis* 18:17-19

¹⁶ See *Shabbat* 146a and *Yevamot* 103b for the Midrashic basis for this position. "Why are non-Jews (*A'kum*) filthy? Because they were not present at Sinai; for when the serpent had sexual relations with Eve, he injected her with filth. Israel which was present at Sinai had their filth removed, non-Jews who were not present did not... What about converts? They too were indirectly present at Sinai..."

¹⁷ There are some subtle differences within this perspective. According to the *Tanya* (1:1, end), all people have a soul formed from the husks (*qelippah*), but the Jewish soul is from *qelippat nogah*, which contains good. The gentile soul, on the other hand, is from the other three *qelippot*, "which contain no good at all" (*she'ein ba-hem tov kelal*). According to *Zohar* (Part III, 25b), Jewish souls originate in divine holiness (*nefesh elokit*), "a part of God above," while gentile souls originate in animal or satanic forces. Maharal, (see *Ha-Mahashavah ha-Pedagogit shel ha-Maharal Mi-Prag*, pp. 37-42) argues that Jews possess a soul that is more separate from the body than that of gentiles, and hence less susceptible to its influence. In addition, it is better prepared for spirituality, so that Jews are more resistant to passions and more receptive to Torah.

A more moderate perspective is offered by Judah Halevi in several places in *Sefer Ha-Kuzari*. He ascribes a special divine element to the Jewish people accounting for the restriction of prophecy to Jews. But even he allows for converts to purify their soul through Jewish practices; although in the first generation they remain excluded from prophecy. That the divine element can be attained within two generations indicates that there is not a deep seated, irrevocable, metaphysical difference between the two souls.

¹⁸ See *Mishnah Avot* 3:14.

¹⁹ Maimonides, *Book of Kings*, end of Chapter 8.

²⁰ Soloveichik, "God's Beloved"

²¹ In addition to the verses Soloveichik cites, see *Sifra, Leviticus* 16:16.

²² See *Deuteronomy* 4:37 and 7:7-8.

²³ See the letters to the editor and Soloveichik's rejoinder in the Autumn 2005 issue of *Azure* (vol. 22). See also Shubert Spero's letter to in the Spring 2005 (vol. 20) which takes issue with Soloveichik's understanding of Divine love.

²⁴ See Exodus 19:5 and Exodus Rabbah 47:13.

²⁵ Kellner, *Maimonides on Judaism*, 81-83.

²⁶ See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik, *Festival of Freedom*. The Torah HoRav Foundation: 2006, (pp. 136-148) where a similar idea is expressed. Rabbi Soloveichik explains the punishment of the plague of the firstborn on the basis of this theory.

²⁷ This reciprocal relationship is expressed beautifully in the *Mekhilla, Exodus* 12:6: "Why was the Pascal lamb taken four days before its slaughter? Because the time had come for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham to redeem his children; but the Jews were completely bereft (naked) of merits to be redeemed. God gave them the commandment of the Pesach sacrifice in order to be redeemed...." The extraordinarily brave act of designating the Egyptian deity four days before its actual slaughter, thereby alerting the Egyptians to their intentions, transformed the Jews from a group of idol-worshipping slaves without any merits into a nation worthy of redemption. Indeed, this was the prerequisite for the Hebrew slaves to be saved from the plague of the firstborn and to earn their role of God's firstborn. A similar perspective emerges from Abrahanel's explanation of the concept of Abraham's Berit Milah- see Abrahanel on *Genesis*, Chapter 17.

Jews and Christians: A Study of Religion and Response

BY AYOL SAMUELS

In any religious system there is a constant dialectic between the social reality, on the one hand, and tradition and scripture, on the other. Scriptural interpretation, legal rulings, and religious ritual respond to and are guided by this dialectic. The development of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity in the presence of each other is no exception. The social reality of two religions with common sacred texts, spaces, and history living in close proximity was bound to influence each others respective systems.

Of course, in order to demonstrate that Jews and Christians were influenced by living amongst each other, we must first show that Jews were aware of and interacted with Christian society. After all, since the 13th century, Europe was replete with caricatures depicting the Jewish "other" in oriental garb,¹ and Jews in medieval Europe were required to wear badges identifying themselves as such.² This does not leave one with the impression that there was very much in the way of meaningful encounters between the two; the Jew was deemed an outsider in a predominantly Christian society. I would argue to the contrary, though. The fact that Christians found it necessary to continuously depict Jews as "other" and require certain dress demonstrates that the Jews were, in fact, somewhat indistinguishable from Christians, living among them, dressing like them, and interacting with them. Consequently, measures needed to be taken to maintain the Jew's status as "other."

The proximity of Jews and Christians is highlighted by an event concerning the Jews of Brest in the early 18th century. According to the Lithuanian Tribunal, two Jews robbed the tomb of an important Christian woman from the local church. Their daughters were later found donning many of the ornate garments from the loot and were thus caught.³ The fact that the Jewish thieves knew about the funeral and where to find the tomb, the daughters felt comfortable wearing these "Christian" clothes, and, finally, that the Christians saw the daughters, points to the reality of very close living quarters.

Not only did Jews and Christians live together, but they also interacted on a day-to-day basis. The *Or Zarua* (1200-1270), for example, discusses the reality of Jews hiring Christian wet nurses,⁴ a common occurrence in the Jewish community as evidenced also by the many Jewish and Christian folktales that sprouted up around it.⁵ Conversely, Christian leaders stated their strong disapproval of those

Christians who had sexual contact with Jews. While probably not a common occurrence, this type of close interaction was clearly possible within society.

With the very close encounters between Jews and Christians, it is no surprise that these interactions influenced their respective religious systems. Although Christians were the ruling majority for the large part of their history, they often saw themselves as practicing the "newer" religion in comparison to the long-established Judaism.⁶ This perception led to a certain "burden of proof" that pushed Christian authorities to draw on the established traditions and "knowledge" of their Jewish neighbors and, at the same time, find ways to create stark distinctions in their religious milieu and veer from the Jews in their midst. Nicholas De

and declare their superiority over their Jewish counterparts. This motivation shapes much of classical and medieval Christian theology. Christians accomplish this goal through both overt laws as well as implicitly polemical rituals. The law forbidding Christians to work as slaves for Jews, for example, is continuously emphasized. Laws such as these indicate an attempt to distance Christians from Jews and perpetuate the view of Jews as the subjugated and "enslaved" ones who were rejected by God.

In Christianity's earlier years, there was a very similar trend of actively moving away from Judaism. During the Quartodeciman controversy of the 2nd century, Christians of Rome were furious at those practicing Christianity in Asia. The latter were celebrating Easter on the

settled in Nicea in 325 CE in favor of the Christians of Rome. This strange decision by the Christians in Rome to go according to the *day* follows naturally from a desire to distance themselves from Jewish rituals.

Of course, the influence of Jewish-Christian encounters is not limited to Christianity. These interactions affected Jewish exegesis, law, and ritual as well. These realms of Judaism were used to both deal practically with the social proximity of Jews and Christians and respond to Christian claims that were especially poignant because of this proximity. R. Yair Bacharach (1638-1702), commonly known as the *Havot Yair*, responds to the problem of Jewish women doing business with Christians in the homes of Christian men and transgressing the law prohibiting seclusion,



Lyra, a 14th Century Franciscan and a very influential Christian commentator, is an excellent example of the former. He emphasizes the importance of the literal meaning of the biblical text as necessary for any subsequent Christian allegorical reading. Who better to go to for exegesis, he reasoned, than those who have been steeped in reading the bible for centuries?⁷ Thus, de Lyra draws very heavily on Rashi's commentaries in attempting to find the "true" meaning of the text.⁸

At the same time that Christians draw from "Jewish knowledge," they attempt to distance themselves physically and theologically

date of the crucifixion, which happens to be the 14th of Nissan, the same date as Passover. This overlap is no coincidence. These Christians were not only retaining the Jewish tradition of celebrating on the 14th of Nissan, but also many of the Passover customs themselves.

To be sure, we even have records of a Quartodeciman bishop, Melito of Sardis's, Passover "*haggada*," with many similarities to that of the Jewish one. The Christians in Rome were infuriated and thought that Easter should take place on the Sunday following the first full moon of the spring equinox, thus celebrating the *day* and not the *date*. The controversy was

yihud. In his responsum, we see a give-and-take between himself and R. Meir Stern regarding how to deal with this issue. R. Meir Stern, the Rabbi of the German Jews of Amsterdam in the 17th century, looks for various ways to find "*pithei heter*," opportunities for leniency, for these women. Although R. Bacharach does not agree with many of Stern's prooftexts, he thinks that, due to economic concerns, this is a reality that will not go away and therefore concludes that these women should not be castigated, although it is wrong.⁹

We might say, then, that, although not ideal, a new halakhic reality was created due to the en-

counters between these Jewish women and Christians.

Like Christians, Jewish authorities felt the need to not only respond to social issues but also to theological issues arising from the encounter with Christianity. These responses sometimes took the form of rituals that we are still familiar with today. After the destruction of the Second Temple, for example, R. Yohanan B. Zakai and R. Gamliel instituted the prayer, "*la-minim ve-la-notsrim*," whose purpose was to create a boundary between rabbinic Jews and "Jewish Christians" within the synagogue. A further example of Christian-Jewish encounters affecting the development of rabbinic Judaism comes from the Passover *haggadah*. Israel J. Yuval, a noted historian from Hebrew University, points to several parts of the *haggadah* which he thinks are implicit responses to early Christianity. The lack of focus on Moses, in the *haggadah*, according to Yuval, is a direct retort to Christians who believe in their savior, Jesus, a "God-like human." Furthermore, he argues that the



midrash that states that the obligation to tell the story of Egypt "all the days of your life" includes the messianic age is responding to the Christian attitude towards the story of the Exodus. According to Christians, now that the messiah, Jesus, has come, the story of Egypt should not be taken literally, but should be read allegorically.²⁴

Finally, interactions with Christians affected the interpretation of scripture at times. Specifically, the *Song of Songs* served as a backdrop for Rashi, whether consciously or not, for responses to Christian polemical attacks. In his introduction to the *Song of Songs*, Rashi explains that he reads the text as an allegory that foreshadows the Jews' contemporary situation of exile. Rashi reads the story as a dialogue between God and the Jews of his day, in which God expresses his love for them and his everlasting connection and covenant with them. This, some say, is in response to the Christian claim that God left the Jews and chose the Christians and that the suffering of the Jews is proof of this. Throughout the commentary, Rashi emphasizes the close relationship the Jews had with God, assures Jews that Christian proselytizing won't work and promises that Jews will eventually be sovereign

once again.²⁵

Through these few examples, we can see that the relationship between Jews and Christians had serious effects on the development of both religions, whether through response, influence, or a combination of the two. Studying the historical relationship between Jew and gentile, therefore, is not simply a curio that should be reserved only for historians to research. Rather, the committed Jew as well as the practicing Christian should also express curiosity.

Ayol Samuels is a staff writer for Kol Hamevaser

* Most of this material was drawn from an excellent course by Professor Debra Kaplan, entitled 'Jewish Christian Encounters.'

¹ Heinz-Schreckenberg *The Jews in Christian Art* (New York, 1996)

² Brian Tierney *The Middle Ages* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), 258

³ Magda Teter, *Material Possessions and Religious Boundaries in Early Modern Poland* Accessed on Sunday 16th of December 2007 <http://www.earlymodern.org/citation.php?citeKey=85&docKey=i>

⁴ *Sefer Or Zarua, Helek 4 piskei Avoda Zara Siman 146*

⁵ There are many Jewish folktales in which Jews are kidnapped by their Christian wet-nurses and baptized. The most famous of these is probably that of Pope Elchanan, the Jew-turned-pope.

⁶ I am only arguing that this seems like the perception of Christians at the time. I am not weighing into the debate about whether Judaism is the "mother" religion or the "sister" religion to Christianity.

⁷ Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pennsylvania, 1963)

⁸ In the same vein, John Dury and Samuel Hartlib proposed to create a college of Jewish studies in 1641 London with one rabbi and two Christian Hebraists on staff to allow Christians to learn about Judaism. Also, in many of the Christian folktales the Jew is portrayed as the stubborn one who will not reveal much-needed information.

⁹ *Sefer Sheelot U-tshuvot Havot Yair Siman 73*

¹⁰ Ironically, this has been changed to "lamalshinim"

¹¹ Israel J Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 98-125.

¹² Sara Kamin, "Rashi's Commentary on *Shir Ha-shirim* and the Jewish-Christian Commentary." *Shnaton La-mikra Ve-Laheker Hamizrah Ha-kadum* 7-8, 218-248.

Why are They so Weird? Translating Dominican to Jewish and Back Again

BY ALIZA HAUSMAN

I can't escape telling everyone at the Shabbat table that I'm a convert when I tell them I that I grew up in Washington Heights. When they ask if I know Rabbi so-and-so, I tell them I grew up on the *other side* of the Heights. *The YU side? The Bennett side?* No, I grew up between Audubon and Broadway...you know, where the Dominicans live.

As a Dominican-American convert, I am charged with being both the Jew that the Dominican cab drivers can talk to in their native tongue and reminisce about living in *la capital* (Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic) and the Dominican that Jews come to as their go-to-girl for deciphering the psyche of the Dominican population in Washington Heights. It can be a joy and a burden to help my people understand each other. In under-

I was too self-involved to realize there was a whole other world going on right next to the mix of Catholicism, *Santeria*, and *empanadas* that ruled in mine.

Later though, I had an Orthodox conversion and married an Orthodox man. Once we were married, a Holocaust survivor asked my grandmother-in-law, how anyone could convert after the tragedy of the Holocaust. Upon hearing this I was at a loss for words. I think that I converted *because* of the Holocaust. In junior high school, the world I lived in and the world that lived next door collided when Hannelore Marx, a Holocaust survivor, came to visit us in the classroom. She showed us the numbers on her arm and told us of the atrocities she had experienced. I was awe-struck that she had been persecuted because of her religious beliefs. I was, in fact, so struck by her story that in my childish naïveté, I surmised that there must be something incredibly special



standing both, in some way, I am removed from both groups. I hover on the fringes ready to put out the little fires that surface when communication goes awry.

I attended elementary school and junior high school on both sides of the Yeshiva University campus, P.S. 189 and I.S. 143. In elementary school, the most I knew about Judaism was that Jews do not celebrate Christmas. This meant that we celebrated Chanukah with our Jewish teacher. At these parties we got to play with dreidels and the boys (and only the boys) wore kippahs. When I ask my little sister what she thought of the few Jews we saw during our childhood in Washington Heights, she says that given their manner of dress, "I thought they were Amish." I was even more oblivious. Maybe I was too short to see whether the men were wearing kippahs. Maybe

about being Jewish if someone was willing to kill you for it. I went home that day and stole the *Magen David* pendant my mother wore on the chain around her neck (along with a cross and saint pendants) and wore it to school the next day.

With the pilfered *Magen David* proudly displayed on my neck, I marched around the school with a confidence I rarely felt in junior high. Walking into one class, I heard something that would become etched in my soul forever. A classmate, a mean girl who had probably sat next to me as we heard the Holocaust survivor recount her story in the camps, had snickered something loudly enough for the whole class to hear: "Heil Hitler!"

That day, I felt as if my heart was bleeding. I could not bring myself to focus on the tasks at hand. My little shoulders shook with

sobs. Suddenly and with true horror, I realized that a new world had been opened up to me. In this new world, some of the Dominicans around me could be just as cruel as the Nazis. Because of that pendant (before my mother finally discovered that I had stolen her pendant and took it back) I learned over time that many of my classmates and those around me had similar negative feelings towards Jews.

It wasn't just my classmates who viewed Jews in a negative light; my own family was no different. My mother's lawyer had the signature side locks, wore a black suit, a white shirt and donned a black hat. He was always kind to us and my mother to him. But behind closed doors I heard my relatives whisper that Jews were *cheap*, that they owned *everything* and worst, they had killed Jesus. *They think they're better than us.*

When I introduced my first secular Jewish boyfriend to my aunt, she said that even though he was Jewish, he was nice. Her relationship with anti-Semitism was beginning to ebb as my grandmother's was just starting to unfold before my eyes. When my grandmother had seen a photograph of my Indian boyfriend, she asked with a sniff, "Does he smell?" When she found out that I was in love with a Jew, my grandmother was so angry that I was afraid she would slap me. Her disgust was palpable and it finally registered that to her, worse than dating

to get that it doesn't matter who landed on Plymouth or Amsterdam Avenue first; now, it's about how we treat each other living side by side.

Just as Shabbos comes to a close for the Orthodox Jews in the area, the mostly Christian Dominicans prepare themselves to attend mass on Sunday morning. The way we pray is different. The way we dress is different. The way we think is different, but the way we view each other, with skepticism and suspicion, is not. If I could just go one day without being asked why *they* dress that way, why *they* do or don't do that, I could learn to find some peace and love both sides unconditionally. But that is not what God has asked me to do. When I begin to tell you that a Jew, a Dominican girl, a Muslim boy, a Chinese woman and a witch were sitting around the dinner table, I'm not cracking a joke, I'm telling you about the last Shabbos meal at my house.

As long as we remain divided, living in our own little worlds, unable to understand each other's customs and hopes and dreams, I will continue to be the emissary between the land of rice and beans and the land of cholent and kugel. Yes, I serve *maduros*, sweet, yellow plantains (banana cousins, not bananas!), as a side dish at my Shabbos table. And my husband, Yehuda, tells his friends to go to only Dominican barbers: "They cut hair the best!"



a black man, a white man, or an Indian man, was dating a Jew. Was my family, one that lived in Washington Heights side by side with the Jews for years, any more or less anti-Semitic than the other Dominicans around them?

Even though we live side by side in Washington Heights, the fact remains, the residents of Washington Heights live in their own ghettos - the Dominicans are on one side and the Jews on the other. The Dominicans have their customs, the Jews theirs. Both sides assure themselves that they were there first. At least, that's what I hear from my Jewish friends who *were there first*. Don't get me wrong, the Jews can be just as cruel as the Dominicans in their ignorance of the other's culture. No one seems

No one has to know that the first time he went to a Dominican barber, with me in tow, his knees were shaking. He claims that it was because he was afraid his limited Spanish would find him being shaved bald.

I know that behind the rude questions I am asked, behind the hate and the senseless acts of violence that occur between the Dominicans and the Jews, there is this little thing called fear. On Shabbos, I asked the girl who thinks the national anthem should be sung only in English, not in Spanish, if she would like to give up her Jewish culture to become "more American?" Over my wedding photos, I tell my grandmother, that my husband makes a mean *recaito*, the green goo we blend together

to make fantastic beans. My friend, a rabbinical student, steals this green goo to make authentic rice and beans for his relatives in Michigan.

There are little ripple effects of change but still, when my husband goes apartment hunting in Riverdale and remarks that he previously lived in "the Heights," the Jewish real estate agent assures him there aren't too many Hispanic people in Riverdale, "it's safe." My husband doesn't even pause: "My wife is Hispanic."

When a Jew asks me why Dominicans dress the way they do, I ask what the deal is with being *tznius*? Covering the elbows and knees is one community's uniform, flaunting one's assets in tight jeans is that of another. Why are Dominicans so loud? Don't tell me you've never been to a Jewish wedding where you wanted to pull out the ear plugs when the yeshiva *bochurs* launched into yet another *niggun*. No, there's no kissing at the end of the ceremony, I tell my aunt calmly, and no sex under a sheet through a hole. No, Jewish women don't all shave their heads after marriage and kosher doesn't mean a rabbi blessed the food. No, Dominicans are not *shomer negia*. Yes, we even hug strangers and tell them all our business in the first five minutes we meet them. So, of course, when we dance, we make sure to dance extra close.

One night around the Shabbos table, my husband told my African-American students, Keith and Reggie, that he was going to teach them a *niggun*. After making faces of shock and horror, my students fell completely silent. I could have let it go, but I didn't.

"What's wrong, guys?" I asked patiently. Reggie quickly piped up: "Well, you know, we love you and Yehuda and all, but I don't know. I mean, maybe he thinks we're all cool enough that he can use that word with us, but like, it's not cool." Yehuda almost choked on his food while I burst out laughing. "He didn't say that! He said *niggun*. N-I-G-G-U-N. A wordless melody."

If a Muslim teenager can break-dance with an Orthodox Jewish rabbi at my wedding, then maybe we can all begin to fathom leaving the realm of what is comfortable to put our fears on the backburner and bridge the gap between Jews and non-Jews. We may have different paths to follow but we're all human and that humanity should unite us. It's all about communication, trying to understand each other and finding common ground. We know about all the ugliness these encounters can bring, but maybe there isn't enough discussion about all the beauty that can come out of learning about each other's cultures.

Aliza Hausman is a freelance writer in New York City who suffers from an addiction to literature, films, magazines...and the nice Jewish boy she married.

Rabim Be-yad Meatim?

BY JACKIE FAST

When one thinks of the Chanukah story, that of the traditionalist Hasmonaeans resisting the Hellenistic Seleucids, one probably imagines that if not for the miraculous regime change, Jews would have been lost to assimilation. The *Al Ha-nisim* tefilla reminds us, after all, that the victory of Chanukah was *rabim be-yad meatim*, a victory for the underdog minority. According to the impressions of anyone who has seen a children's Chanukah play or the grade-school video *Lights*, the infiltration of Greek culture into Judea was deep and thorough; at best, people wanted to fully reconcile it with Jewish living, and at worst,



they accepted Hellenism and rejected Judaism, casting it to the wayside. At least according to the surface view of Jewish cultural life in the years preceding the Hasmonaean rebellion, it would seem that assimilation was in the wind; it was simply the direction in which the culture was headed. However, this impression instilled by our childhood educations, like many views taught to us in our youth, is somewhat simplistic and not an entirely accurate depiction of the popular Jewish view toward Hellenism in the years of Seleucid rule prior to the Hasmonaean Rebellion.

For the vast majority of Jews prior to the Hasmonaean rebellion, the new Hellenistic culture was seen as a foreign imposition; most of the Jewish community was not interested in foregoing its traditional way of life. The impression that many have—namely, that the Jews *were* on the road to assimilation—is true primarily regarding the highest of the social strata. Interest in Hellenistic society was, then, split on lines of social classes in the years leading up to the revolt. Therefore, the rebellion reflected popular sentiments of the people, albeit not the wishes of the highest strata of aristocracy. Perhaps one might suggest that the Hasmonaean revolt was a popular revolution in an almost modern sense of the term!

To be sure, there exists ample evidence of the infiltration of Hellenism into Jewish society besides for the legal restrictions imposed by Antiochus IV Epiphanes upon the community. The book of *1 Maccabees* describes the Jews who were Greek sympathizers; that they encouraged Antiochus to legislate Hellenistic ordinances.¹ The book indicates that they desecrated Shabbat, ensured the construction of the gymnasium in Jerusalem, and cosmetically concealed their circumcisions. It was the Jewish High Priest, Menelaus, who converted Jerusalem into a formal Hellenic polis.² It would seem that Jewish people were not merely hapless subjects who fell victim to the Hellenistic legislation; rather the Jews themselves were involved to some degree in propagating these laws themselves.

This indication of Hellenistic penetration, among at least some of the people, reflects the



degree of Sadducean influence during the Seleucid period, which was at its peak in the political sphere during this time. Both Josephus³ and *2 Maccabees*⁴ describe the Tobiad family, an aristocratic clan involved with the Priesthood, which was Sadducean as well as profoundly Hellenized. During the reign of Antiochus IV, the High Priests were firm Sadducees, and the position of High Priest was no longer a position of hereditary succession. Instead, the ruler assigned the position to the highest bidder. Both of the resultant High Priests, Jason and Menelaus, took the task of Hellenizing Judea into a political agenda. For the aristocratic Sadducees, Hellenism took a very strong hold on their political and cultural affiliations.

It is worth noting that most of the historical evidence for Jewish support of the Hellenistic campaign (listed above) is affiliated with the ruling elites, who were primarily Sadducees. However, proof of Hellenistic sentiments among the Sadducees does not at all imply that Hellenism had spread to the Jewish masses. In fact, to the contrary—the Jewish

populus was generally opposed to the Sadducean political aristocracy, and as such they may have further rejected Hellenism when it was thrust upon them internally, by the Jewish elites. According to Louis Finkelstein,⁵ during the time of the Hasmonaean revolt in the early second century BCE, Judea was undergoing a process of marked urbanization, and the lower- and merchant-classes within the cities grew drastically. He notes that these socioeconomic strata were the ones most likely to sympathize with the Pharisees over the Sadducees. Therefore, this period saw the emergence of a majority within Jerusalem that was opposed to the Sadducees and by extension was opposed to the Sadducees' emerging alliance with Hellenism and adoption of Greek practice. It would seem that at the time of the Hasmonaean revolt, the Macabees had the support of a large percentage of the people.

Evidence is great that many, if not most of the Jewish citizens of Judaea had rather limited contact with Hellenistic practice other than the legal impositions of Antiochus IV in the years preceding the Hasmonaean rebellion. According to Louis H. Feldman in *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, most Jews during the Greek period were remarkably impervious to these outside influences. For example, there is only sparse evidence of Greek influence upon the literary milieu of Hellenistic-era Jews, and the output of Greek language works produced during the period pales in comparison with the number of books and documents that were written in Aramaic or Hebrew, of both Biblical and Rabbinic varieties.⁶ Although to be sure, many Jews may have acquired Greek names, especially by the second century BCE, fluency in spoken Greek was probably uncommon among most of the Jews even of the higher social strata until the late Hasmonaean period, as evidenced by documents written by Jews in Greek that display poor vocabulary and skills in the language.⁷

Indications that seem to suggest the pop-

ularity of Hellenistic culture, such as the bathhouses in major cities, may also be misleading. The presence of bathhouses and gymnasia in Jerusalem attest more to the size of the non-Jewish population in the city than to its popularity among Jewish residents.⁸ Lawrence Schiffman makes it clear that the majority of Jews in Judea at the time were peasantry, and although the peasantry may have adopted Hellenistic standards in their tools, pottery, and material culture, their intellectual culture retained its traditional Hebraic quality.⁹ The diffusion of technological advances did not necessarily go together with the diffusion of Greek thought, writing, and cultural practice.

The regnant perception that assimilation to Hellenistic values was common in Judea during the years before the Hasmonaean rebellion must be qualified. To be sure, there is significant evidence that some of the Jewish people were interested in adopting Greek norms and that the development of Antiochus IV's anti-Semitic Hellenistic political agenda may have originated as the wishes of particular Jewish individuals who sympathized with the Greeks. However, most of these Greek sympathizers were Sadducees affiliated with the aristocracy, and their positions did not necessarily reflect the will of the nation's majority. Most of the Jews opposed these elites on both political and cultural grounds, and instead supported the Macabees in their rebellion for Pharisaic Jewish sovereignty.

The victorious Hasmonaean revolt expressed a momentary victory for traditional cultural values and religious practice not only in the realm of political power but also in the popular opinion of the Jews. Celebrating Hanukkah immortalizes *this* victory, which is perhaps an even greater victory than that found in our childhood perceptions of the era and the holiday.

Jackie Fast is a Senior at SCW, majoring in History and Jewish History

¹ *1 Maccabees*, i

² *2 Maccabees*, iv:23-50

³ *Antiquities*, xii:4

⁴ *2 Maccabees*, ii

⁵ Finkelstein, Louis. *The Pharisees: the sociological background of their faith*, Jewish Publication Society, 1962.

⁶ Louis Feldman. *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, Princeton University Press, 1993. p. 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹ Lawrence Schiffman. *From Text to Tradition*, Ktav Publishing, 1991. p.71.

An Interview With Rabbi J. David Bleich

BY ARI LAMM

Should Jews be involved in human rights activism? Does this relate, in any way, to the obligation to be an or-la-goyim?

I do not think there is any mandate in *halakha* to promote human rights activism unless human rights is defined in a very narrow way to refer to preventing one's government from depriving people of basic rights to which they are entitled *mi-tzad ha-din*. But take, for example, the right to vote. I am not sure that everyone, *al pi halakha*, has an absolute right to vote. There might be *halakhic* grounds upon which one could restrict the right to vote to certain people, or certain classes of people, e.g., taxpayers. This would not necessarily be wise; however, that does not mean that restriction of the right to vote would be prohibited by *halakha*.

But that is only as a matter of *halakha*. The *Ribbono Shel Olam*, while greatly concerned with *halakha*, is concerned with other things as well. Jews also have other concerns beyond *halakha*. No one wants to live in a society in which the government acts in an arbitrary fashion. There are certainly circumstances in which activism is, in fact, desirable and wise. However, wisdom and desirability do not necessarily entail a *halakhic* mandate. For example, one surely wishes that the state make decisions that promote a healthy economy, but that does not mean there is a *halakhic* obligation to engage in advocacy for implementation of such policies.

In terms of, say, genocide: the first person to say that genocide is *assur*, even in the event of war, was the *Hasam Sofer*. Here, then, we are dealing with something that is subject to analysis in terms of *issur ve-heter*, and thus with *halakhic* obligations vis-à-vis the world at large. We must therefore ask a number of questions: is there an obligation in terms of "*le-afreshi me-issura*"? Not necessarily. Is there a *din* of "*rodef*" in *dinei benei Noah*? There is, according to virtually all authorities. The sole exception is a *da'as yahid*. How active is one *mehuyav* to be in providing unsolicited information with regard to such matters? Does the existence or non-existence of an obligation in this regard make a difference? There are a lot of things that aren't absolutely mandated by *halakha*. The problem with this sort of discussion is that it lends itself to the notion that either there is an absolute *hiyyuv*, or nothing at all. In truth, even though there may be no absolute *halakhic hiyyuv*, the world would certainly be a better place in which to live if genocide did not exist, and if all human rights were respected. If one wants to live in a better world, then one does whatever is necessary to remove obstacles to achieving that goal.

Are halakhic authorities responsible for ensuring or promoting the observance of the sheva mitzvos benei Noah? If so, what relevance does such responsibility have for public policy vis-à-vis the Jewish community, and the wider non-Jewish community?

As far as the first part of the question is concerned, the halakhic response with regard to the Land of Israel is clear. Rambam states that the status of a *ger toshav* is contingent upon formal acceptance of the *sheva mitzvos benei Noah*. If a *ben Noah* does not wish to accept the Noahide laws, he may not remain in the Land of Israel.

In the Diaspora, particularly in light of the fact that *ein yadeinu takifah aleihem*, there is no obligation to compel the *benei Noah* to accept the Noahide laws. Indeed, in terms of Jewish obligations vis-à-vis non-Jews, there is no obligation of *hokhei'ah tokhi'ah*, there is no *din arvus*, and hence no normative obligation to ensure that gentiles observe the Noahide laws. That is not to say that we have no interest in promoting their observance of the Noahide Code. For a variety of reasons, we do have such an interest, but that interest does not rise to the level of a binding obligation.

The question is whether there is an obligation to provide information, to teach the non-Jews the *sheva mitzvos benei Noah* and to respond to questions concerning ramifications and minutiae. It seems to me, that there is an absolute obligation to respond *ke-halakha* when non-Jews inquire about the *sheva mitzvos benei Noah*, but that there is no obligation to offer unsolicited information in this regard. There may certainly be an element of self-interest involved in promoting observance of the Noahide Code – presumably one does not want to live in a society in which murder is sanctioned by the state – but that is primarily a concern for self-preservation, or in Rambam's terminology, *"she-lo yishahet ha-olam,"* having little to do with promoting the observance of the Noahide laws for their own sake.

I have also emphasized that we are the *ba'alei ha-Masorah* with regard to the *sheva mitzvos benei Noah*. As the Brisker Rav pointed out, that is the meaning of the verse *"ki hi hokhmaskhem u-vinaskhem le-einei ha-amim."* We thus have an obligation to provide the relevant information to the gentiles, at least when such information is solicited.

There is an illuminating *teshuvah* in the *She'elos u-Teshuvos Hasam Sofer* addressed to a former student who had become a communal rabbi. Finding it impossible to keep body and soul together on his meager salary he requested a raise. That request was denied. Thereupon, he asked *Hasam Sofer* whether he might engage in a "work action." *Hasam Sofer* observed that if the community did not provide for the rabbi's needs he would have little choice but to seek some means of gainful employment. *Hasam Sofer* ruled that if a *she'elah*, or request to sit in a *din Torah* is addressed to him while he is engaged in earning a livelihood, he is under no obligation to respond. But, he continues, he is certain that his student will spend the lion's share of his time in Torah

study. During such periods, ruled *Hasam Sofer*, *"shel haverkha kodem,"* and he is under absolute obligation to respond. There is no similar obligation to interrupt one's own learning to teach a layman a *blatt Gemara*. I understand the obligation posited by *Hasam Sofer* as flowing from the obligation to transmit the *Masorah*, rather than simply from the obligation of *Talmud Torah*.

The implication is that, outside of any obligation of *talmud Torah*, there is an obligation to respond to questions regarding cases of Noahide law. We have an obligation to perpetuate the *shalshes ha-Masorah* of the *sheva*



mitzvos benei Noah by enlightening non-Jews concerning their observance.

How should Judaism respond to racism?

Halakha does not distinguish, as does the Civil Rights Act, between discrimination on the basis of skin pigmentation or gender, and, say, discrimination on the basis of the color of a person's eyes or hair. In this country, a person can discriminate against blue-eyed blondes, or in favor of blue-eyed blondes to his heart's content but he cannot discriminate on the basis of skin pigmentation. If one were to ask me, I would much prefer legislation that would not allow discrimination against anyone on the basis of anything that is unrelated to whatever it is that is the subject of contention. For instance, if one is hiring for a gender-related job, then discrimination on the basis of gender makes perfect sense. If one is interviewing prospective models for a sun-block advertisement, it would make no sense to hire a person of color for the simple reason that such a person is not at risk for sunburn in the same way as a Caucasian is at risk. But enlightened public policy should require elimination of all senseless discrimination.

But is there a halakhic obligation to treat

everybody equally? Such an obligation is difficult to find within the halakhic corpus. There is nothing that prevents a person from agreeing to rent his apartment to "X" while refusing to rent it to "Y" – whether for a good reason, a bad reason, or no reason at all. That would not preclude legislation on the part of a *beis din* of a community in the form of *takanos ha-tzibbur* that would ban such conduct. The fact that this country bars discrimination on the basis of gender or race and the like is because in the past there had been a problem with discrimination of this sort. Discrimination on the basis of eye or hair color has never been a serious

with the similar concept developed by the *Kuzari*. However, there is little of normative consequence in asserting that the concept of *tzelem elokim* encompasses gentiles and then attempting to extrapolate halakhic ramifications from that principle. Nevertheless, there are well-known metaphysical implications and ramifications for a Jewish value system that result from the concept of *tzelem elokim*. Probably the most important analysis is that of Seforno, who understands the term as connoting the creation of an incorporeal soul with potential for developing intelligence, apprehension of the Deity and immortality.

When considering ma'amarei Hazal, or statements by later halakhic authorities concerning gentiles, is it important to investigate and consider the historical or cultural context within which such statements were made?

The answer is usually, but not always, no.

An example of an instance in which the answer would be in the affirmative is in the *Nakash* case, in which a Jew wanted for murder in France subsequently fled to Israel. Israel and France signed an extradition treaty in 1958, and the Israeli judicial system was asked to rule on the question of whether or not Mr. *Nakash* should be extradited. One of the Israeli Supreme Court justices wrote an opinion declaring that extradition is consistent with the traditions of Judaism and cited a whole list of sources in support of his contention. There is only one problem. Every one of the passages cited by the justice as supporting evidence was written for the censor and was not intended *le-halakha*. If one looks at any *sefer* published in 18th century Russia or Poland for example, one will find a statement explaining that words like *"aku"m*, or *"goy"*, do not refer to the people among whom the Jews of the day lived, etc. Every schoolchild knew that these statements were simply not true and were published for the benefit of the censor. In such instances, one clearly needs to understand the context in which such statements were made. But normally, other than to the extent that historical context is explicitly referenced in a given *teshuvah*, or to the extent that such context is implied by the manner in which facts are presented, historical context is irrelevant. If there is any single factor that distinguishes *talmidei hakhamim* from "scholars," it is that the latter read historical and cultural motivation into rabbinic dicta and the former regard *halakha* as objective, eternal and immutable.

What should be the role of secular courts in relation to Jewish courts in contemporary Jewish society?

Secular courts have a very significant role to play in adjudicating matters such as naturalization proceedings. Insofar as litigation is concerned there is an *issur of arkaos shel akum*. Jews are not allowed to have recourse to *arkaos* in processing claims against fellow Jews – that is a blanket prohibition. To the extent that there are dispensations to go to *arkaos*, e.g., pursuant to a *siruv* issued by a

societal problem, and as the aphorism goes, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." This does not mean, however, that there will never be a problem with such discrimination. If such a problem should arise, the government could readily introduce legislation to remedy the situation. Similarly, if we were properly organized in a *kehillah* with a communal *beis din* system, legislation to enact necessary *takkanos* would exist.

What are the implications of the fact that all mankind is created be-tzelem elokim?

One possible *nafka mina* concerns the prohibition of *nivul ha-mes* with regard to a gentile corpse. R. Meir Shapiro, in his *Ohr Ha-Meir*, asserts that the issue is a matter of dispute between Rashi and the Ramban flowing from their respective formulations of the *mashal* of *shenei t'eumim*. One variation includes the word *"Yisrael"* and one does not. Ramban takes Rashi to task because he limits the concept to Jews who are termed "sons of the Almighty." Rashi, then, must have understood that although the term occurs as a description of *Adam ha-Rishon*, that characteristic was not transmitted to all of mankind. Rashi's notion is entirely compatible

competent *beis din*, the secular judicial system may be utilized in order to effect a recovery no greater than available in accordance with *Hoshen Mishpat*. But there are adversarial situations in which the *issur of arkaos* does not pertain. In situations in which a Jew is a plaintiff against a non-Jew, there is a very complex question concerning what one is entitled to recover through the secular court system. One thing that must be emphasized, however, is that if a non-Jew is willing to submit to the jurisdiction of a Jewish court, there is an absolute *hiyyuv* to use a *beis din*.

How should the Jewish community deal with Christian support for Israel?

This is a very thorny issue. I am not aware of the possibility that Christians can legitimately choose not to support Israel. They read *Tanakh* too. If Christians recognize that *Eretz Yisrael* belongs to *Kelal Yisrael*, then we should say *yeyasher kohakhem* and thank you very much! Sometimes, of course, support comes with strings attached – and that requires *hakham einav be-rosho*. I certainly do not want to paint all Christians with one brush. Christianity is not monolithic. Diverse, Christian fundamentalist groups support Israel for a variety of reasons. Some support Israel only because reemergence of a Jewish commonwealth fits into their eschatological framework. Others support Israel as part and parcel of their evangelical efforts. Some are motivated by a mixture of the two. One cannot applaud Christian support for Israel that is attended by missionary activity aimed at Jews. But provided it does not come together with missionary activity, such support should be welcomed. After all, they are only doing what they are supposed to be doing.

The most prudent policy, I believe, is neither to seek nor to shun such support. There is no reason to spurn, but actively seeking such support makes us beholden for such support and limits our freedom of response.

Is it ever appropriate to engage in inter-faith dialogue? Is there a difference between dialogue on questions of doctrine, and on question of general ethics or mutual practical concerns?

Dialogue and cooperation are entirely different matters. Dialogue is often a euphemism for debate. Debate is often great entertainment but is seldom an optimal means of instruction. However, there is certainly room for cooperation with regard to practical concerns, not the least of which includes securing vouchers for parochial schools and *yeshivos*. Significantly, it is the so called “*haredi*” organizations that are at the forefront of that effort. That has got nothing to do with dialogue.

Rabbi Dr. J. David Bleich is a Rosh Yeshiva of RIETS and Rosh Kollel of the Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm Yadin Yadin Kollel Le-Horah.

Open Letter from a God-Fearer

BY ERIC LIVAK-DAHL

I

My story is unique but not solitary. Coming from unlikely backgrounds and from around the world, my peers and I all came to discover Torah. Some are former Christians; some are children of Jewish fathers. Some found Torah through a child who converted. Others of us have more complicated stories. We unite in a love of God, Torah, and humanity. Called God-fearers, from Tehillim 135:20, or Noahides, from the universal ancestor Noah, we are Gentiles who keep Torah – minimally the *sheva mitzvot b'nai Noah* but often much more. Yet today we are often unknown even to our guides, the Jewish people.

My own story sounds very similar to that of a normal *ger*. My connection to Judaism goes back at least as far as elementary school. At the age of eight or nine, I told my parents that I wanted to start celebrating Hanukah. My mother told me that if we were going to celebrate Hanukah, we were going to do it properly. She got a book that had the *brakhot* and songs complete with sheet music, and my father and I made a *hanukiah*. In high school I had the opportunity to connect with the Orthodox world through a friend, and when I arrived at UCLA I quickly became involved in the campus Jewish community. My original intent was to convert, but later I became intrigued by the *sheva mitzvot* and the often ignored path they offer.

Through chance interactions, connections through friends, and social networking internet sites I have discovered a surprising number of other gentiles connected to Judaism and Torah. There are multiple “B’nai Noah” online groups and email lists, with members from across the United States, the rest of the English-speaking world, and even Jordan. We all have different stories, but they all contain similar elements. We each left the practices of the homes we grew up in and became convinced of the truth in Torah, and yet we each do not fully convert. This choice to remain in a religious no-man’s-land is perplexing to Jews and other Gentiles alike. I am not sure even I always understand the logic behind the choice, but enough of us are making it that the situation demands attention.

II

At least as far back as *Bayit Sheni*, there were people known as God-fearers, Gentiles who joined the Jews in their dedication to worshipping Hashem alone. Josephus mentions that, “no one need wonder that there was so much wealth in our Temple, for all the Jews throughout the habitable world, and fearers of Gcd...had been contributing.” An inscription on a synagogue uncovered in Aphrodisias contains one list of donors for Jews and another for God-fearers. Following the second *horban*,

however, God-fearers disappear from the historical record, presumably because they were prime candidates for Paul’s Christian message.

Then, after nearly two thousand years, a solitary figure arose in France in almost Abrahamian fashion. Aimé Pallière was a Catholic priest living in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Through his own studies of *Tanakh* and later his religious experiences at a local synagogue, Pallière became convinced of the truth in Judaism. Due to his closeness with his mother and his unwillingness to separate himself from her, he declined to convert, becoming the first known modern God-fearer. He shared correspondence with several rabbis of his time, most importantly with Elijah Benamozegh, an Italian rabbi, kabbalist, and prolific writer. Even after the death of Pallière’s mother, Rabbi Benamozegh and others encouraged Pallière to



remain a Gentile, seeing his role as a God-fearer (or Noahide, a more modern term used by Pallière) more important to the world than the addition of one more Jew.

Today, the Noahide situation is complex. Under the direction of Rebbe Schneerson, Chabad began a push to educate gentiles about the Noahide laws. His efforts were recognized by the United States Congress² in proclaiming Education Day each year on the Rebbe’s birthday, stating that “Whereas in tribute to this great spiritual leader, ‘the Rebbe,’ this, his ninetieth year will be seen as one of ‘education and giving,’ the year in which we turn to education and charity to return the world to the moral and ethical values contained in the Seven Noahide Laws.” The rabbis involved in the modern efforts to revive the Sanhedrin have also devoted much of their time to Noahide matters, issuing many rulings and assigning several personnel to a “Special Court for Matters Concerning Bnei Noah.”

There are many Noahide groups in existence, mostly in the United States. Several stem from Chabad’s efforts, and so are more Hasidic in their flavor and *hashkafa*. Others seem to be more closely aligned to the Sanhedrin effort, and I do not know quite what to make of them. Several books and multiple *sid-durim* have been produced by different groups, each with a different outlook. The details of each group’s daily lives and practices are unknown to me and to each other. Many Noahide groups are unaware of each other and of the resources each one has developed. There are websites that try to bridge these gaps, but true unity and effective communication is not yet a reality.

Perhaps an even greater barrier to unity is religious practice. In the absence of strict, clear guidance from classical *halakhic* sources, each group develops its own communal and ritual life. These differences arise from the lack of modern *halakhic* guidance. What beyond the *sheva mitzvot* are they obligated in, if anything? Which additional *mitzvot* may they adopt? How should Noahides structure their religious services and their houses of worship? Some *rabbeim* are willing to answer certain questions; many of the more difficult questions go untouched. Those involved in the Noahide movement hope for it to become the authentic expression of the universal Torah religion. For this hope to become real, for it to achieve *le-taken olam be-malhut Shakkai*, mainstream religious Jews as well as gentiles must develop it together.

III

“And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (*Shemot* 19:6)

The role of the *kohen* is historically a dual one. He serves God in the Temple, but he ministers to and teaches the people as well.³ If the Jewish people are to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, they clearly must serve God, but they also must have a lay population to which they minister. The identity of a non-Jew is a positive one; the Gentile is not simply a person who is not a Jew. The Gentile has a religious duty to fulfill unique to himself, just as the *Yisrael* has a unique role and is not merely a Jew who is not a *kohen* or *Levi*. As a friend said, “The *Kohanim* served in the Temple, but the *Yisraelim* served the Temple.”⁴ Likewise, the Jews serve in the world, but the Gentiles serve the world. Resh Lakish argues that Gentiles are prohibited from keeping a day of rest because they must always be at work.⁵ Our role is to be working for the world: to be *oskim be-tikkun olam*.

We find ourselves at a unique point in history. Gentiles are interested in hearing what Judaism has to say about how they should live their lives. Many Christians are interested in learning about the Jewish context of their faith and Jewish exegesis of the shared body of scripture. Some Christians even adopt certain

Jewish practices into their ritual lives. Others leave Christianity entirely to convert fully into Judaism or to become a Noahide. Many people with this thirst for Torah knowledge and values, however, go unsated, or worse yet, get misdirected into an inauthentic expression of Judaism. The popularity of an institution like the Kabbalah Centre demonstrates this danger. The Orthodox world cannot simply step back and let this historic opportunity pass it by. Orthodox Jews must truthfully and faithfully present Torah teachings to those Gentiles seeking out guidance and knowledge.

Rambam wrote that it is *mutar* to teach



Torah to Christians because they believe in the divine origin of the Torah.⁶ Therefore Jews should not feel uncomfortable explaining their religious practices and beliefs in a deep way to a curious co-worker, neighbor or friend. Too many times I have seen a curious gentile given a cursory answer when an honest, in depth answer would have been welcome. Judaism has not often been a tradition of proselytizing, and the Jewish reluctance to engage in outreach activities into the Gentile world is understandable. But active “conversion” efforts are not what are needed. I have yet to hear a Noahide tell me that they became committed to Torah because a Jew knocked on their door and handed them an Artscroll. Rather, we need knowledgeable, committed Jews who are willing to do two things: give honest and comprehensive answers to inquiries from all gentiles, and provide resources for those more Torah-committed gentiles.

The state of the Noahide world is an emergent one. As such, many Noahides do not have established communities and houses of prayer and learning. I personally have been blessed at university with a *kehilla* that has welcomed me, learned and davened with me, and helped me grow. I have no guarantees, though, for what kind of religious communal life awaits me after I graduate and move on. I do not imagine many Jewish communities are prepared to make room for a strange gentile who learns Torah and keeps *mitzvot* but does not convert. Recent threats of intermarriage and millennia-old anti-Semitism make this reluctance understandable. Nevertheless, I hope and pray that I will find more Jews who rise to the occasion and do not shy away from such a challenge. Every year in the *Yamim Noraim* davening we quote Isaiah 56:7: “*Ki beiti beit*

tefilah yikareh le-kol ha-amim.” How much do we mean it?

In addition to supportive Jewish communities, the Noahide world needs rabbinic guidance as well. There is very little classical halakhic literature on Gentile practice of Judaism or on the status of Torah-observant Gentiles. Rambam discusses Gentile practice of *mitzvot* in the Mishneh Torah, *Hilkhot Melakhim u-Milhemotehem*. A few other commentators make points here and there. But there exists no in depth work, no Noahide Shulchan Aruch. Which *mitzvot*, if any, are off limits? What about *ne'emanut* and other personal status questions: Should Noahides be regarded just like the idolaters of old, or are they different? Do any elements of the *ger toshav* status apply to modern Noahides? While it is true that many decisions about personal observance are up to the individual Gentile, questions of this magnitude are appropriate only for major halakhic authorities. My connections with the Orthodox world through my *kehilla* have enabled me to address a few pressing questions to such authorities. There remain, however, many more questions yet unanswered. Again, Jewish reluctance to get involved is understandable. There is no concrete tradition about these questions, only a tidbit here or there scattered across millennia of *me-farshim* and *poskim*. Any rabbi attempting to *pasken* would be operating without much guidance from the tradition. But the work needs to be done.

When not on duty in the Temple, the *kohen* would travel the land of Israel and teach the people. All of Israel is, unfortunately, off-duty right now. As Israel is forced to travel the lands, may both Jew and Gentile remember Israel's priestly role as teacher.

Eric Livak-Dahl is a Senior at UCLA, majoring in Chemical Engineering. He is the webmaster of www.bnainoah.org

- 1 *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.110
- 2 102nd Congress, House Joint Resolution 104
- 3 For example, *Devarim* 33:10: [The Priests and Levites] shall teach Your laws to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel... or *Malachi* 2:7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of *Hashem*, Lord of Hosts.
- 4 David Bardo, personal communication
- 5 *Sanhedrin* 58b
- 6 *Teshuvot HaRambam* #149, J. Blau ed.

Notes from the Underground

BY SHIMSHON AYZENBERG

The United States of America is the only country in the modern world with a long history of Jews living freely and successfully under a non-Jewish majority. Jews occupy a variety of lucrative professions, they have contributed invaluable to the making of American democracy, and many tombstones in Arlington National cemetery carry the Jewish star. The reason for the non-Jewish majority's acceptance of Jews is self-evident: separation of religion and state. It is not only a political tenet in America, but, to a larger degree, a cultural one. A person of any religious persuasion may become a full citizen of the United States and also be accepted as a true American. In Ukraine, however, the land of my birth, Christianity is still a pivotal ingredient in true “Ukrainianess”. The attainment of citizenship is not officially conditioned upon religion in



Ukraine, but cultural integration very much is. In other words, to be a true Ukrainian one must be a Christian.

In June I went on a personal pilgrimage to Ukraine to visit some of my extended family members and friends whom I have not seen in almost twelve years. Growing up in the United States, one may at times forget about the unique opportunity that this country provides for Jews. Many American Jews are, unfortunately, inclined to take America for granted. Even I, an immigrant from the Former Soviet Union, sinned in this regard. This trip to Ukraine was a wake-up call to do *teshuvah* and to never again forget what the United States has done for me, my family, and my fellow Jews.

Motherland

Ukrainians are very proud of their highly arable land. They call it “Nenka,” or “nanny,” because, they believe, it nurtures them from

birth. But particularly two people, Jews and Russians, are not welcome by Nenka. For Ukrainians it is a popular notion that the Jews ruled Ukraine in the guise of the Khazars, from the seventh to ninth century, before the Kievan Rus established itself as the first powerful Slavic civilization under the leadership of Vladimir the Great. The Russians ruled Ukraine, at times with a heavy fist, until the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In Ukraine, as in any religio-nationalistic society, names have profound connotations. The fact that Kiev, the present capital of Ukraine, means “riverside settlement” in Khazarian, which was in the ninth century an important trade emporium connecting the Khazars to the Germans, makes Ukrainians uncomfortable.¹ The importance of Khazar influence in the making of Kiev is markedly underplayed. I was forewarned by my uncle when I got off the plane in the Ukraine that I shouldn't discuss Khazar history with my cousin's Ukrainian husband. This is not so dissimilar from the imprudent denial of the PLO that Jews ever lived in the Holy Land or from the way the nascent Jewish state attempted to minimize the imprint made by Palestinian Arabs on modern Palestine. The fact that “Ukraine” itself in Russian means “on the corner,”— that is, on corner of Russia — does not sit well with Ukrainians either who see themselves as the real progeny of old Slavic glories. In fact, in Kiev there stands a giant bronze lady, almost the size of the statue of Liberty. Instead of a torch of enlightenment and the Bill of Rights she is holding up a sword and a shield, and is facing the Kremlin. In a country where names evince poignant significance she is called “Motherland.”

The Jewish Monk

I met my friend next to the main monastery not far from the giant bronze lady. Olya is a very devout Christian, she is fluent in Slavic, the holy tongue of the Russian Orthodox Church, and is thinking of enrolling into a nunnery. She gave me a tour around the monastery's famous catacombs, where ninth century monks lay fully-exposed on carved shelves of the cave's narrow passageways. Because of the especially dry conditions the monks' bodies remarkably did not completely decompose. I was still able to see veins on their black, desiccated hands. She showed me one monk in particular that was surrounded by more people than any other. When I read the inscription, I was stunned. I stood in front of “Eliya Murametz”, a very famous character in the Russian Orthodox legends, comparable only to Robin Hood in English folklore. Ac-

cording to legend, Eliya was a very sick man all his life. Worshippers with permanent physical ailments come to his body and pray, believing his spirit will heal them. Since he lived in the ninth century, when Khazars ruled Kiev, and had a russified version of a name for Eliyahu, I turned to Olya and quipped "wasn't Eliya Murametz a Khazar?" She looked at me as if I perpetrated the great misdeed at Golgotha and sternly replied "how dare you desecrate his memory with such despicable nonsense." To insinuate that Jews played any role in the development of Nénka's history is an unbearable insult. Even at Babí Yar, a place drenched with tragedy, there are two plaques in front of a commemorative statue, one in Russian and the other in Yiddish, both of which do not mention that out of approximately 100,000 people killed there throughout the war, over 30,000 of them were Jews, massacred in mere two days.

My Godfather

The next day, in Kharkov, my city of birth, I visited my baptismal godfather. Boris Churilov is very well known in Ukraine as "the national master." He was a tireless dissident against the atheism of Russian communism and today is an outspoken critic of democracy in his country. In the 1950's he was converted to Christianity by a famous Jewish Christian patriarch, Alexander Men.¹¹ In 1990, Men was decapitated by a fellow Christian while pouring over old Slavic text because as a Jew he was too charismatic.¹² But my godfather's fame came in the 1970's when he developed a whole new type of iconography by carving beautiful images on tree bark. He sat me down in his kitchen whose walls were laden with icons, uncorked a bottle of vodka and began pouring out thought after thought. My father was next to me, videotaping. I told Boris that I was very grateful for the hospitality but I was unable to fully enjoy it for as an observant Jew, "I am obliged to keep dietary laws." Boris looked at me, then looked at his old disciple, my father, and exclaimed: "but your father is a Jew who does not keep anything!" For the first time in my life *kibud av* collided with the need to respond to a question I could not possibly ignore. The mentality in Eastern Europe falls neatly under the "eat or be eaten" category. There is no middle ground, no room for second thoughts. You defend yourself or you are compromised forever in the very heart of Ukraine. Thus, I felt that millennia of Jewish-Christian polemics descended upon my crouched shoulders. As Ivan Turgenev's "Fathers and Sons" drama unfolded anew in the 21st century, I impulsively retorted, "Yes, but my father is a hypocrite because any Jew who is un-observant is, by definition, a hypocrite." Boris suddenly arose, teary-eyed, glared at his beautiful collection of icons, and cried aloud, "Lord, may even the stiff-necked turn to you!" He took his pad of paper and drew me a bell tower, with a gigantic cross on top, ostensibly signifying my "call" to Christ. And before I left, he lit incense demonstrating his awe-inspiring talent of reviving old memories. I felt nostalgic and remembered from when I was lit-

tle the scent of the Church mass and eating a piece of bread soaked in delicious wine for a Eucharist. At that very moment I reminded myself of the lyrics of two American Jews who often sang Christian melodies, "Hello darkness my old friend, I've come to talk with you again, because a vision softly creeping, left its seeds while I was sleeping, and the vision that was planted in my brain, still remains..."

I do not mean to say that all Ukrainians are deeply religious. Rather, religious consciousness is linked to true Ukrainianness. One can not be a Jew, let alone an observant Jew, and be a full Ukrainian. What troubled me, furthermore, was that I was unable to walk around Kiev and Kharkov freely in my kippa as. Some years back, when I visited Kiev for the first time, I told my Jewish friend who is originally from there that I walked around the city in my kippa. He reprimanded me: "you are an idiot, you could have been badly beaten up." But, even as I wore my baseball cap this time, there was no secret about it. I did not

Jews have the tendency to think of American politics in terms of what is best for Israel and not what is best for America. They join any political establishment, lobby, or party that closely resembles their religio-nationalistic goal for the Jewish state. They forget that the interests of America and Israel are not mutually exclusive. America, obviously the stronger of the two, will not allow Israel to be destroyed. Even to consider this in any shape or form is fanatical and obscene. An apocalypse will not happen to Israel because of America, any time soon.

The tendency of American Jews to focus solely on the welfare of Israel is due to their inability to recognize the importance of the separation between religion and state. Some of us are taught from the earliest years that we should love Israel and even consider it as a beginning of a fulfillment of an ancient messianic prophecy. The teaching of American patriotism in this context cannot possibly be taken seriously next to such dogmatic religious idealism.



hide my face like an ostrich. Everyone knew that I was Jewish, and yet, as in any religio-nationalistic society, the visibility of a foreign religious article, my kippa, would have somehow violated "Nénka's" purity. Simply put, in Ukrainians' minds, open Jewish existence is an ominous affront upon their country.

Let G-d Take Care of Israel

It would be superfluous to say here that the United States is the complete opposite of Ukraine. In fact, not only is that true, but Jews are so free to practice their religion that some of them even feel free to trade their American patriotism for some apocalyptic religio-nationalistic dream of a distant land. It is very unfortunate that too many of America's orthodox

cloud our considerations for what is necessary for the perpetuation of the America of today to future generations, to our children. I am reminded of one of my Bible teachers in YU who on the day of elections 2004 implored the class presciently "vote for who you think is best for America, and let G-d take care of Israel."

Shimshon Ayzenberg is a Senior in YC, majoring in Jewish History, and is working on his masters degree in Modern Jewish History at BRGS.

¹ Russian history begins with Kievan Rus, the first Slavic empire with a capital in Kiev, which lasted from the mid 9th century until Mongol invaders destroyed it in the 12th century. The legend has it that when Vladimir (958-1010 CE), the greatest of the Kievan Rus's rulers, decided to convert his heathen subjects to a monotheistic religion he invited representatives from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to attend his court and present their case before him. Turned off by Islamic abstinence from alcohol and Jewish laws forbidding the consumption of pigs, Vladimir converted his kingdom to Christianity. Secular history, however, credits Vladimir with a brilliant strategic move. Precisely when the Byzantine Empire was consolidating power around itself, Vladimir negotiated an alliance by marrying one of the Byzantine princesses and thereby allowing for the creation of his own Slavic empire. This alliance would eventually squash the very last vestiges of Khazar resistance. The Russian Orthodox Church, on the other hand, confers upon Vladimir and his subsequent royal successors a kind of paternal lordship over their subjects, "the children of the king." The people had originally converted to Christianity not by coercion but purely out of love for their father, the king. Old Slavic texts present the king as a messenger of Jesus, almost an inseparable unit in the Trinity itself. The Church believes that the real and sinful coercion occurred in the late 17th century with Peter the Great, who forcibly westernized the Russian royalty and aristocracy, made many of the early church practices taboo under the penalty of death and introduced western philosophy and science. The Church, therefore, according to its own interpretation of history, entered a nightmarish stage of its history which continues well to our present-day and looks back at the first centuries of Kievan Rus with a particular messianic relish. (See, *Russia: A History* by Gregory Freeze and *The Jews of Khazaria* by Kevin Alan Brook).

¹¹ Brook, 87.

¹² The idea of a Jewish Christian sounds odd to American Jews. On the one hand, this is good because a Jewish identity is not intermingled with any other religion. But, on the other hand, this also has an adverse affect because Jewish identity, even though heavily depended on Judaism, is not simply religious identity. Therefore, just like there can be an American

An Interview with Rabbi Dr. David Berger

BY ALEX OZAR

What can be learned from the history of the Jewish-Christian dialogue that began after the Second Vatican Council?

One thing we can learn from it is the nature of contemporary Christian attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. The question is: does this dialogue tell us something interesting and important about changes in attitudes toward Jews on the part of non-Jews? I think that

non-Jewish attitudes toward Jews. It somehow becomes an article of faith that all Christians have to hate us, that *Esav sonei es Yaakov* is some sort of necessary, metaphysical reality, and that it's somehow un-Jewish to limit it in any way. It's a very strange Jewish characteristic; Jews become uneasy if you tell them that it's not the case that every non-Jew has always hated all Jews. Somehow it makes Jews happy to hear that they have always been hated by everybody, which is not a good sign in terms of Jewish psychology.



Christians who actually engage in dialogue with Jews genuinely have outgrown the classical Christian positions that Jews are to be blamed for the crucifixion, that the way Jews are to be treated now is or should be in some sense a reflection of their guilt. From that perspective this dialogue demonstrates, or reflects, a deep change, and there really has been a deep change. The inclination of many Jews, especially Orthodox Jews, to dismiss the significance of this change, is, I think, a mistake, and really unfair to Christians who have truly reassessed their own tradition in a deep way.

This question is a sensitive one in certain circles, since there are many Jews who are very uncomfortable saying anything good about

Now, can we gain any insight into Judaism itself from these interactions? And by learning things, I don't mean things that are not in Judaism, and that we should borrow from Christianity, but rather developing sharper appreciation for things that are in Judaism but tend to fade away. For example, I think there is a sharpening of an awareness of what forgiveness and sin mean for Judaism when you see how those things are understood in a different religion. One of the most striking examples of the differences between Judaism and Christianity, at least for most Jews and some Christians, was reflected in a phrase I heard in a prayer by Cardinal Lustiger at Ground Zero. Addressing God, he said "*Pardonne les assas-*

sins," meaning 'forgive the murderers.' It really highlighted a deep distinction between at least the formal position of Catholicism on this question (whether the ordinary Catholic really forgives people in this purportedly saintly way I'm not ready to say), and the rather different Jewish perspective.

Also, there are some issues where you have to rethink stereotypical differences. For example: Judaism is supposed to believe that people are judged on the basis of their deeds, while Christianity supposedly believes in grace. Michael Wyschogrod once said to me, "Tell me, did you ever meet a Jew who went into shul on Yom Kippur and said, 'Lord, I want you to give me exactly what I deserve'?" I admitted that I had never met and don't ever expect to meet such a Jew. We have *tefillos* like '*honeinu va-aneinu ki ein banu ma'asim aseimanu tzdaka va-hesed ve-hoshienu.*' This appears to be a doctrine of unmerited grace. So this kind of discussion is an example of something that makes me think harder about supposedly sealed affirmations of what Judaism believes or doesn't believe.

You mentioned forgiveness. What stance should we take on forgiving Christian sins against us in the past?

When you talk about the past, there are a number of issues involved. Should I forgive Christians for what they did in the past? I don't forgive Count Emicho and I don't forgive Chmielnitzky, or Torquemada, and unfortunately it's not hard to find names to add to this list. I don't forgive these people at all. I hope that Count Emicho continues to be punished eternally in hell; I don't think I have any obligation to forgive mass murderers of Jews, or any kind of mass murderer. So the question is, how does that affect my relationship to Christians today? Any contemporary Christians who reject what those people did, and say that it's sinful, do not bear in my mind any responsibility for what they did any more than Jews bear responsibility for the crucifixion.

And to some degree, I think Jews have been excessively nitpicky about demanding of the Church that they use certain language regarding the Church's past behavior. For example, the Church refused in Vatican Two to 'condemn' anti-Semitism, instead using a weaker verb. Jews demanded they use the word condemn, and Catholics responded that they didn't want to use the word condemn because it had a technical theological meaning. Years later, they did condemn.

This continued with the 'We Remember' document on the *shoah*, where Jews took out a microscope and complained that the authors

Christian or a German Christian, there can also be a Jewish Christian. In the Soviet Union this distinction was especially spelled out with the word "ivrey" or "Jew" (from Hebrew "ivri") stamped on every Jew's passport irrespective of his or her creed. Alexander Men was a Jew by birth. His Jewish mother baptized him in a Russian Orthodox Church and he became one of its most prolific and charismatic spokespersons and dissidents in the communist era. He had many students. My godfather, Boris, was one of them.

"This is an obvious example of Russian Orthodox Church's anti-Semitism. (See Wikipedia entry for "Alexander Men.")

"Before my father got tired of it, he lived a typical communist life. He was an engineer at a factory and was married to a beautiful Ukrainian woman. My grandfather, a Soviet detective by profession and also a staunch Stalinist all of his life, was at that point very proud of his son. But from the 1970's on, something terrible happened for my grandfather. First, when my grandfather's brother announced publicly that he was planning to move to the United States, my grandfather apprehended him and then rendered him totally unemployable in the entire Soviet Union (in a country where there was 100% of employment). My great-uncle was forced to live for many years while his papers were being scrutinized by the Russian authorities for his ultimate departure to US by scavenging garbage dumps and begging for food. Recently I called my great-uncle's son, who now lives in Connecticut, to reconnect the family roots after over thirty years of separation. He hung up on me without uttering a word. Nevertheless, while my great-uncle was searching for food in those same early 1970's, my father also experienced an epiphany. He walked out the door of his apartment one day, never went back to his factory job or his Ukrainian wife and began to paint. Today my father is a well-known artist in the artistic community worldwide, but in those days, in a one-party state, if one is not part of the communist party and doesn't live a typical life of the communist system, he or she were automatically suspected of treason. To prevent something horrible from happening to him, my father converted to Christianity. The Church was, more or less, the only accepted institution in the Soviet Union outside of the communist party. My father then married a Jew, my mother, also an artist. My grandfather, a Jew from a small shtetle of the Pale himself, who spoke in Yiddish to his wife when he didn't want my father to understand what was being said, was insulted. I remember my grandfather when Russia was undergoing glasnost and perestroika. He was unable to connect words into sentences anymore.

didn't condemn 'the Church' as an entity for its behavior, instead saying only that there were children of the Church who misbehaved, and that it was terrible, but they didn't say 'the Church.' I consider such demands to be *dik-dukei anyut*. I think it's wrong intrinsically to demand that Catholics denounce the Church itself, which they see as a metaphysical entity. As long as they're prepared to say that anti-Semitism is evil and sinful and that the actual acts that were done in the past were terrible and objectionable, I don't think there's any point in pushing the matter further.

Therefore I don't think that the question of forgiveness of fine contemporary Christians who are vigorously opposed to anti-Semitism is an issue at all. As long as they denounce what was done by their ancestors, they don't have to be forgiven for what was done by their ancestors, any more than we need to be forgiven for our alleged role in the crucifixion. And if the analogy is pushed, Christians after all don't hold us responsible for the crucifixion even if we haven't made public statements saying that the crucifixion of Jesus was an evil and sinful act. Christians don't demand that we say that; they just affirm that we're not responsible. The demand by Jews that Christians issue statements that dot every "i" and cross every "t" that we present to them has always seemed to me a diversion and really something that undermines the Jewish interest.

So, I don't forgive them because I don't think they need to be forgiven. The ones who did it I don't forgive because they don't deserve forgiveness, and the people who have positive attitudes toward Jews today don't need forgiveness.

How do you recommend the average Jew respond when confronted by missionaries?

Well, the Christians have taught us what to do. There's a famous line by Louis IX who said that if a Christian who did not properly prepare is confronted by a Jew with arguments against Christianity he should take a sword and put it in the Jew as far as it will go. So we have a Christian precedent.

On a serious note, a key element of what Louis IX said is true; it depends on whether one is educated in this area. If you are well prepared and are approached by a missionary on the street, I think there's every reason to respond, especially if there are a few Jews around who you think may be influenced.

But I don't think that it's a particularly good idea to engage in formal public debates of this sort, as at least two high profile Jews have advocated. I think it's foolishness, and very much not in the Jewish interest. The result of such an exchange is more a function of the debater's quickness, talent, charm, and speaking ability than a function of the power and validity of the arguments. And to turn religious polemic into a sporting event, which is what I believe it becomes in such a setting, is dangerous. If the Jew is unsuccessful, there are Jews who might actually become interested in conversion; if the Jew is successful, the exchange could cause resentment among Christians. It's

very hard in the course of an actual oral exchange to discipline yourself to not say things that are damaging for Jews in the public arena.

Anyway, there was a long, passionate, and strong opposition to encouraging such exchanges even in the modern world.

Are there specific things a Jew should do/study to prepare for such encounters?

I think that every Jew should take my course in Jewish-Christian polemic.

Besides that, I think it's desirable for Jews to know how Jews understand the relevant *pesukim*. Is it a necessary priority for Jewish education? I can't say that the Jewish educational system has to choose to do this over other priorities, but I think that you can do this without devoting a whole course or semester to it. You could, in a *tanach* or *machshava* class, have a competent person discuss how Jews understand some of these key *pesukim*. Beyond that, I don't know that there needs to be a discussion of Christian theology per se. I think it's desirable that Jews should have some understanding of Christianity and the Jewish approach to Christianity. Jews have to understand what the boundaries of their religion are. And there are



halakic implications also, and that's part of a regular Jewish education.

In general how should we, as bnei Torah, relate to those traditional sources or texts which we find to be objectionably racist or discriminatory?

This is a function of a larger and very challenging issue, and that is: to what degree is it appropriate to bring to bear in one's reading of the Torah certain moral instincts that you may have developed as a result of outside experiences? First of all, pragmatically speaking, I don't think that it's possible, or at least it's extremely difficult, for a person to simply bracket deeply held moral instincts when approaching the Torah and looking at the straightforward meaning of certain texts, saying that those moral instincts are all wrong and discarding them. Psychologically, it's very hard to do

that. The question is: is it something one is supposed to do?

I think that the way to approach this is to ask oneself if those moral instincts appear to you to accord with the broad and deep message of the Torah itself. I suppose that it's likely that the answer will be yes, though determining what is the result of psychological processes and what is the result of an honest reading of the tradition is very difficult. But I will say for myself that I believe that the instincts that say that we ought to value non-Jews as human beings are in accord with a variety of statements in *Tanakh* and *Hazal*. Whether it's "*rahamav al kol maasav*," or the creation of all human beings in God's image, explaining these texts away is much more difficult than dealing with the problematic texts. To say that *haviv adam shenivra be-tzelem*, contrasted with *haviv yisrael shenikreu banim lamakom*, somehow doesn't refer to non-Jews requires you to do somersaults of the most extreme sort, and it's disturbing that some Jews find themselves doing such somersaults.

I'm convinced that the basic imperative of caring for non-Jews is a real Jewish imperative, and that's the underlying assumption that I bring to the texts that are disturbing. From that

perspective I think it's legitimate to try to find in the tradition itself approaches that have limited the impact of those troubling texts. Without looking in detail at the actual texts, but in terms of the theoretical approach, that's how I see the legitimate and proper Jewish engagement with this material.

From an educational standpoint, how should these texts be approached?

I'm not an educator in the sense of having training in pedagogy, so I don't know exactly at what age it becomes appropriate to address these matters, but I don't think you can just skip the texts in question. What is possible is simply to learn them straightforwardly, and very often, at least in my experience, people won't ask the difficult questions. Therefore, you can manage to get through a *shiur* not skipping this material and not raising the issue

at all. But I don't think that's right. If you think these problematic assertions do not apply to contemporary non-Jews or most contemporary non-Jews, so that you take a position like that of the Meiri in your own mind and conscience, it's important to say that to students.

I don't know what individual *roshei yeshiva* think or don't think about these issues, and I realize that my own views on these matters are not held by all *roshei yeshiva*, even in YU. I can't tell anybody to teach something he doesn't believe is true, but I think somebody who does have a position on matters of this sort like that of Rav Henkin, Rav Ahron Soloveichik, Rav Kook, Rav Hirsch, Rav Weinberg, and some other quite distinguished authorities, should say to students that there is a list of very *bechovedike poskim* who do not regard these regulations or most of these regulations as applicable to non-Jews who live in more or less ethical societies. I think you do have to do that. I think it's important to say that.

At the end of the day, are you troubled by these texts?

Sure I am. I wouldn't have written the Orthodox Forum article if I weren't troubled by them. I grew up troubled by them, though I was relieved to a significant degree when I entered Rav Ahron Soloveichik's *shiur* and heard him address these issues in a way that put me more at ease. But there remains a certain element of discomfort with some of this material; sometimes a believer lives with discomfort. God's view of things doesn't have to accord with my instincts. Sometimes I simply have to say that He knows better. But that doesn't mean that I don't have an imperative to try to resolve these issues in a way that I consider consistent with the larger message that I believe God Himself has given us in His Torah.

Can Christians get into heaven?

I think so. Here the question is *avoda zara*. We have this category of *sheva mitzvos bnei Noah* that get non-Jews into heaven. Now according to most understandings, the Rambam says that this has to be on the basis of belief in revelation, but you could argue, as David Novak does, that that's perfect for Christians, because they do believe in revelation, and they follow a moral law based on revelation. So even if you do accept this Maimonidean restriction, Christians meet the criterion, kind of. But you will still be facing the question of *avoda zara*. And this raises larger issues about whether in order to get into *olam haba* a non-Jew has to get a hundred on his exam. Does he need a perfect score on the *sheva mitzvos* in order to have a *helek la-olam haba*? Now I suppose that a straightforward reading of most discussions of this matter would be yes. You have to observe all of the *sheva mitzvos*, not six out of seven.

However, there is a *teshuvah* of Rav Yaakov Emden, and you get a similar impression from a piece by the elder Rav Henkin, and this appears to be Rav Ahron Soloveichik's po-

Choosing to be Jewish

BY YAAKOV BITTON

sition, that indicates that the observance of the moral commandments is sufficient and that mistakes with respect to the understanding of God would not keep you out. Sinners, Jews and gentiles, are not punished forever but rather achieve a restored state. So here you have a Jew of standing who explicitly takes the position that a perfect score is not necessary.

Assuming you don't accept Rav Yaakov Emden's position, then the major obstacle for Christians is *avoda zara*, though I suppose they may eat things that are *ever min ha-hai*... But the question is whether or not Christianity is *avoda zara* when the believer or worshipper is a non-Jew. There is an imposing list of *aharonim* on either side of this question. I personally think that the Tosfos that started this formulation on *shituf* does not mean that worship of Jesus as God or as part of the Godhead is not *avoda zara* for non-Jews. I think they meant to say that swearing in the name of God while having in mind that Jesus shares His essence is not prohibited for non-Jews. It may even be that that the relevant part of the *Tosfos* isn't talking about *avoda zara* at all; it's talking about a separate *issur* of being *meshatef shem shamayim ve-davar aher*, and the answer is that that technical prohibition does not apply to non-Jews. So they're not even talking about *avoda zara* when they say that. But either way, whether it's the oath interpretation or the last interpretation, it doesn't mean that they thought that worshipping Jesus of Nazareth as God or as an element of God is not *avoda zara* for non-Jews.

But whether or not Tosfos said it, there is an imposing group of *aharonim* who say that *bnei Noah* are in fact not *muzharim* on *shituf* even in the sense of worship and that Christianity is the classic example of this. So from that perspective Christians can have a *helek* in *olam haba* even without resorting to the position that they don't need to get a perfect score, because even with respect to *avoda zara* they're ok.

How do you think we should relate to Christian support for the state of Israel?

I think we should welcome it. If you have an overtly missionary organization which exploits its support of the state of Israel in its missionary activity, then I would have great reservations. But as long as they don't do that, even if they do engage in missionary activity, I would say that the dangers that face the state of Israel are such that we can't be overly fastidious in what sort of support we accept.

Rabbi Dr. David Berger is the department head of YC Jewish Studies

¹David Berger, "Jews, Gentiles, and the Modern Egalitarian Ethos: Some Tentative Thoughts," *Formulating Responses in an Egalitarian Age*, ed. Marc Stern, (Lanham, 2005), 83-108

The most basic difference between a Jew and a gentile is the affiliation to the People of Israel. To be a Jew is not merely to be an individual who believes in G-d; a Jew is not only someone who follows the Jewish Law; a Jew is neither a person married to a Jew, nor someone who happens to reside in the Jewish Land. The rabbinical term for "Jew," proper, is "*Bene-Berit*" (a member of the covenant). Whether

The second way is by choosing to convert. In order to understand conversion to Judaism, allow me to suggest that Judaism is not a *religion*. Judaism is more of a *nationality*. One thing is certain, we are not, and were never, a race (as Hitler believed). We, the People of Israel, became "Jewish" (I am going to use the term Jewish to mean "a member of the People of Israel!" whether it be from the tribe of *Yehuda*, *Levi* or any other) by accepting, willingly, a covenant that *Hashem* offered to con-

dent. He or she is given the "Jewish Green Card" and is allowed to reside in our homeland with the condition that he or she submits to our legal system. The Jewish permanent resident, the *Ger Toshab* has to follow the seven Noahide Laws.

Gerim that belong to the second genus, *Ger Tsedek*, are fully naturalized citizens. Just like in the United States, they are expected to commit, unconditionally, to the totality of the national legal system as the most basic condi-



by inheritance from a Jewish mother or by choice, a Jew is a member of the nation who contracted a covenant with G-d at *Sinai*.

There are two ways by which a person is deemed Jewish by the Jewish People. The first and most common is by right of birth. Any individual born to the People of Israel is automatically Jewish: automatically chosen by *Hashem*, and automatically liable under Jewish Law. It was not the *individuals* standing at *Sinai* some 3,500 years ago who contracted this covenant with *Hashem*, it was the *People of Israel* as a whole. Any subsequent individuals born to the Jewish People (see Deuteronomy 29:13-14) are *Bene-Berit* because they belong to this entity.

tract with us on *Har Sinai*.

It is of interest to note that the *Torah* never explicitly mentions that a gentile can convert to Judaism. Nevertheless, the term *ger* (it is used to connote "stranger" in general; I am referring to those places where it refers to "convert"), is mentioned fifty times in the *Torah*. The message is quite clear. It's as if the *Torah* takes for granted that any human being can choose to accept the Covenant, just like we did at *Har Sinai*.

Back to our assertion that Judaism is a nationality, it has to have rules of naturalization. Judaism allows for two types of *gerim* (proselytes): *Ger Toshab* and *Ger Tsedek*. *Ger Toshab* is, in modern terms, a permanent resi-

tion for their inclusion. Once someone is accepted to the People of Israel, he or she is no worse than any other Jew who is biologically Jewish. Of course, there are still technical limitations, like the prohibition against a *Ger Tsedek* marrying a *Kohen*. This is just like the technical limitation for Americans—a naturalized American citizen cannot run for president, regardless of how good a citizen he or she is.

Throughout Jewish History, we have had our share of prominent Jews who became Jewish by their free choice, starting with the very first Jews (those 600,000 who left Egypt). King David's great grandmother converted to Judaism. Shema'ya and AbTalyon, the heads of the *Sanhedrin*, teachers of the celebrated Hillel, and a link in Jewish chain of tradition,

were themselves *gerim*. R. Akiba, R. Meir, Onkelos, and others, all of them directly credited for Judaism as we know it, descended from *gerim*. In a letter that overflows with sincere sentiments, no less a figure than Maimonides' addresses himself to one such convert: Ovadyah. This individual wanted to know whether he was entitled to use the expression "*E-lohenu ve-lohe avotenu*" (our Lord and The Lord of our fathers) since his own fathers most certainly did not qualify in this sense. Amidst many heartfelt words encouraging him to be aware of his equivalence to any other Jew, Maimonides assured him that his father was indeed Abraham: if not *genealogically*, in any case *ideologically*. He should therefore say "The Lord of our fathers" just like any other Jew.

Additionally, the *Torah* is crystal clear with regards to our treatment of *gerim*: one of the 613 biblical precepts is the unequivocal prescription "you shall love the convert". Maimonides points out in *Sefer ha-Misvot*¹ that a Jewish convert deserves his fellow Jew's love because of two *Misvot*. He has to be loved like any other Jew has to be loved, and he has to be loved, additionally, as a *ger*! The *Midrash*, addressing the formulation of this same *pasuk*, affirms that *Hashem* chose the same formula for prescribing the love of the *ger* as with prescribing *His* own love.

A *ger* is admitted to Judaism through three rituals, in the same fashion that we contracted the Sinaitic Covenant: with *mila* (circumcision), with *tebila* (ritual bath), and with *korban* (offering). Today, we do not - for the time being - practice the ritual aspect of Judaism that is dependent on the Temple of Jerusalem, hence only the first two rituals



apply. In addition to the technical process, in order to qualify as *Ger Tsedek*, a few fundamental conditions must be met.

Firstly, the person willing to become part of the People of Israel has to accept (and not only in the abstract) the fulfillment of *all* the *Mitzvot*. Understandably, an individual who

wants to become naturalized in America cannot claim: "I am willing to accept the entire constitution ... except for the 16th Amendment." Furthermore, no serious court will welcome the argument of "Why do I need to commit to it all while my friend John, an American born citizen, doesn't keep it?" A Jewish *ger*, too, has to commit to the entire *Torah*, even when knowing that some Jews-from-birth qualify as full-fledged Jews while not always being strictly faithful to Jewish Law.

Secondly, the commitment has to be based purely on a sincere willingness to be a part of the Jewish People. A book entitled *Israël et l'Humanité* records the substance of a lengthy discussion that concerns our subject. The protagonists are Aimé Pallière and Rabbi Elijah Benamozegh. Aimé Pallière was a Catholic priest who discovered the Truth in Judaism. He was worried about attaining true salvation so he appealed to Rabbi Benamozegh to see what he should do about it. Rabbi Benamozegh, a faithful paradigm of *Torah u-Mada*, explained very extensively that Judaism grants a place in The World To Come to gentiles as well. It suffices to fulfill the seven Noahide Laws, without needing to actually become Jewish. He then suggested that Aimé Pallière remained a gentile. The reasoning is as follows: if the objective is the attainment of *Olam HaBa*, and if this can be done by remaining gentile and practicing seven laws, then why would anyone in his right mind want to incur the liability of 606 additional precepts! Indeed, *the one and only reason why a gentile should want to convert is to be a part of the Jewish people*. Any other reason invalidates the conversion.

While *mila* and *tebila* are details that can be (and are) verified, it becomes more difficult to discern the *ger*'s intent in converting. We cannot depend solely on the word of the subject in order to determine his or her genuine intentions. And this is how the great codifier of Jewish Law, Maimonides² has put it: "...The

proper prescription [of how to accept converts] is: when the *ger* or *giyoret* come to convert, [the Jewish court] investigates them lest they are to benefit [from this conversion] financially, or politically, or whether it is for fear of anything that he/she is choosing to enter our Law; and if it's a man, they investigate lest he has laid his eyes on a Jewish girl; and if it's a woman, they investigate lest she has laid her eyes on a man from among the Jewish men. Should they [the court] not find any ulterior motive, they inform them [the *gerim*] how demanding is the burden of the *Torah*, and the inconvenience that is incurred by its fulfillment on the common folk, [all of this] so that they give up. If they are nevertheless committed and did not give up, and they see that indeed they are converting from love, they accept them..."

This requires an extensive detective-like scrutiny on the part of the Jewish court. Due to the enormous amount of uncertainty that remains, exacerbated by factors such as the prosperity of Jews or anything else that might make being Jewish tempting for the average gentile, some Jewish courts decided to refrain altogether from accepting proselytes during certain eras: "For that reason, the Jewish Court did not accept converts [throughout] all the days of David and Solomon. In the days of David, should they be coming [to convert] out of fear, and in the days of Salomon, lest it be because of the sovereignty and the substantial wellbeing the Jews were privy to back then that they are choosing to convert. For all those who convert from among the gentiles due to anything mundane, are not *gere tsedek*..." Unlike other religions, we do not actively seek converts. We do not have "Jews for Judaism" groups, nor do we infiltrate rabbis into Catholic schools in order to "save souls." This is because the Jewish people sees the possibility of both being gentile and being good. Our sages have said: "*haside umot ha-olam, yesh la-hem helek la-olam ha-ba*" (the righteous from the nations have a share in The World To Come). If, however, a gentile does decide to convert, there is a way to become a Jew. Nevertheless, the convert has to unambiguously choose to do so for the right reasons, and the one and only reason to convert is the wish to be part and parcel of The People of Israel. Unconditionally.

Yaakov Bitton is a Senior in SSSB

¹ Maimonides, *Teshubot haRambam* 293

² Maimonides, *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, *Asse* 207

³ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah Issure Bia* 13:14-15

Is There a Mitzvah to Prevent Genocide?

BY RABBI ARYEH KLAPPER

Adapted from a lecture at Young Israel of Sharon, July 5, 2006

I. Historical and Socio-Axiological Arguments

Is there a mitzvah to prevent genocide? If "mitzvah" means "a deed recognized by Judaism as good," the answer plainly is yes. We still live in the shadow of the Holocaust and see the world's general indifference to the destruction of European Jewry as an epic scandal; surely, then, we must see ourselves as religiously compelled to avoid such indifference, and to protest when we observe it in others.

Jewish history has religious significance. This belief, which Dr. David Berger has powerfully shown underlies and mandates Religious Zionism, also means that the experiences of every Jewish community legitimately and necessarily shape its approach to specific halakhic issues.

At the Seder, we recite the paragraph *Vehi She-amdah*, declaring that a genocidal attempt on us takes place every generation. In that respect at least, the Holocaust is not qualitatively unique in Jewish history. What may well be unique, however, is the attitude toward America that emerged from the ashes. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, instead of being unreservedly thankful towards a country that did not participate, we came out thinking that it should have done more to prevent it!

In previous persecutions, the best we hoped for was nonparticipation. The notion that a gentile country, with a minor Jewish population, should be obligated to intervene in another country's internal affairs to save us, risking its own soldiers and people in the effort, would have been incomprehensible. Now, if we have any sense of moral reciprocity, this new feeling that others are obligated to save us should generate an obligation for us to save them.

Furthermore, our sense that America was obligated to save us during the Holocaust is not formulated in terms of Jewish chosenness, that America has an obligation to save G-d's chosen people, but rather in terms of America's obligation to humanity. This obligation to humanity applies equally to us as it did to 1940s Americans. We seem to accept the notion of universal human responsibility. America has given us a realistic sense that we can require of non-Jews intervention on our behalf, and this sense should require us to intervene on behalf of non-Jews.

Moreover, throughout Exile, Jews only had the power to save themselves, if that. We therefore deferred discussing the responsibilities conferred by power to save others to the

Messianic era. The establishment of Israel changed this, as did our American experience. Since America is a genuine democracy, where we have genuine influence—not the power to compel others, but responsibility alongside them, where our voice is as meaningful as anyone else's—American citizenship makes us responsible for the moral tone and actions of American society. Before America, it would have been absurd to discuss Jewish responsibility for the rate of abortion in the society of their host nation; today, we cannot evade partial responsibility for that circumstance in America. Similarly, we bear responsibility for America's reaction to attempts at genocide.

II. Halakhic Arguments

If our community had internalized Rabbi Norman Lamm *shlita's* pithy declaration that "Halakha is minimalist Judaism"; if we had accepted Rabbi Walter Wurzbarger *z"l's* contention that covenantal imperatives lie at the core of Torah; if we saw our religious purpose as expanding G-d's presence in the world beyond the four cubits of halakha, rather than as limiting our own image of His presence to that constricted space; in short, if we read Torah like Ramban—a legal treatment of this issue would discuss the parameters of the obligation without feeling the need to demonstrate its existence. Yet for better or worse, much of the Modern/Centrist Orthodox community tends to understand religious obligation exclusively as a formal legal category. It is accordingly necessary to approach the question again, this time with halakhic rigor: Is preventing the annihilation of defined gentile communities a halakhically significant act? Does this significance rise to the level of *mitzvah kiyumit*, a legally recognized positive deed, or even more strongly, a *mitzvah hiyuvit*, a legal obligation?

My answers to these questions are founded on two assumptions which I wish to make explicit from the beginning.

1) All human beings are created *be-tselem Elokim*.

2) Halakhic obligations differ from moral obligations in that they are not abstractions that exist regardless of the rulings of *poskim*, especially contemporary *poskim*. Moral obligations are generated by principles and circumstances; halakhic obligations are generated by authority.

I cannot argue that halakhic tradition unequivocally obligates us to prevent genocide. I will, however, argue that a plausible case can be constructed that preventing genocide is halakhically significant, perhaps even halakhically obligatory. This case may not convince someone who does not share my moral assumptions and evaluations, but it should convince someone who does share them that they are acting legitimately.

Making that case requires me to show, first, that halakha obligates Jews to intervene on behalf of non-Jews. Second, I will need to show that the category of genocide—the attempt to extinguish a particular cultural, ethnic or racial group—is halakhically significant.

For pragmatic reasons, I would prefer to argue further that genocide is more halakhically significant than the category of mass murder. It seems unrealistic to impose on the United States the responsibility to intervene, militarily or otherwise, every time any government behaves cruelly toward its population. Orthodox Jews do not have to vote for all humanitarian interventions everywhere. The United States, to some degree, has a right to mind its own business. Rather, the obligation to act should be activated only when a humanitarian crisis rises to the level of genocide.

A Jewish obligation to intervene on behalf of non-Jews emerges from the positions of Rabbi Chaim Brisker (*Yesodei ha-Torah* 5:1, *Rotzeah u-Shemirat ha-Nefesh*) that the moral *sevara* "who says your blood is redder than his" prevents Jews from choosing their own lives over those of Gentiles, and that the obligation to defend those pursued with murderous intent against their pursuers, even at the cost of killing the pursuer (*rodef*), is part of the



Noachide commandment of "*dinim*," i.e. essential to any civilized society.

This is not the forum for a formal evaluation of Rav Chaim's arguments regarding the scope of *rodef* in the Rambam. It is worth briefly noting, however, the universalistic formulation of Rambam (*Sanhedrin* 12:3) that one who saves any human life is considered to have saved an entire world. Note also that *Sefer ha-Hinukh* (Mitzvah 600) formulates the obligation to save a *nirdaf* in universal terms—"the settlement of the world requires championing of the weak," and "the oppressed turn their eyes to G-d." This appears to impose a particular obligation on Jews, as G-d's agents on earth, to answer the prayers of the oppressed.

Whereas Rav Chaim obligates Jews to prevent murder of gentiles, Rav Yaakov Emden obligates us to rescue gentiles from even less severe injustices. Moshe Rabbeinu's championing of the Gentile daughters of Yitro (*Shemot* 2:17, and see especially Seforno there) plainly foreshadows his role as redeemer of the Jews. Rav Emden (*Sh'eilat Yaavetz* 2:51) infers from this narrative that a Jewish *adam hashuv* is responsible to rescue any oppressed person from any oppressor, even a non-Jew from a Jewish oppressor.

In Rav Emden's case, a Jew borrowed

money from a non-Jew, with two Jewish witnesses. The Jew then reneged. R. Emden argues that the two witnesses must respond to a subpoena. He makes the technical argument that the Talmudic prohibition against testifying against Jews in secular court doesn't apply to an *adam hashuv*. But whereas the Talmudic distinction between *hashuv* and non-*hashuv* seems to be pragmatic—whether one can successfully evade the subpoena without consequence—Rav Emden transforms this into a moral claim.

It is not clear why, once R. Emden introduces his rhetoric of universal moral obligation, the Talmud should consider *adam hashuv* exceptional rather than paradigmatic. For our purposes, however, it suffices that his definition of *adam hashuv* is somebody who plays a role in the moral functioning of the society, somebody of whom people have moral expectations. In America, where society has moral expectations of Jews as it does of every other citizen, every Jew is an *adam hashuv*. According to R. Emden, we all have the obligation to save even a non-Jewish oppressed from the hands of a Jewish oppressor.

But this obligation is undefined. How severe does the oppression have to be to trigger our obligation? We cannot be obligated to intervene every time the judicial system goes awry. R. Emden's obligation, as opposed to R. Chaim's, can only be a *mitzvah kiyumit*. But even R. Chaim's obligation, which is *hiyuvit*, must have limits; we are not obligated to become roaming knights-errant, to devote all our time to preventing individual murders, even in our day when everyone who reads newspapers is constantly made aware of specific acts of injustice rising to the level of killing and rape all around the globe. Neither is the United States obligated to play that role throughout the world.

My suggestion is that there is generally a communal analogue to the moral principles that generate halakhic obligations for individuals. Individuals must keep honest weights and measures—communities must establish fair marketplaces. Similarly, the individual obligation to save a *nirdaf* from being killed is paralleled by a communal obligation to ensure that everyone can live safely without fear of being killed.

Furthermore, the communal obligation to create a safe society exists on both a local and global scale. In other words, communities have obligations both to their own individual citizens, and toward other communities. The communal obligation to save a *nirdaf* extends to preventing the deaths of entire other communities.

III. Clarification of Halakhic Issues

This argument leaves much undefined. International lawyers have wrangled for decades about the exact meaning of genocide, and halakha need not accept whatever definition emerges from their discussion. There are resources within the *Masoret* for distinguishing qualitatively between the deaths of individuals and the deaths of communities, but they have

not yet been developed. It is certainly a challenge to distinguish halakhically between Saddam Hussein's killing of 25,000 Kurds and his killing of all 25,000 Marsh Arabs, but I think it can be done.

Similarly, there are resources within the *Masoret* for determining the boundaries of the obligation to pursue justice and prevent injustice. For example, while Rambam (Laws of Kings 9:14) holds the entire city of *Shkhem* capitally liable for failing to prevent the kidnapping and rape of Dinah, he does not extend this liability to the rest of the population of Canaan.

What risks must one take to fulfill this obligation to prevent genocide? Surely one must be willing to sacrifice a portion of one's time and money. However, the obligation to intervene does not imply that one has to risk one's life. Individuals have little if any obligation to risk their own lives to challenge a *rodef*. Certainly, in the context of a volunteer army such



as the United States', we cannot risk others' lives for our own moral obligations. It is morally questionable to vote for war when neither one's own life nor those of one's children will thereby be put at risk. Furthermore, Rav Herschel Schachter *shlit"l* has convincingly argued that there is rarely if ever an obligation to fight a losing war.

At the same time, the Rav *z"l* argued that a *milhemet mitzvah* is best defined as "a war that accomplishes a mitzvah," and *Minhat Hinukh* argues that any mitzvah which requires a war to accomplish necessarily requires risking one's life. Along the lines of our previous argument, it may be that a community has no obligation to risk its existence to save another community, but is obligated to risk the lives of some of its members. We supported a draft to fight against the Holocaust; in the absence of a draft, perhaps we are obligated to volunteer when war is halakhically called for.

All these questions require the attention of great *lamdanim* and *poskim*. My purpose here is only to call them to that attention, and to argue that ignoring them is a failure of our responsibility to ensure that the face which the eternal Torah presents to our time is one that sanctifies the Divine Name.

Rabbi Aryeh Klapper is *Rosh Beit Midrash of the Summer Beit Midrash* and currently serves as *Talmud Curriculum Chair at Maimonides High School* and as a member of

Messianianism at the Dead Sea: The Use of Peshar in Qumran

BY SHIRA SCHWARTZ

The Qumran Sect, popularly known as the Dead Sea Sect, consisted of a group of Second Temple Period Jews who, based largely on disagreements, presumably with the Pharisees, over issues of temple practice and worship, essentially seceded from the union and relocated to Qumran, a settlement on the northwestern bank of the Dead Sea. The predominant academic position¹, supported by evidence from early historical writers such as Josephus and Pliny the Elder, maintains that the group was Essenian; Lawrence Schiffman, albeit with some difficulty, contends that it was Sadducean.² For the purposes of this article, it will be assumed that the people in Qumran, like the general opinion, were Essenes.

Prior to the Qumran relocation, Essenes already practiced religion in a stricter, and in some ways, different manner than the broader Jewish population.³ These general differences in practice gave the group an exclusive and elite character that separated it from other Jews. For example, the Essenes ate communally, and outsiders were forbidden to touch the communal food.⁴ They were hypersensitive to matters of purity and piety, believed in determinism, and carried a philosophy and way of life similar in many ways to stoicism. However, despite these differences in philosophy and practice, they continued to associate with the rest of the Jewish people. It was only once these differences affected temple worship that the group separated.

The Temple-focus of the Qumran Sect's secession displays how central the Temple and temple worship were during that period to the lives of the Jews and to the very definition of what it meant to be "Jewish." It is crucial to approach any study of the Qumran Sect with an understanding of this context and how it shaped religious life. It is also important to realize that it is impossible to project modern religious models onto Second Temple period society. Indeed, it is questionable whether the term "sect" can even be applied to groups like the Essenes and Sadducees. Without the modern sense of "Orthodoxy," the sorts of divisions that existed between groups were of a different nature than contemporary ones. The differences between Essenes and Pharisees outside of temple worship did not provide enough cause for the Essenes to leave.

Once they did separate, the Qumran Sect began to see itself not only as more pious, but as more "Jewish" than other Jews. Through their writing it is clear that the people at Qumran thought of themselves as chosen, better, and eschatologically significant. A subtle analysis of the theology, doctrine and rituals that separated the Qumran Sect, uncovers a

unique world that forces us to question the parameters of "Jewish" during the Second Temple Period.

Many documents and texts found at the Qumran site serve as lenses into the lives and thoughts of the people who dwelled there. Along with many of the biblical documents, we find an interpretive method called "*Peshar*" that the Qumran people used to explain biblical text. Similar to Midrash in form, it often consists of a lemma—biblical verse, and a *peshar*—its interpretation. However, unlike Midrash, *Peshar* seeks to reinterpret the biblical text in accordance with contemporary times, claiming the period in question and the people who lived then as the subject of biblical prophecy. Although Midrash attempts to see Jewish history through a biblical prism, it does not typically write history into the text, as if the literal meaning of the text was intended exclusively for the specific time in question.



In this regard, *Peshar* is, as Schiffman suggests⁵, more similar to New Testament interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. These New Testament interpretations reframe the Hebrew Bible to fit into a Christian context.

Many such *pesharim* were found at the Qumran site. An exploration of *Peshar Habakkuk* serves as a good example of the significance *peshar* carried for the worldview of the Dead Sea sect. *Peshar Habakkuk* uses the biblical *Habakkuk* as a springboard to discuss two main themes: internal religious politics with the Temple priesthood, and international repercussions of the *Kittim* lurking on the scene. It employs a bold interpretive methodology in order to make ancient prophetic texts pertain to and reflect the particular time and circumstance of the *Peshar*'s authors. Often-

times overlooking and altering the literal meaning of the text, "*pesharim*" tie the text to contemporary experience, which in turn validates the contemporary worldview of its composers.

A strong example of this can be found in the *Peshar*'s elucidation of *Habakkuk* 2:2-3. The verses translate literally as follows: "Then the LORD answered me and said, Write down the vision plainly on tablets, so that with ease someone can read it. For a prophecy testifies of a specific period; it speaks of that time and does not deceive." These verses, although somewhat cryptic, unmistakably speak of the clarity that prophecy provides, the apparent connection between a given prophecy and its appointed period, and the lucidity with which this particular vision ought to be recorded; they tell of the simplicity and obviousness that colors the vision just read.

However, the *peshar* alters the translation:

"Then God told Habakkuk to write down what is going to happen to the generation to come; but when that period would be complete He did not make known to him. 'so that with ease someone can read it,' this refers to the Teacher of Righteousness to whom God made known all the mysterious revelations of his servants the prophets. 'For a prophecy...' This means that the Last Days will be long, much longer than the prophets had said; for God's revelations are truly mysterious."⁶

Instead of focusing on the lucid nature of the prophecy in question, the *peshar* ascribes mystery to it. Rather, in its effort to make the verses relevant, it monopolizes the clarity that the divine word is characterized with by Habakkuk, emphasizing instead an opacity it presents to laypeople, an exclusivity that al-

lows only truly pious and chosen people to understand it.

Parts of the verses that are general or vague, such as, "*ha-korei*", the reader, or more simply, someone that wants to read about the vision, gain specificity and particular meaning: the Teacher of Righteousness. In this case, the *peshar* has transformed "the reader/one who will read" into *The Reader*. In order to do this successfully, the *peshar* must also conveniently ignore such words as "*uba'er*" and "*yaruts*," words that connote the simplicity with which God commands the text to be written down and the ease with which it should be able to be read. This is necessary in order to raise the simple "reader" to the level of the elevated "Teacher of Righteousness"; certainly, this divinely inspired, messianic personality would not need the prophecy to be watered down. In this way, the *peshar* establishes divine and biblical authority for the sect's leader, the Teacher of Righteousness. Additionally, the Teacher of Righteousness assumes a messianic role, thus supporting the Dead Sea sect's belief that they were living during the End of Days and were pawns in the messianic process. Furthermore, instead of translating the general "*hazon*", as vision, the *peshar* moves towards specificity once again and delineates what exactly "*hazon*" refers to: what is going to happen to the last generation. This again, adds a messianic element to the translation, and by playing on the Teacher of Righteousness (they were surely referring to a particular individual at that time), makes the words of Habakkuk speak of their own time period.

Oppositely, the *peshar* adds mystery where none existed before. It takes the time to note: "but when that period would be complete He did not make known to him". This knowledge is clearly something that Habakkuk was not privy to, but that the Teacher of Righteousness would be. Furthermore, this Teacher of Righteousness is personified as the man "to whom God made known all the mysterious revelations of his servants and prophets", heightening his status even more. Lastly, instead of focusing on the truth that prophecy reveals, as God has chosen to in the actual text, the *peshar* takes the verse which describes prophecy's open and intelligible nature—"For a prophecy testifies of a specific period; it speaks of that time and does not deceive," and paints a layer of ambiguity over it—"This means that the Last Days will be long, much longer than the prophets have said; for God's revelations are truly mysterious." This allows them to pull from the text of Habakkuk, lengthening not only the Last Days, but therefore, the text's relevance to *their* days.

At this point the *peshar* has successfully established the absolute, yet exclusive nature of the prophetic text, and the validity and supe-

riority of he who will read it, namely, the Teacher of Righteousness. Interestingly, these verses may also shed light on one of the reasons why the *peshet* is pitched at tying *Habakkuk* to its contemporary period. The

perhaps beyond the scope of what it actually does, they legitimize their way of life and convince themselves of its alignment with the vision of God. This is typical of a group that tries to redefine a text and/or religion and claim

and *Peshet* is important to note for a number of reasons. First, it proves that the interpretive methodology found in the New Testament was not necessarily novel, nor was it shockingly suspicious to Jews when it first emerged. This helps to clarify and contextualize the Jewish response to early Christianity. Secondly, it shows just how far the Essenes, like the early Christians, were willing to go to defend their values and choices. It particularly displays how significant the Qumran Jews may have thought their way of life was, so much so that they were convinced not only of its divine approval, but divine origin.

Break-off sects of social and organized religions must prove themselves within the contexts that they attempt to redefine. In the case of *Peshet Habakkuk*, it seems that this was not only a utilitarian and external need, but a deep internal need as well, one which required satisfaction in order for the people themselves to believe in their superior Jewish status, and in their own legitimacy.

Shira Schwartz is a staff writer for Kol Hamevaser



tablets upon which the "hazon" is written conjure up the image of the original tablets that Moses inscribed the Torah on. Through this act and imagery, the prophecy's strength grows to be of biblical proportion and the Teacher of Righteousness achieves a Moses-like status. He therefore trumps the words of the other prophets, the prophets who were wrong when estimating how long the Last Days would be, and can indeed be presented as a messianic figure.

authenticity. Such a move requires extreme positions and perspectives, often expressing itself in messianism. Eschatological drama and messianic immediacy tend to shift people's attention away from details and technicalities—from logic, and increase a group's ability to persuade and enforce dogma. Such was the case in Qumran.

As Schiffman^{viii} notes, the New Testament inducts a similar methodology for biblical interpretation. This is not surprising since it



The use of *peshet* not only elucidates the text of *Habakkuk*, but it validates the worldview and perspective of its employers. By attaching themselves to a prophetic text and by interpreting that text to connote ideas that are

seeks to redefine the monotheistic religion and promote a new divinely appointed Messiah; it is forced to confront the existent biblical text, and make peace with it. The similarity between New Testament biblical interpretation

First Contact

BY ARI BERNSTEIN

Bereishit Rabbah 78:15 relates that the Rabbis would analyze the *Parsha* of Yaakov's confrontation with Esav before they journeyed to Rome to implore the government on behalf of the Jews. The Rabbis understood that the confrontation between Yaakov and Esav depicted the paradigm of cultural interaction between Judaism and the West. Therefore, in seeking to find a *modus vivendi* for Jewish relations with the West, it seems appropriate to analyze this earliest account of the confrontation.

One of the most illuminating details in the story concerns Yaakov's decision, according to *Bereishit Rabbah* 76:9, to hide Dinah in a box rather than risk Esav setting his eyes upon her, which may have led him to desire her for marriage. The Rabbis criticize Yaakov for denying his brother the opportunity for *teshuva* that marriage to a *tsadeket* like Dinah would have afforded. Without any extensive analysis, it is clear that the midrash assumes that there is an ideal that Esav should be redeemed to serve God. Assuming the perspective of the Rabbis that the events and decisions in Yaakov's encounter with Esav reflect the underlying natures of each respective party, one must apply this ideal to all of Esav's descendants as well. This means that, in the modern world, there is an ideal that Jews should facilitate gentiles' service of God.

The precise nature of Yaakov's failure in hiding Dinah is somewhat ambiguous, however. And understanding the precise nature of his failure is important for understanding the approach Jews should take when relating to gentiles. One can understand that Yaakov rejected the notion that he was responsible to inspire his brother, who had attempted to annihilate Yaakov's family, to return to God. Yaakov's decision to hide Dinah, then, was a reflection of a broader philosophical rejection of responsibility for his brother. If this approach to the midrash is taken, the message of the midrash is simply that Jews should seek to inspire gentiles to serve God.

One can also interpret the midrash as a methodological critique of Yaakov, in which case the message of the midrash becomes more pointed. According to this approach, the authors of the midrash understood that Yaakov wanted to redeem Esav; however, Yaakov considered the marriage of his daughter to Esav too high a price. To understand what this means for us, it is necessary to analyze the downside Yaakov saw in Esav marrying his daughter. For one, Yaakov would not have wanted his daughter to live in Esav's household, where she would be subject to the influence of her reprobate husband. Additionally, Yaakov would have feared the consequences of the intensified cultural interaction effected by Dinah's marriage to Esav and the familial unification it entailed. Yaakov's methodological failure, then, was too much concern for the

ⁱ Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, Miksat Maaseh haTorah (MMT), (London, 2004) pg. 228-29.

See Albert Baumgarten, "But Touch the Law and the Sect Will Split," *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 5.3 (2002): 301-315.

ⁱⁱ James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. Grand Rapids, 1994).

ⁱⁱⁱ Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their True Meaning for Judaism and Christianity*, (New York, 1994)

^{iv} Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.119-60, *Antiquities*, 13.171-72, 18.18-22.

See MMT and the Community Rule/Serekh haYahad (pg. 97-125 in Vermes) for an articulation of Qumran laws and customs.

^v Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.

^{vi} Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 224-25.

^{vii} Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, Commentary on Habakkuk (1QpHab). (London, 2004), 512-13.

^{viii} Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their True Meaning for Judaism and Christianity*, (New York, 1994)

Summer@YU is looking **FOR YOU!**

Join our staff and help impact the lives of high school students
from all across North America.

JULY 1- AUGUST 5, 2008

Each summer these students come together in NY to experience college
life and learning. From different countries and states and varying
religious backgrounds, they are waiting for you to show them how to
have a great time living a Jewish life and studying in a Torah environment.

Offer **GUIDANCE**

Use Your **TALENTS**

Test Your **LEADERSHIP** Skills

Get **INVOLVED**

Think **you** have what it takes?

APPLY TODAY!

Visit www.yu.edu/summeratyu

*Guide the next generation of
YU students through the ins
and outs of life on campus.*



Yeshiva University



For more information contact Yehudi Isenberg at 917-328-4865 or email: summer@yu.edu

preservation of his cultural identity and unwillingness to open himself to Esav's influence as he attempted to inspire Esav to serve God. This does not mean to say that Yaakov should have, in the spirit of camaraderie and pluralism, experimented with offerings to Baal as Esav tried praying in a Synagogue. Rather, Yaakov would have to discern what values of Esav were consistent with service to God as practiced by his father and grandfather. However, failure to open himself at all to Esav prevented Yaakov from inspiring Esav to the full extent of his capabilities. Perhaps Martin Buber described the necessity of openness most succinctly in "I and Thou" stating, "relation is reciprocity."^{vi} Yaakov could only influence Esav from the framework of a relationship if Yaakov accepted Esav and treated him as a "thou."^{vi}

Another striking element in the story is Esav's transformation at the moment of encounter. Esav, runs toward Yaakov and kisses and hugs his brother. The *Sifrei*^{vii} highlights the

he should be invulnerable to the evil eye. This praise of Yosef seems somewhat inconsistent considering the criticism that Yaakov suffers for his seemingly identical action of hiding Dinah.

To answer the first question, it seems pertinent to analyze the characters of Yaakov and Esav. From their first introduction, the Torah presents a vivid distinction between Yaakov and Esav. The Torah describes Yaakov as "*ish tam yoshev ohalot*,"^{vi} a man content with what he has, uncompelled to exit his tent, succinctly described as "simple," in the most flattering sense. Esav, by contrast, is a hunter, always seeking. He demonstrates his neediness in his classification of Yaakov's lentil soup as "*adom ha-edom ha-zeh*,"^{vii} Esav so desperately needed immediate gratification that he could not expend the time to name the food according to its fundamental nature. This tendency is so central to his character that Esav is named after the incident. Esav desperately seeks materialism - to the degree that he is willing to barter eternal

does not pursue possessions to salve inner angst, presents an entrancing vision of a lifestyle of satisfaction and tranquility. By lavishing gifts upon Esav in a gracious manner, Yaakov demonstrated his freedom from the ad-

who, due to this very invulnerability, elicits admiration from an anxious West. Perhaps it is based on this quality that Ovadiah writes "And it will be that the house of Yaakov will be fire, and the house of Yosef a flame, and Esav, for



enormity of Esav's change, noting the opinion of Rav Shimon Bar Yochai that, notwithstanding the axiom "Esav hates Yaakov," at this moment Esav was truly overcome by love.^{iv} Rav Shimon bar Yochai's statement - and, for that matter, the story itself - begs the question of what Yaakov did to achieve this massive change in Esav's attitude. The gifts alone would seem not to account for Esav's new disposition considering that Esav was so cynical that he found the firstborn rights worthless because death would claim him anyways. One would have expected Esav to see the gifts as nothing more than Yaakov's bribe to spare his life.

An additional question is prompted by the midrash that records that Yosef shielded his mother from Esav's gaze lest he see her and desire her.^v The sages laud Yosef's action and propose that Yosef was rewarded for his action in the form of Yaakov's blessing to Yosef that

values for it - because he suffers an existential angst concerning his mortality - "*anokhi holekh la-mut ve-lamah zeh li behorah*."^{vii} Esav unconsciously deludes himself that control of physical objects affords some control over mortality, but his anxieties remain despite his accumulation of wealth. Rather than recognize a fundamental failure in his approach, Esav continues to pander to unconscious delusion and assumes that his angst endures only because he lacks sufficient wealth. The Torah highlights this difference between Yaakov and Esav's respective relationships with materialism following their reconciliation in *Vayishlach*; Esav protests Yaakov's gifts with the statement "*yesh li rav*" and prompts Yaakov's more profound response of "*yesh li kol*." Esav eternally seeks and lacks, Yaakov, by his satisfied disposition, has everything.

To a perpetually needy individual, a complacent figure who is satisfied with himself and

diction of acquisitiveness, and by implication, the existential angst of mortality. The sudden realization that his brother had found a path to transcendence of a seemingly inescapable anxiety of the human condition shocked Esav emotionally and disrupted his hatred for Yaakov. From this state of emotional confusion, Esav was able to look more honestly and recognize his brother's greatness. Therefore, when Esav saw Yaakov, he ran, kissed, and hugged his brother. And at the conclusion of their meeting, Esav, enthralled, begged Yaakov to return to Seir. Yaakov refused; he perceived that Esav's desire for his accompaniment did not reflect true moral change. Rather, Esav deluded himself into thinking that Yaakov's presence would address his anxiety, just as he believed physical wealth would do so. However, although Yaakov failed to impart a historical impact on Esav, he redeemed Esav in their encounter by presenting his brother with a vision of a lifestyle that, due to the confidence it provided, was free from enslavement to materialism.

This quality of Yaakov appeared, amongst all of his children, most prominently in Yosef who, due to his self-confidence, could endure twelve years in prison without losing faith in divine salvation and destiny. That Yosef should hide part of his family from Esav, therefore seems all the more surprising. Hiding Rachel, then, must be consistent with the personality of the Jews' greatest cultural ambassador in history. Indeed, upon closer analysis, one can differentiate between Dinah, who was unwed, and Rachel, who was married to Yaakov and therefore unavailable to Esav regardless of how much he desired her. Yosef, with the wisdom of one confident in his identity, was able to understand that certain intimate valuables are not available for public appreciation. Yosef's self-confidence, and the decision making faculties it affords him, makes him uniquely capable of navigating the narrow path necessary for successful cultural interaction with the West. For the same reason, Esav's wiles of materialism and immediate pleasure are particularly unseductive to Yosef,

straw... they will consume."^{viii}

For our own interactions with the Western World, Yosef presents the most compelling model. Emulation of Yosef requires satisfaction in who we are and disengagement from Western materialism. By doing this, we enable ourselves to engage in the Western world without fear of losing our relationship with God or compromising our identities. If we use this freedom to demonstrate our concern for all men and do not fail to recognize that the rest of humanity has something to offer us, we become a nation that the West cannot help but view with admiration.

Ari Bernstein is a Sophomore in YC majoring in Philosophy and Psychology

*Credit is due to David Weiss for his help in organizing the structure of this article and proofreading it.

ⁱ "I and Thou," 1:20

ⁱⁱ Martin Buber proposed that one can treat another human as a subject or an object - a "you" or an "it." This is the difference between recognizing the other with whom one relates as another human being who is equal in every respect and commands the complete attention of the individual. In Buberian terms, Yaakov failed because he treated Esav as an "it."

ⁱⁱⁱ *Sifrei, Beha'aloscha*, 69.

^{iv} This statement is all the more astounding considering that Rav Shimon Bar Yochai is a great particularist who maintained that gentiles are not human enough to contaminate a room with their corpse.

^v *Bereshit Rabba* 78:10

^{vi} *Bereshit* 25:27

^{vii} *ibid.* 25:32

^{viii} *Ovadiah* 1:18

Book Review:

The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt

BY AMI FRIEDMAN

The cover of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt depicts an American flag colored blue and white, and the title makes it clear what the book is all about. Indeed, many observers have noted this close relationship between the Jewish state and the world's most powerful country. Continuing on the path of previous scholars, Mearsheimer and Walt analyze the origins of this tight friendship and question its implications.

the word "lobby." Additionally, greater attention is allotted to the role of Christian Zionists in the Israel lobby.

Previous scholars like Michael Oren have argued that lobbying had little influence on the relationship between the United States and Israel. Instead, they attributed American support for Israel to the biblical roots of American democracy. Mearsheimer and Walt disagree, and maintain that political lobbying by organizations such as the America Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC) has been the driving force behind this close relationship. While

unnecessary to say, however, that Walt and Mearsheimer do not share the Klan member's views in general, but happen to agree on this one issue. In fact, the authors argue that tactics such as those employed by the *Sun* are objectionable techniques used by the lobby. In fact, the authors maintain that carelessly using the word "anti-Semite," as well as more malicious labels, is one of the more odious tactics of the lobby. They especially single out Jewish organizations such as Abraham Foxman's Anti-Defamation League for using this term unfairly. Mainstream Jewish columnists have

incursion, greater than the 52% of Americans in general. This demonstrates that the Israel lobby does not fully represent the views of most American Jews. The authors also affirm that the Israel lobbyists sincerely, but incorrectly, believe that their actions will benefit the US as well. They also assert that the Israel lobby is no different than environmental, anti-smoking and trade lobbies.

Mearsheimer and Walt make some sound points, such as explaining how Israel was an asset, albeit an exaggerated one, to the US during the Cold War but that Israel has since become a liability. They say that that Israel's and the US's interests will inevitably conflict, such as in the case of Israel's supposed nuclear weapons program. They also point out the extravagant aid the US gives to Israel, a small wealthy country. This aid amounts to more than 3 billion dollars in military equipment, favorable loans, and direct handouts. Mearsheimer and Walt take issue with the fact that this aid exceeds that given to any other country in dollar and per capita amounts.

The book is not without its flaws. The main problem with the work is its attempt to cover too much territory. Walt and Mearsheimer attempt to span, in the course of a single book, the United States' political process, the Cold War, the Arab-Israel conflict, terrorism, and the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism. Almost all of the footnotes are secondary sources from newspapers, magazines and articles from the Internet, including some from questionable sources such as Norman Finkelstein, Noam Chomsky and the pro-Arab magazine *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*. Additionally, there are hardly any personal interviews of key figures. Even more problematically, the authors do not demonstrate any comprehension of Hebrew or Arabic, placing them at a serious disadvantage in effectively analyzing issues surrounding the Middle East.

The book also lacks a thorough analysis of the religious passions surrounding the conflict. Jewish extremism certainly exists, and this book thoroughly documents every crime or immoral action ever committed by Israel. However, they ignore any role that Islam and its extreme elements might play in the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The work does not even contain a map, which would be useful in illustrating the US's geographic interests in the Gulf and the Jewish-Arab layout of settlements in Israel. This



The book was originally a paper commissioned by *The Atlantic Monthly* in 2002 that was later rejected. Instead, it was published by *The London Review of Books* in March 2006 and by *Middle East Policy* in Fall 2006. In August 2007 and was finally published as a book by Farrar, Straus and Giroux and it is now a *New York Times* Best Seller. At 484 pages, including 107 pages of footnotes, the new book covers recent events since the publication of the article including Israel's military misadventure in Lebanon in the summer of 2006. The book overall is a polished version of the article with corrected errors and some notable changes including the decision not to capitalize

they believe, for numerous reasons, that Israel has the right to exist as a Jewish homeland, the authors argue that there is no moral rationale for the high level of support for Israel that the US provides.

Naturally, genuine anti-Semites, fortunately on the fringes in this country, lauded the work, as they would any piece that critiques organized Jewry. Opponents of the book used this very fact to implicate the work itself, claiming that it is anti-Semitic. The *New York Sun*, for example, interviewed a Ku Klux Klan member who praised the original article. This created the misimpression that the authors were in league with anti-Semites. It should be

also been rightly concerned that overuse of the term blunts the effect of designating people or works as anti-Semitic.

Walt and Mearsheimer have made multiple disclaimers that their book does not contain any resemblance to the Russian Czarist virulently anti-Semitic forgery, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. Instead, they portray how "the lobby" maintains views on Israel that differ from those of the majority of American Jewry and even Israeli Jewry. They illustrate, for example, that Israeli officials and pro-Israel lobbyists put pressure on the Bush administration to invade Iraq. However, they cite the statistic that 62% of Jews opposed the

would be important because the complex geography of the Holy Land and the current layout of its demographics is a major reason the negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians remain so tedious.

opportunity society and perhaps justifiably so, or it is reasonable for Western countries to maintain a white majority and to distinguish in some ways between different races. Probably there is some element of truth to both ideas.

THE ISRAEL LOBBY

AND
U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt

One interesting note is the strained Jewish-gentile relations in Israel that the book reports. Differing polling agencies have come to these conclusions: 55% of Jews want segregated entertainment facilities, 53% of Israeli Jews are against full equality for the Arabs, and among Israeli Jewish high school students, 75% say Arabs are uneducated, the same percentage say they are uncivilized and 74% say they are unclean. According to two separate polls, 57% or 63.7% of Israel's Jews think that the Arabs should be encouraged to emigrate, and various poll figures showed that 40%, 62% or 42% of Israeli Jews believe the government should encourage Israeli Arabs to leave and another 17% tended to agree with the idea.

While the authors state that this is expected, due to the bloody conflict, it is clear that Israeli democracy is not as developed as some supporters of Israel claim. Imagine if a majority of Americans shared the aforementioned Klu Klux Klan member's views. Current supporters of Israel would rightly condemn that society, or any society whose populace displayed similar attitudes towards an ethnic minority. One can make the racist claim that Israel has the moral prerogative to separate and reduce the Arab population because a large Arabic or Muslim presence will reduce the quality of life for the state as a whole, but that seems equivalent to saying that one should segregate or expel blacks and Hispanics because of their supposedly high rates of drug, sex, crime or welfare dependency.

Ultimately, apologists who tout Israel's virtues as a liberal democracy arrive at a dead end. Either Israel is far from ideal as an equal

Walt and Mearsheimer's accusation that Israel mistreats religious minorities, however, has only a limited effect. Israel is far from perfect, but few states historically have had unblemished treatment of minorities. Furthermore, contrary to the authors' claims, Israel's conduct towards its minorities is far more humane than that of its Muslim neighbors. One can point to the paucity of churches and synagogues in areas where Muslims are in control and to the fact that Christian Arab communities are vanishing just like the Palestinian ones did in 1948. It is also relevant to note that, however many Arab civilians that Israelis may have killed (and the number is harder to

tell given the unconventional nature of the conflict), many Muslim governments have slaughtered in far greater numbers. Furthermore, 60 years later, the Palestinian expellees from Israel are still refugees in Arab lands, unlike the German expellees from Czechoslovakia and the rest of Communist Europe or Jews from Arab countries, for that matter, both of whom are living prosperous lives today despite their justified grievances. Israel is not a saint when it comes to treating its gentile population, but they assimilate a diverse group of Jews relatively easily, unlike the Arabs with their own.

Another aspect of the Jew versus gentile conflict comes into play when describing American politics. One aspect they mention is the pressure that the pro-Israel lobby puts on the media. Walt and Mearsheimer disavow the anti-Semitic charge that Jews "control the media," but when looking at the statistics of the disproportionate representation of Jews in media management, the anti-Semites' claim has a strong element of truth. Of course, it is absolutely constitutionally permissible for there to be a plethora of Jews in Hollywood and for many Jews to own news agencies. However, this will ultimately impact the product. Nevertheless, the idea that the media does not allow numerous views on Israel may seem hard to swallow to some who heavily engross themselves in it. Determining whether an editorialist is favorable or unfavorable towards Israel is difficult, given that bias depends on one's own perceptions of the issue. One can also debate the authors' claim that neutral news reporting takes a balanced view of the Mideast, given that critics have charged the media with shoddy reporting, plagiarism, falsification and laziness.

More revealing is their treatment of the activity of "neoconservatives," a movement originally consisting almost entirely of leftist Jews who adopted a hawkish anti-Communist and less socialistic ideology during the Cold

War. One major reason for this shift was the perceived anti-Zionism on the left. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the movement has expanded into an ideology promoting a hawkish foreign policy supporting democratic revolutions worldwide, in addition to strong support for Israel. The movement comprises and always comprised only a minority of American Jews, and the current movement contains non-Jews as well, but the Jewish names appear in prominent positions in the George W. Bush administration. Similarly, Congressmen ranked the AIPAC second to the American Association of Retired Peoples in influence. While how much an effect groups that identify themselves as Jewish have on public policy is subject to debate, one must be in denial to overlook that the self-proclaimed representatives of a group comprising less than 3% of the country have an out of proportion influence on public policy.

Meanwhile, the authors demonstrate how the vaunted Arab lobby is far weaker. They do not mention, however, that this might change over the years and decades. High birthrates and large-scale immigration will increase the Muslim population, while Jews continue to vote Democrat, despite the Christian Evangelicals' pro-Israel influence on the Republican Party.

The book is further flawed because it attempts to critique Israel, but relies too heavily on a subset of controversial Israeli historians. Merely focusing on the strategic implications of supporting Israel might have been more effective. Even then, the liberals, who believe foreign policy should reflect the interests of all countries, not just the US, and the neocons who ardently support democratizing the third world, would have objected to the authors' conservative, realist views. The authors also minimize the actual conflict between West and East. For example, they downplay the influence of virulently anti-Western writers such as Sayyid Qutb and Edward Said.

Nevertheless, *The Israel Lobby* is original in its elaboration on the genuine conflict of interest between a segment of Jewry and the Christian Evangelicals and the rest of the American population, which prefers to be neutral in the Israel-Palestinian conflict and only wants to support Israel conditionally. The Israel lobby is not all Jewish and does not represent all Jews, but there nonetheless remains a conflict between it and the rest of the American population.

Ami Friedman is a Senior in YC



Don't learn history ...

Make it!



The Orthodox Union's Legislative Fellowship is an exciting one year post-college program for select, motivated college graduates with leadership potential and an interest in serving the Jewish people while gaining hands on, high level political and policymaking experience.

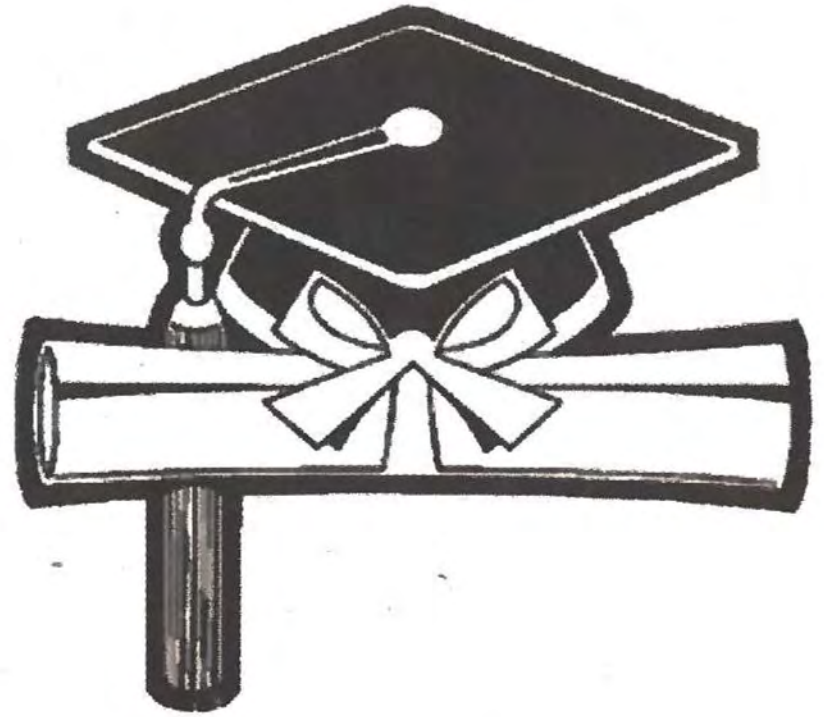
Fellows serve for one year in Washington, DC on the staff of the OU's Institute for Public Affairs, learning political advocacy, issues management and communications skills while helping advance the policies and priorities of Orthodox Judaism in the public square.

Fellows will work side by side with senior OU leadership, Jewish communal leaders, Congressional and Executive Branch staffers and be mentored by OU/PA professionals.



2008-09 Fellowship applications and stipend details are now available at: www.ou.org/public_affairs

Application Deadline: March 7, 2008



COMMENCEMENT 2008

THURSDAY, MAY 22 • 11AM
THE WAMU THEATER
MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

IN ORDER TO RECEIVE YOUR TICKETS AND CAP AND GOWN WE WOULD APPRECIATE IF YOU WOULD FILE FOR GRADUATION WITH THE REGISTRAR ON YOUR CAMPUS. PLEASE FILE ASAP SO THAT YOU ARE ELIGIBLE TO ATTEND AND MARCH IN YOUR GRADUATION CEREMONY.