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KOL HAMEVASER

The Jewish Thought Magazine of the Yeshiva University Student Body

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*"Bore u-Manhig
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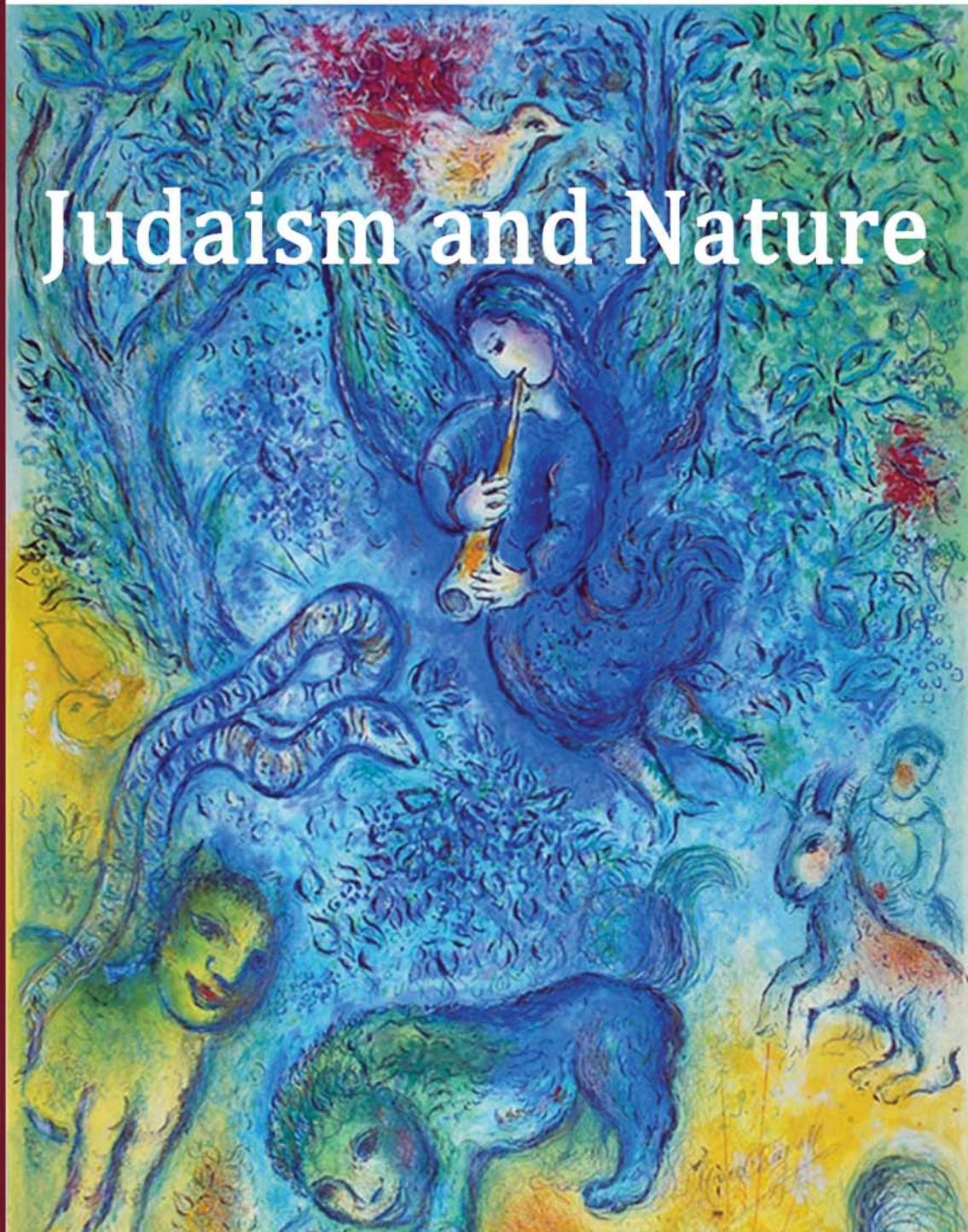
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Judaism and Nature



Kol Hamevaser

The Student Thought Magazine of the Yeshiva
University Student body

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About *Kol Hamevaser*

Kol Hamevaser, the Jewish thought magazine of the Yeshiva University student body, is dedicated to sparking discussion of Jewish issues on the Yeshiva University campus and beyond. The magazine hopes to facilitate the religious and intellectual growth of its readership and serves as a forum for students to express their views on a variety of issues that face the Jewish community. It also provides opportunities for young scholars to grow in their intellectual pursuits and mature into confident Jewish leaders. *Kol Hamevaser* is published on a monthly basis and its primary contributors are undergraduates, although it also includes input from RIETS Roshei Yeshivah, YU Professors, and outside scholars. In addition to its print magazine, it also sponsors special events, speakers, discussion groups, conferences, and shabbatonim. The magazine can be found online at www.kolhamevaser.com.

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This magazine contains words of Torah.

Please treat it with proper respect.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Women's Learning: Public Policy and Personal Commitment

BY: Dean Karen Bacon

In a recent issue of *Kol Hamevaser*,¹ Fran Tanner reflected on the state of women's Jewish education and concluded by challenging the reader to consider whether our current situation is ideal or in need of development. In structuring her analysis, Ms. Tanner equates Torah study with the study of Gemara. In her words, "R. Soloveitchik began paving this path for women [i.e. Torah study], instituting Gemara at the Maimonides School and later establishing the first Gemara *shi'ur* for women in Stern College."ⁱⁱ Against this yardstick of the formal study of Gemara within a *beit midrash* construct, Ms. Tanner suggests that women's education, both in quality and quantity, is sorely lacking. But this focuses on methodology, and I would rather turn our attention to the ultimate goals and objectives of Torah study. In this regard, let us consider some broad questions and trends in education generally and particularly as they relate to women's Jewish education.

Public policy must take into account at least two important stakeholders: the community and the individual. Where the needs and wants of both coincide, establishing public policy and adhering to that policy can be relatively simple. When that coherence does not exist, policy inevitably is driven by the needs of the community, although the individual may yet have the freedom to pursue less traveled roads. In the United States, educational policy has been traditionally aimed at preparing an educated citizenry. More recently, political leaders have been asserting that educational policy should be related to economic goals, ensuring that students have the knowledge base to maintain the economic superpower status of this country. Let us contrast this with the driving forces in Jewish education.

R. Jonathan Sacks, in his book *The Dignity of Difference*, refers to education as the "conversation between the generations."ⁱⁱⁱ For the Jewish people, that "conversation" started at the beginning of our recorded history, with *Sefer Bereshit*, and continues throughout the generations, through the texts and the voices that are our living *masorah* (tradition). Jewish educational policy should have at its very foundation this transmission. At the same time, the individual must assume his/her responsibility to be an active participant in this transmission and not just a passive recipient. But this alone is insufficient.

Dr. Norman Lamm, Chancellor of Yeshiva University, reflected on the outcomes of Jewish education in an article titled "*Takhlit*: Teaching for Lasting Outcomes," which appeared in *Seventy Faces*.^{iv} Quoting from *Berakhot* 17b, Dr. Lamm introduces two fundamental goals of Jewish education: to transform the individual's personality and to cultivate the commitment to the performance of good deeds.^v These two goals must also figure prominently in the devel-

opment of Jewish educational public policy and in the responsibility assumed by each individual.

Thus, having barely touched the surface, we have listed three driving forces for Jewish education: the intellectual transmission of the Jewish conversation (the texts), the affective development of the individual personality, and the cultivation of value-driven behavior.

Stopping at this point, let us return to the issue at hand, framed as two distinct questions: what should be the nature of women's Jewish education as expressed in public policy, and does this absolutely define and restrict the approach that might be preferred by individual women?

In the absence of strong precedents for women's education, I would argue for flexibility rather than rigidity. More specifically, I would suggest a public policy that has clear goals, including, but not limited to, the ones described above, with multiple routes to achieve those goals. All the routes should share some common denominators: the development of analytical and linguistic skills to study text, the cultivation of an understanding of the halakhic process, and the acceptance of the responsibility for being a part of a *masorah*-dedicated community. Beyond these overarching goals, women should feel free to intensify their studies in the directions to which their hearts and minds draw them. For some, this may lead to a commitment to the formal study of Gemara, for others it will lead to studies in *Mahashavah* (Jewish philosophy) or biblical *parshanut* (exegesis), etc. But regardless of the road chosen, for a combination of clear policy and individual flexibility to be successful, the student must be passionate about life-long learning, something so clearly evident in Ms. Tanner's plea for communal and personal self-reflection. Without this passion, public policy will be for naught and individual choice will be a charade. In the words of the sometimes-quotable Woody Allen, "Seventy percent of success in life is showing up." The *beit midrash* is open, and it awaits us all.

Karen Bacon is the Dr. Monique C. Katz Dean of Stern College for Women.

ⁱ Fran Tanner, "Women's Learning: Educational Goals and Practice," *Kol Hamevaser* 4,2 (Sep. 2010): 20-21.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

ⁱⁱⁱ R. Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London; New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 81.

^{iv} Dr. Norman Lamm, "*Takhlit*: Teaching for Lasting Outcomes," in *idem, Seventy Faces: Articles of Faith*, vol. 1 (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2001), pp. 225-240.

^v *Ibid.*, p. 225.

EDITORIAL

The Dialectical Nature of "Nature"

BY: Sarit Bendavid

In *Sefer Bereshit*, humankind is charged with a dual role. On the one hand, we are celebrated as the pinnacle of creation, the surrounding natural world set in place to provide for us. We are told to "fill the earth and subdue it,"ⁱ to rule over the flora and fauna and exploit natural resources in order for humanity to progress in this world. On the other hand, we are told to "watch it and guard it,"ⁱⁱ to protect nature and ensure that it is not abused, for we are merely members of the natural world, on equal footing with the rest of its inhabitants. These two facets of humanity, of being above nature while also existing within it, describe the dialectical human experience in relation to our physical surroundings.

The same question can be asked not only concerning our relationship with the physical world, but also with the natural forces that guide us from within ourselves. Do the *mitsvot* reflect our natural tendencies, or are they something distinct which demands that we disobey our inherent desires? Jewish thinkers seem to have conflicting opinions on the influence that human nature has on Halakhah. For instance, there are differing approaches towards prayer, which is the expression of our relationship with the Divine. While some believe that prayer should not be forced, but should rather flow naturally when we truly feel motivated, others maintain that we must transcend our natural desires and compel ourselves to have *kavannah* (intent) at set times.

The cover image of this edition, a copy of a painting by Marc Chagall titled "The Magic Flute," seems to reflect the complex relationship between Man and Nature. Produced in 1966 as a poster advertisement for the Metropolitan Opera Company's upcoming production of Mozart's "The Magic Flute," the painting can be interpreted as merely depicting characters from the opera; yet, there seems to be another, more universal, layer of meaning that hints to Man and his place in the Garden of Eden.ⁱⁱⁱ The image depicts a garden-like setting; the lions, which seem to be in an amorous relationship, represent Adam and Eve, who are the kings of the animal kingdom, just like lions are considered to be the kings of the jungle. God's presence is symbolized by the white dove or the red triangle at the top of the painting, and the snake is clearly visible between the lions and God, highlighting his role in distancing Man from the Divine. However, the woman floating in midair and playing the flute seems to represent a different facet of mankind than the lions, one that transcends the natural world. The woman appears to be flying up to meet God, while the lions are looking down at the earth below. These two different representations of Man are at the heart of this issue: what is the essence of humanity, and how are we to relate to the natural world around us? Should we look towards the sky and try to fly above our physical limitations, or should we look towards the earth and attempt to utilize it in our divine worship? On the one hand, we ask God, "What is Man that You should be mindful of him?" while we also believe that God made us "but little lower than the angels."^{iv} Our relationship with the natural world, both within ourselves and

with the world surrounding us, is dynamic and should constantly be re-evaluated.

The theme of this edition concerning Judaism and its relationship with nature is incredibly broad, which is reflected in the range of article topics. Jonathan Ziring considers different possibilities of how to understand the essence of man, whether above nature or within it, as well as the relation between Jew and Gentile within this context. Chesky Kopel investigates the true nature of the *yetser ha-ra* (evil inclination), and Danny Shulman examines the religious value of spirituality that falls outside the realm of Halakhah. Eli Putterman provides us with insight on the philosophy of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, specifically in relation to natural morality. Additionally, an interview with R. David Horwitz, *rosh yeshiva* at RIETS, is included, which discusses issues relevant to our theme.

Another path of exploration in this issue concerns our relationship to the physical land and the animals that inhabit it. Toviah Moldwin examines the relationship between man and animals, focusing on meat consumption, while Kaitlyn Respler discusses the value of sensitivity towards animals that Judaism promotes. Tali Adler presents an overview of Judaism's sensitivity towards the natural world, especially focusing on Judaism's land ethic, and Adam Hertzberg compares the theology of the film *Avatar* to Kabbalistic and Hasidic ideas about our connection with nature.

Issues raised by science and rational thought are also tackled by a number of writers. Ariel Caplan explores the question of how we should accord our traditional views of Creation with evolutionary theory, and Jerry Karp specifically focuses on theistic evolution and the different possibilities of how God could have directed this process. Rafi Miller addresses the popular idea in science today that God was not involved in Creation, highlighting a number of problems with this assumption. Reuven Rand analyzes the awareness of the presence of God in our lives today and our conceptions of divine intervention in light of modern sensibilities.

We hope that you enjoy this edition of *Kol Hamevaser* as you explore the "nature" of the natural world around and within us.

Sarit Bendavid is a senior at SCW majoring in History and English Literature, and is an Editor-in-Chief for *Kol Hamevaser*.

ⁱ 1:28.

ⁱⁱ 2:15.

ⁱⁱⁱ The identification of this painting with the biblical story of the Garden of Eden is discussed in Philip B. Malzl, "An Allegory of Eden: Marc Chagall's *Magic Flute* Poster," *BYU Studies*, 43:3 (2004): 219-228. The identification of the characters in the painting that are presented above are adapted from this article, excluding the interpretation of the floating woman playing the flute, which resulted from this author's own reflections.

^{iv} *Tehillim* 8:4-5.

The Evil of All Roots: Why Does the Yetser ha-Ra Exist?

BY: Chesky Kopel

“...The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel: ‘I have created for you a *yetser ha-ra*; there is nothing more evil than it.’”ⁱ

The antagonist is often the most noticeable character in a story. His or her position is made so very conspicuous by his or her struggle with the hopes and dreams of the protagonist. The hero’s mission is charged with additional energy as a result of its having to face opposing forces. In Israel’s mission to fear God, walk in all His ways, love Him, and serve Him with full heart and soul,ⁱⁱ it seems that there may be such an antagonist, the *yetser ha-ra*.

It is extremely difficult to understand the *yetser ha-ra*, best translated as “the evil creature.”ⁱⁱⁱ In order to appreciate what exactly it is, many have studied the original sources of the term and tried to formulate, based on them, a precise definition. This definition needs to relate to many different questions: Is it some sort of internal drive, or a separate being that confronts us? Is it inherently bad, or morally neutral with the potential to cause evil? Are we

“The consequences of the *yetser ha-ra* entail a formidable responsibility for each and every individual; this being is presented to us as a force with which we are obligated to reckon.”

capable of eliminating it, or is it essentially unending and unchanging? Does it bear any relationship to the incident of Adam and Eve’s “Original Sin?”^{iv} Others have taken the additional step of comparing the *yetser ha-ra* to various inclinations, instincts, or other psychological constructs. Probably the most common approach to this creature, however, is a subjective one. We understand the *yetser ha-ra* by determining how we are to defeat or to utilize it in order to become the best people we can be. All of these strategies prove quite challenging, though, because of the diversity of views in Hazal as to the *yetser ha-ra*’s nature, the different conceptions of psychoanalysis and its practical relevance, and the great spectrum of conflicting life philosophies among religious Jews, respectively.

But why does it exist altogether? All the perspectives on the *yetser ha-ra* ostensibly agree that God created it for us, as people or as Jews. Beyond that, the question of “why” is most directly dependent upon the above challenges of its definition and the existential response it is meant to elicit from us. A great deal has been written about these questions, and the presence of the *yetser ha-ra* in the works of Hazal and later Jewish literature is immense. This essay will summarize a small, but significant, portion

of the work that has been done, before returning to the question of why the *yetser ha-ra* exists. The matter of parallels in psychology will be left aside.^v

The earliest references to an entity like the *yetser ha-ra* are in the Torah itself, in two verses in Genesis:

“And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination (*yetser*) of the thoughts of his heart was only evil (*ra*) continually.”^{vi}

“And the Lord smelled the sweet scent; and the Lord said in His heart: ‘I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination (*yetser*) of man’s heart is evil (*ra*) from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.’”^{vii}

The first of these verses concerns God’s decision to destroy all of mankind, because of the hopeless future anticipated by its wicked nature. Immediately following this is the Torah’s account of the Flood and the sparing of those few individuals who would reignite the spark of life on Earth. The second verse, ironically, is part of God’s assurance to Himself that He will never again commit such destruction. A seem-

ing message of this contrast, and of its conclusion in particular, is that the evil nature of man’s *yetser* is no longer reason enough to deny him the opportunity of life. The Torah instructs us that this evil is now a part of the acceptable reality of what is and always will be. Human beings are fashioned with an inherently evil mindset; otherwise, they would not be human beings.^{viii} The term *yetser* here apparently refers to the creature of man’s own heart and not to any other entity that acts externally to it.

In the words of Hazal, the term plays a somewhat different, more dynamic role. The consequences of the *yetser ha-ra* entail a formidable responsibility for each and every individual; this entity is presented to us as a force with which we are obligated to reckon. The Mishnah in *Avot* 2:11 illustrates this quite powerfully: “R. Yehoshua said: ‘The evil eye [envy], the evil impulse (*yetser ha-ra*), and hatred of humankind drive a person out of the world.’”^{ix}

It is not hard to appreciate how this inherent facet of human nature can “drive a person out of the world.” In fact, God initially declared it reason enough to remove all of life from the world. An important message of R. Yehoshua’s statement concerns how we are meant to respond to the *yetser ha-ra*’s presence. Despite

the fact that humankind was allowed to survive with the *yetser ha-ra* still harassing every person, it was (and is) nonetheless expected to recognize the tremendous evil within this entity, and the sort of consequences that it brought about in a world of pre-Flood justice. With statements like this one, Hazal instruct that the *yetser ha-ra* warrants a personal responsibility which transcends mankind’s freedom from the waters of the Flood.

Other statements of Hazal provide insight which helps shed light on why the seeming imperfection of the *yetser ha-ra* persists in man

yetser ha-ra in the service of God. Still, it remains unclear what makes one *yetser* good and one evil if both are meant to be sublimated for the same ultimate good: the love and service of God.

These expressions of Hazal, just a few out of hundreds on the topic of the *yetser ha-ra*, not only demonstrate the dynamic nature of our relationship to the *yetser ha-ra*, based on a novel interpretation of the two verses in Genesis, but also create a great deal of confusion. It is clear that there is no one unified voice in Hazal regarding the nature of the *yetser ha-ra*, whether

“It is clear that there is no one unified voice in Hazal regarding the nature of the *yetser ha-ra*, whether it is positive or negative, internal or external.”

and also relate to the general question of the essay. One example is found in the words of R. Shemuel bar Nahman, quoted in several different midrashic sources:

“R. Shemuel bar Nahman says: ‘Behold, it was very good’^x – this is the *yetser ha-tov*; ‘And behold, it was very good’^{xi} – this is the *yetser ha-ra*. And is the *yetser ha-ra* actually ‘very good?’ Unbelievable! Rather, if not for the *yetser ha-ra*, a man would never build a house or marry a woman, he would never procreate or conduct business.”^{xii}

Statements like this introduce us to the benefits of the *yetser ha-ra*. It seems that besides leading to devious and inappropriate behavior, this entity somehow brings Man to participate in some of life’s most important and productive activities as well. A well-known aggadic story, related in several different sources, teaches that the men of the Great Assembly even sought, through prayer to God, to have the *yetser ha-ra* for idolatry and adultery eliminated. They then discovered that without sexual drive, no species would be able to survive in the world.^{xiii} Another being that we encounter here is the *yetser ha-tov*, or “the good creature,” which would appear to be the opposite of the *yetser ha-ra*. The exact definition and description of the *yetser ha-tov* depend upon those of the more commonly-referenced *yetser ha-ra*, and, therefore, can also refer to one of several different things. The *yetser ha-tov* may prove especially confusing to grasp in a context like this, one that highlights the benefits of the *yetser ha-ra* itself.

The interplay between these different perspectives on the *yetser ha-ra* is clarified somewhat by statements that attribute to it a morally-neutral character. One important example is the following quote from the Mishnah in *Berakhot* 9:5: “‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.’^{xiv} [...] – with the *yetser ha-tov* and the *yetser ha-ra*.”^{xv}

The verse quoted here is an important expression of our requirement to love and serve God, which we recite in the *Keri’at Shema* twice every day. Hazal see within this verse a directive to enlist both the *yetser ha-tov* and the

it is positive or negative, internal or external. Israeli professor and well-known activist Ishay Rosen-Zvi published an excellent study of the conception of the *yetser ha-ra* in different midrashic schools of thought.^{xvi} The primary dispute raised in the study is between the Academy of R. Akiva (*De-Bei R. Akiva*) and the Academy of R. Yishmael (*De-Bei R. Yishmael*).

In statements by the Academy of R. Akiva, there is no mention of an independent *yetser ha-ra*, but there are repeated references to a force simply called the *yetser*, which appears to closely resemble the biblical *yetser*.^{xvii} This force is presented as the natural inclination of a person, expressing his or her internal doubts, concerns, and pleasures. The proposed treatment of this entity is quite mild as well. Rather than encouraging us to struggle against this *yetser*, the statements of the Academy of R. Akiva often demonstrate how the Torah recognizes the *yetser*’s concerns as legitimate and explain why they are sometimes not to be followed. The challenge for individuals, therefore, lies in the capability to even follow the directives of the Torah when they contradict our basic, often reasonable, human drives. As an example of such a statement, Rosen-Zvi provides the following quotation from *Sifra*:

“‘But in the fifth year you may eat of its fruit, that it may yield unto you more richly its increase.’^{xviii} R. Akiva says: ‘The Torah is speaking in opposition to the *yetser* (*dibberah Torah keneged ha-yetser*). In order that a person should not say, ‘Behold, for four years I distress myself with it to no end,’ therefore, [the Torah] says, ‘that it may yield unto you more richly its increase.’”^{xix,xx}

The verse quoted here appears in the context of restrictive agricultural laws, commanded in the previous two verses, which limit the benefit that one is entitled to gain from his or her fruit tree for the first four years of its fruit-bearing life. The Midrash addresses the disenchanting *yetser* of the Jew, which complains about these seemingly wasted four years of work, and explains that the Torah itself demonstrates how God will make up the loss. Starting from the

fifth year, the tree is guaranteed to produce “more richly.” Rather than rejecting the claims of the *yetser* as incorrect or devious, the Torah encourages us to recognize the real blessing that comes from following its laws and not the *yetser*.^{xxi}

The Academy of R. Yishmael, however, concerns itself with a very different kind of entity. Its *yetser ha-ra* appears to be some kind of independent creature, “demonic and antinomic.”^{xxii} It dwells within the human heart, possessing it with an inherently evil impulse that is directed towards the violation of the Torah and its statutes. Every person is bid to involve himself or herself in a constant struggle with this *yetser ha-ra*, to overcome it and dedicate oneself to the service of God. The most important advice for overcoming it is to involve oneself with the study of Torah.

Within this camp of R. Yishmael, two more important divisions exist. First, some statements suggest that the *yetser ha-ra* can ultimately be defeated, while others insist that it is an essential, everlasting struggle that every individual must endure. Secondly, some statements seem to describe an independent being acting within a human (often expounded from biblical references to the human heart, e.g., “be-

] Involve yourselves in words of Torah and it will not rule over you [...] If you want, you can rule over it, as it is stated: ‘but you may rule over [sin].’^{xxvii,xxviii}

The *Sifrei* here seems to present the *yetser ha-ra* as an independent entity, supremely evil in contrast to all other evils, and not just the overarching term that encompasses them all. It also indicates that a total victory over the challenges of the *yetser ha-ra* is possible and within our reach, if we are to just involve ourselves in words of Torah.^{xxix}

Rosen-Zvi also demonstrates that most expressions in the Mishnah follow the same R. Akiva- R. Yishmael divide in meaning, between *yetser* and *yetser ha-ra*, while the Tosefta seems to largely follow the thought of the Academy of R. Yishmael. One important exception is the Mishnah in *Berakhot* 9:5, referenced above, which presents a dialectical approach, highlighting the struggle between a person’s *yetser ha-ra* and his *yetser ha-tov*.^{xxx} Last, the article raises speculations regarding the earlier bases of the different schools of thought (R. Akiva in the apocryphal book of *Ben Sira*, and R. Yishmael in the literature of Qumran).^{xxxi}

The diversity of the voices of Hazal regard-

the more intuitive transgressions, but prefers that one struggle with his impulses with regards to the less intuitive ones.^{xxxvii}

Why does the *yetser ha-ra* exist? All of the above formulations of the *yetser ha-ra*’s essence assume that God created it for man, and that everything God does is righteous and is meant to benefit His creations. Within that framework, the various views presented all see the *yetser ha-ra* as one of three things: a metaphorical expression of the struggle to follow God’s will and do good (intended to improve Man’s appreciation of the nature of the struggle), a challenge that enhances the spiritual value of Man’s efforts to do good, or a motivational mechanism to encourage Man to overcome the antagonist and do good. In other words, the *yetser ha-ra* is either the struggle itself, a force that makes the struggle more valuable, or a means of persuasion for man to fight his hardest in the struggle. Each one of these models represents an aid for mankind to be the best it can be. No matter which position is most accurate, the underlying message is the same. Our greatest enemy is revealed to be one of our greatest friends.

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“Every person determines on his or her own how to best understand the *yetser ha-ra* and how to relate and respond to it.”

kol levavekha” – with all your heart^{xxxiii}), while others just see the *yetser ha-ra* as a metaphorical model to refer to all forces that drive us away from proper service of God (often expounded from expressions of caution, e.g., “*hishameru lakhem*” – take heed to yourselves^{xxxiv}).

One example Rosen-Zvi provides of a statement by R. Yishmael is this quotation from *Sifrei*:

“Another matter, ‘And you shall eat and be satisfied. Take heed to yourselves [...]’^{xxxv} – [God] said to them: ‘Take care, lest the *yetser ha-ra* lead you astray, and you will separate yourselves from words of Torah, since once one separates himself from words of Torah, he is bound to go cling to idolatry.’^{xxxvi}

This statement places clear emphasis upon the importance of struggling against the evil influence that is the *yetser ha-ra* and identifies involvement in learning Torah as the means to properly wage that battle. It falls into the category of statements characterized by expressions of caution, rather than those that place strong emphasis on the independent entity of the *yetser ha-ra*. Idolatry, the ultimate rebellion against God’s sovereignty, is a poignant and shocking example of the consequences of abandoning the commitment to struggle through learning Torah.

Another example Rosen-Zvi provides is the following polemic, also from the *Sifrei*:

“The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel: ‘I have created for you a *yetser ha-ra*; there is nothing more evil than it.’ [...]

ing the nature of the *yetser ha-ra* leaves a considerable task to future generations. Every person determines on his or her own how to best understand the *yetser ha-ra* and how to relate and respond to it. On the one hand, it is difficult to rally oneself to battle against the very force that brings man to “build a house or marry a woman [...] procreate or conduct business.” On the other hand, how can one ever reconcile himself with a being that will “drive [him] out of the world?”^{xxxvii}

The *yetser ha-ra* therefore seems at once evil and morally neutral, or even positively valuable. Different schools of thought have developed in response to this problem. Some view the presence of a struggle with improper inclinations to be the healthy mode of relation to the *yetser ha-ra*.^{xxxviii} and some preach the total elimination of any and all drives that are not consistent with our proper service of God.^{xxxix} The former opinion more likely appreciates the conception of the *yetser ha-ra* as a neutral life force, which can be used for good or evil. Alternatively, it may often be an expression of a religious worldview that emphasizes the centrality of the free will’s struggle against adversity in the service of God.^{xl} The latter opinion sees the *yetser ha-ra* as the opposition to the service of God, and therefore as the constant enemy of the Jew. Some expound further that elimination of the *yetser ha-ra* is necessary to purge the remnants of Adam’s “Original Sin” from within a person.^{xli}

Rambam presents a more nuanced third approach in the *Shemonah Perakim*, which values the total control of the impulses with regard to

the text.

* Genesis 1:31.

xi Ibid.

xii *Beresheet Rabbah* 9 (my translation). Also see similar formulations in *Kohelet Rabbah* 3 and *Yalkut Shim’oni* 16.

xiii Variations of the story appear in *Yalkut Shim’oni* to Nehemiah 1071 and in *Yoma* 69b and *Sanhedrin* 64a. An interesting image in this tradition is the depiction of the *yetser ha-ra* for idolatry in the likeness of a “lion of fire.”

xiv Deuteronomy 6:5.

xv Mishnah, *Berakhot* 9:5 (my translation). See also, for instance, *Sifrei*, *Devarim* and *Midrash Tanna’im* to the verse in Deuteronomy. The exegesis is based upon a seemingly extraneous letter in the Hebrew word meaning “your heart,” leading to the possibility of a dual heart.

xvi Ishay Rosen-Zvi, “*Dibberah Torah Keneged ha-Yetser: De-Bei R. Yishma’el u-Mekoro shel Yetser ha-Ra*,” *Tarbits* 76 (5767): 41-79.

xvii I am referring to the concept of the *yetser* developed in the two verses in Genesis which I quoted above; see nn. 6-7.

xviii Leviticus 19:25.

xix Ibid.

xx *Sifra*, *Parashat Kedoshim* 3:9 (my translation).

xxi Rosen-Zvi, pp. 42-45.

xxii Ibid., p. 57 (my translation).

xxiii Deuteronomy 6:5.

xxiv Ibid. 11:16.

xxv Ibid. 11:15-16.

xxvi *Sifrei* to Deuteronomy 43 (my translation).

xxvii Genesis 4:7.

xxviii *Sifrei* to Deuteronomy 45.

xxix Rosen-Zvi, pp. 48-60.

xxx Ibid., pp. 60-68.

xxxi Ibid., pp. 68-79.

xxxii *Avot* 2:11; see n. 9 above.

xxxiii See, for instance, Rambam’s understanding of *Divrei ha-Hakhamim*, apparently referring to the normative view of Hazal, in *Shemonah Perakim* 6.

xxxiv See, for instance, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, *Sha’ar 9 – Sha’ar ha-Perishut* 5.

xxxv See, for instance, R. Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek* (New York: Ktav and Yeshiva University Press, 2006), p. 65.

xxxvi This view presumes that the *yetser ha-ra* is part of a person and not a separate entity within him. See, for instance, Yakir Englander, “*Tefisat ha-Adam ve-Taftidah shel ha-Halakhah be-Haguto shel he-Hazon Ish*,” *Reshit* 2 (2010): 185, on the topic of the *yetser ha-ra* in the thought of the Hazon Ish (Rabbi Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz). See also Jeremy Cohen, “Original Sin as the Evil Inclination – A Polemicist’s Appreciation of Human Nature,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 73,3-4 (July-October 1980): 495-520.

xxxvii Rambam, *Shemonah Perakim*, *ibid*. My thanks to Ben Jubas for providing me with many sources on the topic of approaches to the proper relationship with the *yetser ha-ra*, which he presented in a shi’ur at the Drisha Institute on September 4, 2010.

i *Sifrei*, Deuteronomy 45 (my translation).

ii Cf. Deuteronomy 10:12.

iii See, for instance, Isaiah 29:16.

iv Genesis 3. The term “Original Sin” is borrowed from common Christian theology, based on a teaching of Paul the Apostle throughout the Gospels, which provides a unique interpretation of Psalms 51:5. The conception that this sin had an impact upon human nature exists in Jewish thought as well, as will be indicated below.

v An important study is Moshe Halevi Spero, “Thanatos, Id and the Evil Impulse,” *Tradition* 15,1-2 (1975): 97-111.

vi Genesis 6:5. All Torah quotations are translated by Chief Rabbi Emeritus Dr. J. H. Hertz for *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: The Soncino Press, 1988), with my modifications to better fit colloquial speech.

vii Ibid. 8:21.

viii Evan Schwarzbbaum, a fellow student at Yeshiva University, brought to my attention an important distinction between the terminology of the verses, which helps to illustrate this contrast. 6:5 refers to the *yetser* of “the thoughts of [man’s] heart,” indicating that the heart itself can be perfected and need not tolerate any evil. 8:21, however, concludes that the evil permeates “man’s heart” itself and is an essential part of its very being. The human heart cannot be perfected to the point of this evil’s total removal.

ix *Avot* 2:11 (translated by Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks for *The Koren Sacks Siddur* [Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2006], p. 651). Some editions of the tractate, including the one in this *siddur*, count this Mishnah as 2:16, based upon a different tradition of breaking up

God, the Multiverse, Stephen Hawking, and You

BY: Rafi Miller

This past September, physics genius and celebrity Stephen Hawking released a new book, *The Grand Design* (coauthored with Leonard Mlodinow and published by Bantam Books). A short passage in the book quickly caught the media’s attention. “Stephen Hawking says God did not create the universe,” announced the headlines.ⁱ The book immediately hit the

the scientific drama occurring within it, in the exact mathematical relationships between natural phenomena and especially in the permanent laws of physics – the primeval will of the Master of the Universe is reflected. A man goes outdoors on a fair summer’s day and sees the whole world blossoming – that man comes ‘to know’ that there exists a Primary Being Who is the originator of all that is.”ⁱⁱⁱ

“We have learned after seeing our favorite design arguments squashed by Newton, Darwin, etc. that we should not depend on a “God of the gaps” for monotheism. Instead of looking for God in events that the laws of nature have yet to explain, today we find His wisdom in the laws themselves.”

tops of best-seller lists.

Hawking’s book is primarily about M-Theory, a generalization of string theory under development since the 1990s and currently the best candidate for a “theory of everything” in physics. Hawking adds some comments about theories in which universes can appear from nothing: “Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper [i.e. fuse] and set the universe going.”^{vi} Today, says Hawking, science can interpret the moment of Creation.

Believers in God should not be worried or even surprised if a scientific description of Creation is somehow proven to be true. We have learned after seeing our favorite design arguments squashed by Newton, Darwin, etc. that we should not depend on a “God of the Gaps” for monotheism. Instead of looking for God in events that the laws of nature have yet to explain, today we find His wisdom in the laws themselves. Thus, for example, explains R. Joseph B. Solovitchik:

“In nature as a whole – and especially in its systematic regularity and in the technical character of its processes, in

The power and consistency of natural law reveals God’s wisdom. I will not defend Hawking’s dismissive attitude, but his book dismisses a God of the Gaps, not God Himself.

Hawking’s book also contains a more surprising claim. “Philosophy is dead,” he pronounces on the first page.^{iv} Science has done away with it. The big questions of existence shall no longer be pondered in armchairs but rather answered in laboratories and observatories. That is a bold claim – definitely great for selling books.

But has modern science really answered the questions of existence? Can it make God’s role as Creator irrelevant? A few issues deserve consideration.

Nothing and Something

How can a universe appear spontaneously from nothing?

The leading theory today is that our universe began as a random fluctuation of energy in a vacuum, where conditions were right to set off a Big Bang. Indeed, vacuums are proven to have energy fluctuations, and recent observations by NASA support other aspects of the theory. However, a fluctuation in a vacuum is not creation from nothing; a

vacuum, with dimensions and energy, is far from nothing. God’s *creatio ex nihilo* is (traditionally) creation from absolute Nothing, a Nothing that has no properties whatsoever: it is not dark, it is not empty, it is not existent; it is pure Nothing. Nothing cannot be governed by natural laws, because Nothing plus laws is Something. There is an infinite gap between Nothing and Something. Absolute Nothing is not blue touch paper.

The continued existence of Something is not so straightforward either. We are so used to existence that we take it for granted. Why should Something exist? Physical laws describe Something, but they are just equations; they do not create Something. Hawking expressed it best in his first best-seller, *A Brief History of Time*: “What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?”^v

So we still ask: why is there Something rather than Nothing?

Fine-Tuned Laws

Hawking concedes that the laws of nature appear fine-tuned to permit the existence of life:

“The laws of nature form a system that is extremely fine-tuned, and very little in physical law can be altered without

are devoid of life. A universe will eventually appear where life-permitting laws are fulfilled by chance; life forms like us must find themselves in such a universe.

This passage from Hawking appears to be a victory for recognition of the fine-tuning problem. Many positivist thinkers have totally dismissed the problem using various excuses; here is a high-profile positivist acknowledging the need for explanation. All that remains for the theist is to argue that the multiverse is a less satisfying explanation than God is.

Is it?

First, the magnitude of fine-tuning is tremendous. In recent decades, physicists have noted dozens of ways that numbers appearing in the equations of physics seem fine-tuned for life to exist, occasionally with unfathomable precision – down to a few parts in numbers like 10^{40} , 10^{60} , even 10^{100} .^{viii}

Take the force of gravity, for example. If its strength, relative to the nuclear weak force (a force between the components of a proton), were different by as little as a few parts in 10^{100} , then our universe’s early expansion might have been disastrous.^{ix} If its strength, relative to the electromagnetic force (the force that governs our interactions with everyday objects), were different by a

“But has modern science really answered the questions of existence? Can it make God’s role as Creator irrelevant?”

destroying the possibility of life as we know it. Were it not for a series of startling coincidences in the precise details of physical law, it seems, humans and similar life-forms would never have come into being.”^{vi}

Hawking says a “multiverse” can explain this. There are many universes beyond our own, the story goes; Hawking says that M-Theory allows for “perhaps as many” as 10^{500} distinct universes.^{vii} (10^{500} is notation for the number written as a one followed by 500 zeros. For comparison, there are about 10^{80} atoms in the visible universe, or one followed by 80 zeros; note that every time you write six more zeros after a number you multiply it by a million.) Most of these universes obey laws much different from ours and thus

few parts in 10^{40} , the energy of starlight would be either too weak or too strong for life to survive.^x

Fine-tuning is required all over physics: e.g., in the strengths of forces, the masses of particles, the geometry of space, and so on. It is needed for nearly every stage in the universe’s progress toward life: e.g., the avoidance of immediate collapse after the Big Bang, the appearance of matter, the feasibility of atoms, the stability of stars, the production of any elements beyond beryllium (like carbon and oxygen), and so on. The overall picture is overwhelming.

Then, philosopher John Leslie drops a bomb: there are so many reasons the values of constants are precariously linked to each other in our universe by fine-tuning require-

ments, it is a miracle that no two requirements of life conflict!^{xi} You cannot fine-tune a constant to meet one requirement and then again to meet others; a constant must satisfy all requirements simultaneously. How amazing that every one of the narrow requirements of life overlaps with all the others!

Were a multiverse to explain Leslie's point, it would need vast regions ruled by laws radically different in their *fundamental structure* from those that rule our own, so that ours would be the rare region where fine-tuning of constants even has a chance.

Truth be told, Hawking's M-Theory offers the first plausible multiverse I have ever seen considered that does vary the structure of physics between universes. But I am not convinced that the variation is enough to explain the miracle. Further, it remains to be seen whether M-Theory is itself fine-tuned. For this issue, then, I recommend patience: first, wait for the full picture of M-Theory to emerge and gain empirical support, then we can worry about its implications for fine-tuning.

The question stands in the meantime: why does the possibility of life appear to be almost inherent to the observed laws of nature?

Elegant Laws

There is another sort of fine-tuning that does not get much attention because it is more subjective. The laws of nature appear to be fine-tuned for *elegance*. A law may be called "elegant" when it is expressed by math that is both simple and deep.

Consider gravity again. Gravitational orbits obey the laws of Kepler, which comprise three simple equations. Those laws can be derived from any of three distinct mathematical models: namely, a central force, a potential energy field, or the principle of least action. Each model is itself a short line of mathematics. These interpretations of gravity are all *simple*, but their interconnectivity is *deep*; we then say that the law of gravity is "elegant."

The entire edifice of physics is a complex structure, with numerous layers of principles

and derivations that interact in subtle and surprising ways – elegant ways. Legendary physicist Richard Feynman expressed won-

der that you "cannot modify the laws much" without destroying their elegance.^{xii}

Why does nature appear to value elegance?

“In any event, modern science clearly leaves important metaphysical questions unresolved. Any qualified philosopher since Immanuel Kant could have predicted that outcome.”

Laws at All

Fine-tuning is a trivial problem compared to a deeper question: why does nature follow mathematical patterns, as opposed to total chaos? As Hawking, quoting Albert Einstein, writes, "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible."^{xiii}

Why should nature obey laws at all?

God and the Multiverse

The existence of a God Who cares about life immediately resolves all the questions I have raised so far. A multiverse could only explain some of the fine-tuning questions.

Also, note that God and a multiverse are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that God created a mostly uninhabitable multiverse with the laws to produce a habitable universe, just as within our mostly uninhabitable universe God used natural law to eventually produce a habitable planet.

In any event, modern science clearly leaves important metaphysical questions unresolved. Any qualified philosopher since Immanuel Kant could have predicted that outcome.

...and You

This whole discussion should be irrelevant to a Jew's commitment to serving God. There is simply no way to unequivocally

prove the personal God through nature – and we do not demand proofs. In the words of R. Eliezer Berkovits: "No doubt, the familiar

proofs for God's existence may suggest a Supreme Being as a likely metaphysical hypothesis. But can a man pray to a hypothesis, let alone trust and have faith in it? The God of religion is clearly not a hypothesis."^{xiv}

We do not need to investigate God's presence; we experience it.

Why, then, should we care about fine-tuning and spontaneously-forming universes? First, one must "know what to respond," in the words of R. Eliezer.^{xv} We should know that our faith stands strong even as science illuminates the foundations of nature.

But more importantly, God created an incredible world for us to appreciate and thereby draw closer to Him. Quoth Rambam: "And what is the path to loving Him and fearing Him? When man contemplates His great and wondrous works and creations and sees in them His immeasurable, infinite wisdom, he immediately loves, praises, glorifies, and yearns with a great desire to know His great Name, as David said, 'My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God.'^{xvi} And when he considers these things, he immediately trembles and fears and knows that he is a small, lowly, obscure creature, standing with minimal, trivial knowledge before the All-Knowing, as David said, 'When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers [...] What is man that You should recall him?'"^{xvii,xviii}

We can appreciate Rambam's words now more than ever. We live in an exciting time, when new discoveries in physics and astronomy are being made faster than we can keep up with them. The grand design is unfolding – offering a glimpse of the grandeur of the Designer.

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at: <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/stephen-hawking-god-create-universe-question-day/story?id=11542128>.

^{xi}Stephen Hawking & Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), p. 180.

^{xii}Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *On Repentance: In the Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph D. Soloveitchik*, adapted from the Yiddish by Pinhas H. Peli (Jerusalem: Orot Publishing House, 1980), p. 147.

^{xiii}Hawking & Mlodinow, p. 5.

^{xiv}Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 192.

^{xv}Hawking & Mlodinow, p. 161.

^{xvi}*Ibid.*, p. 118.

^{xvii}A great, but partly dated, list of sourced examples is provided by John Leslie, *Universes* (London: Routledge, 1989), chapter 2. I highly recommend the book to readers interested in having their minds blown.

^{xviii}Leslie, p. 23.

^{xix}*Ibid.*, p. 37.

^{xx}*Ibid.*, p. 64.

^{xxi}Richard Feynman, *The Character of Physical Law* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1967), p. 54.

^{xxii}Hawking & Mlodinow, p. 87.

^{xxiii}Eliezer Berkovits, *God, Man, and History: A Jewish Interpretation* (New York: Jonathan David, 1959), p. 12.

^{xxiv}Avot 2:14.

^{xxv}Tehillim 42:3.

^{xxvi}*Ibid.* 8:4-5.

^{xxvii}Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:2 (translation mine).

“We should know that our faith stands strong even as science illuminates the foundations of nature.”

and derivations that interact in subtle and surprising ways – elegant ways. Legendary physicist Richard Feynman expressed won-

der the personal God through nature – and we do not demand proofs. In the words of R. Eliezer Berkovits: "No doubt, the familiar

ⁱE.g., "Stephen Hawking Says God Did Not Create the Universe: What Do You Think?" ABC News (September 2, 2010), available

A Biblical Approach to the Relationship Between Man and the Animal Kingdom

BY: Toviah Moldwin

The topic of the relationship between man and the animals in Jewish tradition is not one which has gone unnoticed by the scholars of our religion. Numerous articles and books have been devoted to explaining the theological and legal aspects of how people should properly relate to animals. This article is an attempt to look at the same issue from a slightly different perspective: that of the Hummash and its traditional commentaries. In particular, this article will focus on the early chapters of the book of Genesis, as these chapters lay the groundwork for our understanding of the relative places of man and animal in God's world.

Immediately subsequent to the creation of Adam, God instructs Adam as to what food he may consume: "And God said, behold, I have given to you every grass which produces seed over the face of all the Earth, and every tree which contains a fruit that produces seed, it shall be to you as food."³ The Talmud notes that this verse conspicuously omits any mention of animals, thereby indicating that God did not permit Adam to eat meat.⁴ The Talmud also notes that, although in the previous verse God had blessed Adam that he would "rule over the fish of the sea, birds of the sky, and every living creature that teems on the Earth," this was only meant to permit Adam to utilize animals to perform labor for him, not to consume their flesh.

The Talmud goes on to say that this prohibition was repealed in the time of Noah. After Noah exits the ark, God tells him, "Any teeming creature which lives, to you it shall be for food, like the grass of the field I have given to you everything."⁵ With this statement, God permitted Noah (and, by extension, all mankind) to eat the previously prohibited meat of animals. The Talmud's reading of these verses would appear to be the plain sense of the biblical narrative, and this reading was also adopted by a number of prominent medieval Jewish biblical commentators, including Rashi, Nahmanides, and Abraham ibn Ezra.⁶

It is evident from these passages that, despite the fact that God originally intended there to be a hierarchy of species wherein man was to be superior to the animals, it was only subsequent to the Flood in the times of Noah that man was permitted to eat meat. This presentation of the relationship between man and the animal kingdom spurs two questions: 1)

why did the original conception of man's relationship with animals not include a permission to consume meat, and 2) what changed after Noah survived the Flood? The resolutions to these two questions will not merely help us better understand the biblical narrative; they can also be significant in terms of identifying the biblical view of the relationship between man and the animal kingdom.

A simple yet compelling answer to the first question can be found in Nahmanides' com-

"It would emerge from Nahmanides' interpretation of this biblical narrative that, although prior to the story of Noah, animals were considered an integral component of God's initial conception of the world, subsequent to the Flood, the only function of the animal kingdom was to benefit man."

mentary to Genesis 1:29. Nahmanides writes that the reason why man was not originally permitted to eat animal meat is because "those that possess a mobile soul [i.e. creatures who have the ability to move about: animals] have somewhat of a superior quality in their souls, similar to a soul which possesses intellect, and they have the ability to choose that which is good for them and [display preference for] their food, and they flee from pain and death." In other words, Nahmanides feels that, since animals display a decision-making capacity similar to that of humans, it is inappropriate for man to slaughter another soul-bearing creature for his own consumption.⁷

We are thus led to the second question: if animals possess a soul similar to that of man, why was man permitted to consume animal meat after the Deluge? To this question, Nahmanides responds (basing himself on the midrash in *Genesis Rabbah* 28) that, in the years prior to the Deluge, both the animal kingdom and humankind behaved in immoral and perverse ways. As such, God had actually intended to completely wipe out all animal species, but as a reward to Noah for his righteous behavior, God kept members of each species of animal alive purely for the gastronomical enjoyment of Noah and his descen-

dants.

It would emerge from Nahmanides' interpretation of this biblical narrative that, although prior to the story of Noah, animals were considered an integral component of God's initial conception of the world, subsequent to the Flood, the only function of the animal kingdom was to benefit man. Thus, though animals continued to possess consciousness and intelligence after the Flood, God still permitted man to consume their

because of his role in saving the animals from the Deluge.

According to Kimhi, it emerges that the postdiluvian existence of the animal kingdom is not merely meant for the sake of human consumption; rather, the animal kingdom is considered to be an integral component of the eternal divine conception of the universe, and it is mankind's obligation – as it was Noah's – to ensure the continued survival of the animal kingdom. Furthermore, even according to the approach of Nahmanides, though the animal kingdom was preserved purely for the benefit of mankind, the fact remains that animals do possess consciousness and a certain amount of intelligence, and there is thus some value in respecting this aspect of the animal kingdom and in feeling some degree of compassion and respect for animals as sentient beings.

R. David Zvi Hoffman, in his commentary to *Parashat Re'eh*, builds on this theme from the early chapters of Genesis and notes that the sentiment of having compassion for animals manifests itself throughout the Torah in a number of different places.⁸ Firstly, Hoffman notes that immediately subsequent to permitting man to eat meat, God enjoins Noah, "But meat with its soul, you shall not eat its blood,"⁹ which is understood by the rabbinic tradition to forbid all mankind from eating part of an animal while it is still alive.

According to Hoffman, this prohibition was enhanced for the Israelites during their travels in the desert, when God forbade the slaughtering of animals anywhere outside the grounds of the holy Tabernacle.¹⁰ This prohibition was repealed when the Israelites entered the land of Israel, but the Torah still required the Israelites to show their compassion for animals by not consuming their blood, a prohibition mentioned a number of times throughout the Torah.¹¹ This prohibition was necessary, according to Hoffman, because "consuming the animal's blood, which contains the life-force, brings a person to cruelty."¹²

Hoffman also points out that a unique expression is used in the Torah in conjunction with the prohibition against consuming blood. The Torah rarely describes a specific reward for the observance of any individual commandment, but with reference to the commandments of honoring one's parents,¹³ sending away the mother bird when taking its children,¹⁴ and not eating blood,¹⁵ the Torah uses the phrase, "in order that it should be

good for you” or, “in order that your days should be lengthened.” Hoffman points out that the common characteristic among all of these commandments is that they each possess a “humanistic” quality. In other words, these commandments serve to engender a sense of compassion within a person.^{xv}

child on the same day because animals possess emotions, and it would therefore be wrong to cause the mother grief by slaughtering the child in front of it (or vice versa).^{vi} Kimhi’s explanation is somewhat odd; generally one would assume that God does not withhold a particular desideratum from

“The Torah clearly gives mankind permission to consume animal meat, but this should not mitigate the fact that Jewish tradition also encourages a sense of compassion for animals and of responsibility for the continued existence of the diverse array of animal species that exist in our world.”

Hoffman’s approach to this recurring biblical theme appears to differ slightly from that of Kimhi and Nahmanides. According to Hoffman, the Torah obligates us to show concern for animals not necessarily because the animals “deserve” our respect and compassion, but rather in order to refine us, so that we not become cruel and inhumane people who are used to slaughtering and killing.

These three ideas – Nahmanides’ notion of animal sentience, Kimhi’s assertion that God rewarded Noah for his role in the preservation of the animal kingdom, and Hoffman’s emphasis on the importance of compassion for all life in order to refine the human character – should serve as important models for Torah-observant Jews when dealing with questions of animal rights, vegetarianism, and environmental issues. The Torah clearly gives mankind permission to consume animal meat, but this should not mitigate the fact that Jewish tradition also encourages a sense of compassion for animals and of responsibility for the continued existence of the diverse array of animal species that exist in our world.

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mankind in order to give it as a reward for a future good deed.

^{vii} David Zvi Hoffman, *Sefer Devarim al yedei David Zvi Hoffmann*, trans. Zvi Har-Shefer (Tel-Aviv: Hotsa’at Netsah, 1959-1961), p. 185.

^{viii} Genesis 9:4.

^{ix} Leviticus 17:4.

^x E.g. Leviticus 7:26 and 17:10-14, Deuteronomy 12:23 and 12:27.

^{xi} David Zvi Hoffman, *Sefer Devarim al yedei David Zvi Hoffmann*, trans. Zvi Har-Shefer (Tel-Aviv: Hotsa’at Netsah, 1959-1961), p. 185.

^{xii} Exodus 20:11.

^{xiii} Deuteronomy 22:7.

^{xiv} Ibid. 12:25.

^{xv} It should be noted that Nahmanides in his commentary to Deuteronomy 22:7 takes a similar, if not identical, approach to that of R. Hoffman. I have focused here on the commentary of R. Hoffman because he articulates how this idea is a running theme throughout the Bible.

An Interview with Rabbi David Horwitz

BY: Shlomo Zuckier



Does the Torah have something to say about environmentalism? As Jews, what is our responsibility to the natural environment around us?

Well, there certainly is an *issur* (prohibition) to wantonly destroy property, based on the *pasuk* of *ki ha-adam ets ha-sadeh* (“for is man a tree of the field?”);ⁱ but we also definitely accept the distinction made by several medieval Jewish thinkers between *domem* (unmoving), *tsomeach* (living), *chai* (creature) and *medabber* (speaking). We reject PETA extremists, as we certainly reject any approach which negates the distinction between the animal world and the human world. The plant and animal world exists to help our *avodas Hashem* (service of God), while human life is on a higher level.

Can studying the natural sciences, such as Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, help us as ovedei Hashem (servants of God)? Can it enhance our Torah learning?

That question is a particular example of the general question Rambam discusses, which is how does one reach *ahavas* and *yir’as Hashem* (love and fear of God), each of which he counts as mitzvot. There is a famous divergence of emphasis in Rambam. In *Hilchos Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:1, he writes:

“And what is the path to loving Him and fearing Him? When man contemplates His great and wondrous works and creations and sees in them His immeasurable, infinite wisdom, he immediately

“The plant and animal world exists to help our *avodas Hashem* (service of God), while human life is on a higher level.”

loves, praises, glorifies, and yearns with a great desire to know His great Name, as David said, ‘My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.’ⁱⁱ And when he considers these things he immediately trembles and fears and knows that he is a small, lowly, obscure creature, standing with minimal, trivial knowledge before the All-Knowing, as David said, ‘When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers. [...] What is man that You should recall him?’^{iii,iv}

To the extent that studying any science leads us to marvel at the *Ribbono shel Olam* (Master of the World) Who created this glorious universe, then it is a good thing. Having said that, Rambam writes, in this connection, in his *Sefer ha-Mitsvos*, mitsvah 3, some points that do not appear in the *Mishneh Torah*:

“The third mitzvah is that He

commanded us to love Him Who is exalted. [This demands that] we should investigate and study His commands (mitsvos) and actions until we apprehend Him and enjoy, in apprehending Him, the pinnacle of all enjoyment – and this is the necessary love.”

In other words, one also reaches *ahavas Hashem* and *yir’as Hashem* through *talmud Torah*, studying God’s mitzvot. Twenty-four years ago, before R. Ahron Soloveichik, *zts”l*, returned as a Rosh Yeshiva to RIETS, he gave a Torah u-Madda lecture, in which he discussed Rambam’s words in each of these two places.

To reiterate, the study of science can be a glorious endeavor, and to study the remarkable diversity of the flora and fauna of the world is fantastic, but let us not forget Rambam’s formulation in *Sefer ha-Mitsvos* – that one comes to knowledge of God through learning Torah, which is our primary focus and which is what we do in this yeshivah, as well as any other.

What is the religious value of appreciating the aesthetic beauty of nature?

To a large degree, this comes out of understanding the word “*nifla’im*” (wondrous) in the first quotation from Rambam above. If one studies the three astronomical laws of Johannes Kepler, for example, the law that the squares of the periods of revolution of the planets are to each other as the cubes of their mean distances from the sun, one is amazed at the harmony of the universe that God created. One

ⁱ Genesis 1:29.

ⁱⁱ *Sanhedrin* 59b, as cited by Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav.

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 9:3.

^{iv} In their respective commentaries to Genesis 1:29 and 9:3.

^v Maimonides makes a similar argument in *Guide for the Perplexed* III:48, in which he argues that the Torah enjoined the Israelites from slaughtering a mother animal and its

who studies astronomy and astrophysics sees how everything fits together mathematically, and that can also lead to *ahavas Hashem*. Rambam also says that there is a therapeutic value in recognizing beauty, which helps to maintain a person's emotional equilibrium, so that if one is depressed, he can look at *tsuros na'os* (beautiful forms), which might include paintings and the like, to revive his spirits.

In the area of Biology, the science of genet-

“Certainly, as frum Jews today, our command to observe the mitzvot has nothing to do with whether we feel they are rational or not or coincide with natural morality or not.”

ics, for example, is very fascinating. I remember learning about Gregor Mendel and his experiments with pea plants and how he figured out dominant and recessive traits. The field figured out how genetics works and how phenomena which otherwise would be incomprehensible can fit into a rational pattern. Man is a pattern-seeking animal, and the more we see and understand patterns, the more we experience awe in the grandeur of God, Who created it all. There is also a natural human response towards magnificence, which we feel when we go to the zoo and see all the creations and large beasts. Seeing large beings fills one with a sense of amazement.

What do you think is Judaism's position on the existence of natural morality? If it does recognize such an idea, to what extent does Judaism allow it to affect halakhic decisions?

This is a question which people far greater than I have debated for a long time. There is the old question of what R. Sa'adya Ga'on means when he divides mitzvot into *shim'iyot* (taught mitzvot) and *sichliyot* (logical mitzvot),^v and, as is well known, Prof. Marvin Fox argued that even R. Sa'adya Ga'on did not have an objective standard of morality; rather, *sichliyot* means “reasonable mitzvot.”^{vi} Of course, Dr. Lamm disputed Prof. Fox very strongly, claiming that they represented moral mitzvot, and this comprises one relevant major debate.

In his later works, Rambam rejects R. Sa'adya Ga'on's distinction. He says that (almost) every *chok* (inexplicable law) can ultimately be understood, if one applies his intellect to try to figure out *ta'amei ha-mitsvot* (reasons for the laws). On the other hand, the *chivyuv* (obligation) to perform *mitsvot* has nothing to do with the question of whether they appear rational to us or not. These questions have been discussed many times. Rambam in *Hilchos Melachim* says that if someone keeps the seven mitzvot of Noah because of *hechrea ha-da'as* (moral conviction, as opposed to a sense of commandedness), he does not qualify as one of the *chasidei ummot ha-olam* (righteous among the nations), and he may or may not be one of their *chachamim* (wise men), de-

pending on the *girsas* (precise text).^{vii} Hermann Cohen interpreted that ruling as only dealing with *hilchos ger toshav* (the laws of a resident alien), but that is definitely not *pashut peshat* (the simple reading) in Rambam's words.

Certainly, as frum Jews today, our commandment to observe the mitzvot has nothing to do with whether we feel they are rational or not or if they coincide with natural morality or not. We are faced with the commands of God

qua commands, and we have to try to fulfill them.

Can you discuss R. Kook's position on relating to the natural world and/or natural morality?

On the one hand, R. Kook was suffused with a love for the entire universe. Samuel Hugo Bergmann points out that R. Kook's view is not one of pantheism but panentheism, the belief that God inheres in everything and if a person loves God, he will love the entire universe, in which God is immanent. Having said that, R. Kook certainly realized that one cannot jump steps in this process of spiritual growth in this regard. One cannot be a hater of Jews or other people and be a vegetarian; that is absurd. While holding a position of panentheism may help one treat the environment with more care and convince people not to be litterbugs and not to pollute, R. Kook would definitely agree that it should never be used as an antihalachic or antinomian vehicle.

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ⁱ *Devarim* 20:19.

ⁱⁱ *Tehillim* 42:3.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.* 8:4-5.

^{iv} Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:2 (translation by Rafi Miller).

^v R. Sa'adya Ga'on, *Emunot ve-De'ot, ma'a-mar* 3.

^{vi} Marvin Fox, “On the Rational Commandments in Saadia's Philosophy: A Reexamination,” in idem (ed.), *Modern Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), pp. 174-187.

^{vii} Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim* 8:11.

Towards a Jewish Land Ethic

BY: Tali Adler

The concept of a comprehensive “land ethic” was first introduced by Aldo Leopold, the famous American environmentalist, in his 1948 book, *A Sand County Almanac*.ⁱ In this seminal work, Leopold described the need to expand the scope of ethics to include not only humanity, as it had been defined until that point, but the biosphere as a whole, including plants, animals, land, and water. Leopold argued for a non-anthropocentric ethic in which humanity would be seen as merely one segment of the Earth's total population with the responsibility to behave in an ethical manner with respect to the Earth itself

world must begin with the verse most cited by the claim's proponents, Genesis 1:28, in which God blesses man, telling him, “*Peru u-revu u-mil'u et ha-arets ve-kivshuha*,” “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it.”^{iv} Those who blame the Bible for a pervasive proprietary attitude of callousness toward the Earth generally stop their analysis of Genesis here. However, further analysis of the first book of the Bible shows that man's “mastery” over the Earth is severely tempered by the knowledge that he is but one of the Earth's many inhabitants and must treat the others, as well as the Earth itself, with respect. This message is made clear at the beginning of the second chapter of Genesis when God commands man “to guard

“[D]espite the common and famous misperceptions, a close examination of traditional Jewish writings and biblical law shows that Judaism does not simply view the Earth as man's domain to rule however he sees fit.”

as well as to its other inhabitants. In his famous essay, Leopold wrote that the prevailing attitude until that time was one that advocated human use of the Earth and its resources in whatever manner people saw fit. He claimed that this attitude stemmed directly from Judeo-Christian ethics, particularly the famous twenty-eighth verse of the first chapter of Genesis in which God commands the first man and woman to “dominate the earth and subdue it.”^{vii} Such an understanding of the Jewish approach was not unusual in the works of those who advocated ecological reforms and responsibility to the Earth. Indeed, in his essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” the famed historian Lynn White, Jr., went so far as to assert that the Bible bore the primary responsibility for the Western mentality towards the natural world and its disastrous effect upon the natural environment.ⁱⁱⁱ

However, despite the common and famous misperceptions, a close examination of traditional Jewish writings and biblical law shows that Judaism does not simply view the Earth as man's domain to rule however he sees fit. On the contrary, Judaism takes a theocentric view of the world that sees both man and the Earth as God's creations and under His ultimate control. Although Man is certainly superior to the animals in that he was created in the image of God, this superiority does not grant him ownership of creation. Judaism warns against the human tendency to view the Earth and its inhabitants as existing only or primarily for human benefit and takes precautions to ensure that man treats them with the proper respect.

An attempt to rebuff the claim that Judaism takes a purely anthropocentric view of the

and keep” the Earth.^v Man is granted permission to consume vegetation but is still forbidden from eating meat. Clearly, if Man is given any special position of authority here, it is as a guardian of the Earth, not as its owner.

It is only after the failure of the first generations of an and the subsequent Flood that man is granted permission to eat meat.^{vi} God grants this permission in a blessing to Noah after the Flood waters abate. Although this blessing echoes the original blessing granted to Adam, one key element is missing: the blessing of “dominion” over the Earth. Man may now consume meat, as many animals do, but he is no longer deemed worthy to rule over the other species. It is only when God deems man responsible enough to refrain from needlessly harming other inhabitants of the Earth that he is worthy to be their guardian. Rabbinic sources view this permission as a form of concession to man's immorality and bloodlust granted only after the generation of the Flood had proved man's inherent wickedness.^{vii} However, even this concession comes with a caveat: man may kill animals for food, but he is forbidden from consuming their blood, which is said to represent their “life.”^{viii} Ramban comments that the rationale for this is that “the possessor of a soul may not consume another soul, since all souls, both human and animal, belong to God.”^{ix}

The Jewish idea that man is merely a part of nature and not its center is expanded upon throughout the Bible and rabbinic literature. In the Book of Job, God spends approximately two chapters reproving Job for his belief that man, and particularly Job himself, is the center of the world. Indeed, God asks Job, “Is it by your wisdom that the hawk grows pinions,

spreads his wings to the south? Does the eagle soar at your command, building his nest high?^{xv} God emphasizes that man shares the Earth with many other inhabitants and should not believe himself to be the sole focus of creation. The Psalmist, too, took this view, writing poems in which nature itself praises God, entirely independently of man. This theme would continue to play a role in rabbinic literature throughout the centuries, most notably in *Perek Shirah*, a hymn written in the year 900, in which animals, trees, and the stars themselves are quoted as having their own songs to praise God.

Many halakhot can be interpreted as attempts to reinforce such sentiments and remind Man of his obligation to respect the Earth and its inhabitants. The most obvious of such laws is that of *bal tashhit*, the commandment against needless waste of resources. The law is derived from a passage in Deuteronomy regarding the laws of war:

“When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you may not cut them down. Are trees of the field human, to withdraw before you into the besieged city?”^{xvi}

Rashi explains that the verse seeks to emphasize that the tree is not part of the group against whom the nation is waging war. Instead, the tree is an independent entity with its own right to life, regardless of its environment, and should thus be saved from needless destruction.^{xvii} The Rabbis later expanded this injunction to prohibit any unnecessary waste or destruction of either natural or man-made items.^{xviii} In his seminal work *Horeb*, R. Samson Raphael Hirsch states that the law of *bal tashhit* is, in effect, “the warning of God: ‘Do not corrupt or destroy anything’ [...] from the earth which bears them all to the garment which you have already transformed into your cover.”^{xix} *Bal tashhit* is a clear proclamation that things, both animate and inanimate, have a right to existence outside of their benefit to humanity and

“Bal tashhit is a clear proclamation that things, both animate and inanimate, have a right to existence outside of their benefit to humanity and that man is forbidden from wantonly destroying them.”

that man is forbidden from wantonly destroying them.

Other laws that encourage man to realize the limits of his authority over creation include the injunctions against causing unnecessary pain to animals. These laws include prohibitions against harnessing species of different sizes together (causing the smaller one to be dragged along with the larger one),^{xx} or muzzling an an-

imal while it is threshing (in essence, making it work amidst food without allowing it to eat).^{xvi} These laws are designed to prevent animals from suffering unnecessary physical pain, a practical step to ensure that humanity realizes that it cannot do with other creatures as it sees fit without moral boundaries.

Indeed, the rabbinic tendency to encourage humane treatment of animals expands even to areas where it seems counterintuitive: the laws of *kashrut*, particularly those involving the rit-

“The biblical concept of Sabbath and its links to the laws of shemittah seem designed to instill an awareness of the fact that man’s rightful benefit from nature is not absolute.”

ual slaughter of animals for food. The laws of *kashrut* require that the animal be slaughtered in a particular way, with one clean cut, designed to minimize suffering. In addition, the law requires that the animal’s blood be covered. Certain rabbinic sources interpret these laws as attempts to instill a sense of shame in man and remind him that the ideal diet is a vegetarian one. Most prominent among these rabbis is Rav Avraham Yitshak ha-Kohen Kook, who writes: “A sense of shame is the first step towards a cure. [...] Cover the blood, remove your shame! These acts will bear fruit, and eventually people will learn the lesson. The silent protest will then emerge in a loud and powerful voice, and will achieve its aim. The command to slaughter in a sanctioned and painless manner underscores the message that we are not dealing with a castaway object – a lifeless automat – but with a *living thing*.”^{xvii}

In his famous *Talelei Orot* (Dewdrops of Light), Rav Kook went on to write that eventually, in the messianic age, humanity will return to an entirely vegetarian diet as a result of its heightened sense of morals. This idea, that the

ideal that we should strive for is a world that includes animals as beings that we do not consume, is a strong component of the Jewish land ethic. Biblical narratives and laws are meant to guide the Jewish people in particular, and humanity in general, to an era in which all the Earth’s inhabitants will be treated ethically.

Judaism’s sensitivity towards the ethical treatment of nature extends beyond the bounds

of animal life to include the land itself. The books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy each describe the laws relating to *shemittah*, the sabbatical year. The Torah warns that if the laws of *shemittah* are not observed, the people will be exiled from their land so that the earth may enjoy the years of rest it had missed.^{xviii} This passage makes it clear that the law of *shemittah* commands that the people allow the land to rest for its own sake, rather than for any ostensible agricultural benefit. Of course, the law has

other ramifications as well: in the Torah’s suspension of the concept of private ownership of land, man is reminded that he does not, and indeed can never, have absolute control over the Earth. The Earth is its own entity, which, like man himself, ultimately “belongs” to no one but God Himself.

One of the most intriguing aspects of *shemittah* is the language the Bible uses in its description. In the passages describing *shemittah*, the Bible uses the word *shabbat* (sabbath), a word used in only one other context in the Bible: the command to refrain from all forms of creative work on the seventh day. Interestingly, this is the only biblical command that applies to animals as well as to human beings: people are forbidden from working their animals on the Sabbath. In prohibiting man from all forms of creative work, the Bible essentially mandates one day a week where man is forbidden from altering the natural environment in any way. According to R. Ismar Schorsch, former Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, “Shabbat reminds us of our earthly status as tenant and not overlord.”^{xix} The biblical concept of Sabbath and its links to the laws of *shemittah* seem designed to instill an awareness of the fact that man’s rightful benefit from nature is not absolute. The Earth has a purpose and right to exist entirely of its own, independent of its benefit to man.

In spite of Judaism’s incredible plethora of textual support for a “land ethic,” the idea of environmentalism is often underemphasized in the Modern Orthodox Jewish community. Orthodox Jewish day schools rarely focus on the parts of Jewish law that deal with the human relationship to the land. Although Jewish holidays and festivals relating to the land are duly celebrated, they are often viewed primarily as ritualistic in nature rather than as meaningful celebrations and reminders of the Jewish perspective on man’s relationship to the land and environment. For two thousand years, this was sufficient. Without a land to call their own (and,

indeed, without legal ability to own land in many countries of the Exile), Jews had little need for a land ethic in their daily lives. Today, however, this is no longer true. The Jewish People has returned to Israel, once again assuming responsibility for agriculture and acquiring the privilege of land ownership. If Orthodox Judaism is to thrive and continue to be relevant in the twenty-first century, this attitude must change. Orthodox Jews must begin to realize that the fact that the Jewish People is no longer “a people without a land” means that they must undergo a religious paradigm shift in addition to the political one they have already undergone. It is time that Orthodox Judaism revive the millennia-old concept of a religious commitment to the land and the environment and accept the responsibility that comes with that revival.

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ⁱ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Vogel, “How Green Is Judaism? Exploring Jewish Environmental Ethics,” *Business Ethics Quarterly* 11,2 (2001): 349-363.

^{iv} All translations from Tanakh are from the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (2000).

^v Genesis 2:15.

^{vi} *Ibid.* 9:3.

^{vii} Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Genesis* (Jerusalem: Haomanim Press, 1996), p. 289.

^{viii} Genesis 9:4.

^{ix} Ramban ad loc.

^x Job 39:26.

^{xi} Deuteronomy 20:19.

^{xii} Rashi ad loc.

^{xiii} *Shabbat* 67b, *Hullin* 7b.

^{xiv} Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb*, transl. by Isidor Grunfeld (London: Soncino Press, 2002), pp. 279-280.

^{xv} Deuteronomy 22:10.

^{xvi} Deuteronomy 25:4.

^{xvii} From Rav Kook’s *Talelei Orot* (Dewdrops of Light), cited by Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (Jerusalem: Haomanim Press, 1996), p. 138 (emphasis mine).

^{xviii} Leviticus 26:34-35.

^{xix} Saul Berman, “Jewish Environmental Values: The Dynamic Tension Between Nature and Human Needs,” *Human Values and the Environment* 1,3 (1992): 1-72, at p. 4.

"Bore u-Manhig le-Kol ha-Beru'im:" Theistic Evolution in Modern Orthodox Discourse

BY: Jerry Karp

Much ink has been spilled (not always reflecting forethought and designⁱ) on the issue of the place of evolutionary theory within Jewish thought. Every Orthodox Jewish student living in the twenty-first century has been educated regarding the contradiction between the Torah and the theory of evolution and has been told either to reject evolution summarily or to accept that God created the world via evolution. The current trend is generally that those in the ultra-Orthodox community believe that evolution is completely untrue, while those in the Modern Orthodox world believe that the Torah can accommodate the possibility of the emergence of life via evolutionⁱⁱ. Discussions of Torah and evolution often center on interpreting the first chapter of *Bereshit* in light of modern cosmological and evolutionary theory, or explaining how later Talmudic and midrashic sources, as well as the positions of Rishonim and Aharonim, support the notion that the world is more than 6,000 years old or the possibility that man could have descended from other animals.ⁱⁱⁱ

I wish, therefore, to focus on a question which has, to my knowledge, not been the exclusive subject of any exposition on evolution and Torah.^{iv} Torah u-Madda proponents almost dogmatically assert that evolution can be reconciled with Torah and that God directed the process of evolution. But that position requires further explanation. How did God direct evolution?

This question may initially seem to be a simple one, but I think that it is one that requires careful consideration. The term "theistic evolution," referring to evolution under God's control,^v is somewhat oxymoronic. The modern synthetic theory of evolution, comprised of Darwin's original theory coupled with more modern innovations in molecular biology, proposes not only that all species have evolved from less advanced forms of life, but also that the mechanism of this transmutation is natural selection. Random mutations occur in an organism's genes, and if these random mutations produce an organism which is better able to succeed in its environment, that organism will be more likely to pass on this mutated gene, along with its phenotypic advantages, to the next generation. Over the course of billions of years, this process will eventually result in more advanced and complex organisms, eventually leading to the diversity that we observe today.^{vi}

This explanation automatically presents a problem for those who believe in God's creation and providence.^{vii} According to the evolutionary theory, evolution progressed independently on the basis of random mutations. There is no need for the intervening hand of God. What exactly, then, did God do

in the process of evolution?

One option which has been suggested (though it seems to be unpopular) is that evolution indeed progressed via the random mutations leading to natural selection, as evolutionary theory suggests. God's involve-

"One option...is that evolution indeed progressed via the random mutations leading to natural selection, as evolutionary theory suggests. God's involvement in creation, then, was in the initial stage: creating the system that would eventually develop automatically into a diverse biosphere."

ment in creation, then, was in the initial stage: creating the system that would eventually develop automatically into a diverse biosphere. God created the universe,^{viii} as well as the rules of mathematics and biology which would eventually, on the basis of probability alone, lead to evolution through natural selection. This notion would not be immediately obvious to us, since we do not associate the concept of "creation" with mathematical and physical laws; we often think that God, as it were, acts outside the realm of what we consider "logical." However, if we truly believe that God has created everything, He must also have created the notion of logic itself, and with it the logical physical and biological laws. Thus, according to this theory, God indeed created the world through evolution: He created the *system* which then operated independently.

One early author who subscribes to this notion is R. Samson Raphael Hirsch.^{ix} At the time of his writing, the theory of evolution was in its early stages. R. Hirsch states that he has no reason to assume that the theory of evolution or the scientific age of the universe is accurate. However, he states that if evolution were eventually shown to be true, he would not find this discouraging, but inspiring:

"... Judaism in that case would call upon its adherents to give even greater reverence than ever before to the one, sole God Who, in His boundless creative wisdom and eternal omnipotence, needed to bring into existence no more than one single, amorphous nucleus and one single law of 'adaptation and heredity' in order to bring forth, from what seemed chaos but was in fact a very definite order, the infinite variety of species we know today, each with its unique characteristics that sets it apart from all other creatures."^x

More recently, this approach can be found in a brief essay by Reuben E. Gross:

"Assuming that the Darwinists have cor-

rectly described the mechanism of creation [...] all they have done is to dis-establish [*sic*] the Creator as mechanistic-mason carpenter of a static world, but at the same time they have unwittingly re-established Him as an engi-

It seems, however, that many are uncomfortable with this approach (and, indeed, most of the authors who have written about evolution and Judaism do not adopt this understanding). Perhaps this is because of the inherent discomfort in suggesting that God created the universe instantaneously and then withdrew from it, similar to a deistic conception of God.^{xii} Of course, one might argue that, even according to the story in *Bereshit*, God eventually stopped creating the world; in fact, perhaps ironically for those who are disturbed by this view, the fact that God created the world and then rested is explicitly stated.^{xiii}

A second view regarding the harmonization of divine creation and evolution is that God created the world through evolution, which does not really proceed via *random* natural selection. Evolution did occur, but the process did not take place randomly; rather, God made a decision at every branching point along the way. In a sense, though, proponents of this theory do not technically believe in evolution as it is generally understood, since the modern synthetic theory of evolution includes the mechanism of natural selection. Indeed, part of the attractiveness of evolutionary theory is that it provides a scientific mechanism to account for the diversity of life; stripping evolution of this mechanism might defeat the benefit

neer-architect, *kiv'yochol*, of a self-adjusting, dynamic world and the Creator or legislator of the fitness standards and rules of adaptability. [...] In other words, the question now is not who put the molecules together, but Who so designed the Universe that this combination (generally described as protoplasm) uniquely acts and reacts in a manner known as life."^{xi}

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of proposing it in the first place. One might counter that God wished to create the world in a way that would *appear* scientific, such that He would not obviously violate the laws of nature which we now understand.

In this vein, Dr. Carl Feit suggests that nat-

the evolutionary process was a relatively favorable, but not the only favorable, outcome; had other random mutations occurred, those mutations would have propagated, perhaps eventually leading to a completely different advanced species. Religious thinkers and scien-

tists who have adopted this second stream

believe that *only* man could have developed since he is the *telos* of evolution, and every minute molecular motion involved in the evolutionary process was controlled and chosen by God in an attempt to create the specific world which we inhabit.

A final explanation of theistic evolution is a sort of hybrid between the first two positions, though it is conceptually more similar to the second approach. It is adopted by, among others, Dr. Nathan Aviezer,^{xvii} a physicist at Bar-Ilan University. Aviezer contends that generally life is “left alone” by God, perhaps with some mutations occurring. However, at some major points in evolutionary history, such as the advent of man, God intervened and caused a major evolutionary step to occur.^{xviii}

Aviezer’s position is based on Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould’s version of evolutionary theory, called punctuated equilibrium, which suggests that evolutionary change happened in quick spurts over the course of evolutionary history, while most of life’s history was marked by long periods of stasis with no evolution.^{xix}

Thus, Aviezer posits, the natural course of life would have been stasis, while God intervened at some points to create evolutionary change. Aviezer maintains that Darwin was correct that evolution occurred but incorrect about its mechanism.

This explanation, like the second, holds that for evolutionary change to occur, it must be di-

rected by God. As opposed to the first explanation, these last two streams of thought hold that evolution is a miracle of sorts. Every time a new species developed, God had explicitly created it at that moment. According to the first approach, however, evolutionary change is no different from any other aspect of the universe. The basic question at hand, evoking the famous debate between Rambam and Ramban,^{xx} is whether evolution is a miracle or an

integral part of nature.

I believe that this discussion highlights the clear fact that when we say that “God directed evolution,” we do not all agree on what this means. It is time we understand what we mean when we make well-intentioned but ambiguous pronouncements. Clarification of our positions on theistic evolution can only lead us to greater appreciation for God’s creation.

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^{xvii}Cf. Rabbeinu Bahya, “*Sha’ar ha-Yihud*,” in *Hovot ha-Levavot*.

^{xviii}As is often the case, the fact that Modern Orthodox Jews are willing to accept that evolution could be true is sometimes ignored, and all Orthodox Jews are sometimes lumped together as anti-evolutionists. Thankfully, the distinction between Modern Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews in this regard seems to have been well-established overall. Some notable exceptions persist, however. As an example, Ian Barbour writes that “Reform and Conservative Judaism, the Catholic church, and most of the mainline Protestant denominations today maintain that we do not have to choose between cosmology and creation” (*Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997], p. 203).

^{xix}In a more egregious example, Alexander Nussbaum presented in an article in the magazine *Skeptic* the sweeping generalization that “Orthodox Jewish scientists, even those with legitimate degrees from prestigious universities accept the inerrancy of Torah and Chazal, condemn evolution, and proclaim the superiority of the truths of Torah over secular science.” He then cites the works of Rabbi Dr. M. D. Tendler, Dr. Gerald Schroeder, Dr. Nathan Aviezer, Dr. Lee Spetner and Dr. Herman Branover, all of which, he claims, suggest that evolution is false (“Orthodox Jews and Science: An Empirical Study of their Attitudes Toward Evolution, the Fossil Record, and Modern Geology,” *Skeptic* 12,3, available at: [http://www.skeptic.com/the_magazine/featured_articles/v12n03_orthodox_judaism_and](http://www.skeptic.com/the_magazine/featured_articles/v12n03_orthodox_judaism_and_evolution.html)

Torah Views on Science and Its Problems (New York: Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists, 1976), which, he claims, “promotes creationism.” This is only partially true: most of the articles in the collection do argue that evolution is false, but at least one (“On Creation and Evolution” by Reuben E. Gross, see n. 11 below) argues that evolution may be true, and moreover, the “AOJS Students’ Questions Panel,” a 30-page discussion of the issues regarding evolution and Torah, is willing to accommodate such a belief as well. It is also important to point out that this book was published in 1976, when many Orthodox Jewish scientists were not willing to believe in theistic evolution. This attitude seems, however, to have changed in the last 35 years; indeed, the AOJS has since featured numerous speakers at their annual conventions who have discussed theistic evolution.

Nussbaum’s piece in *Skeptic* paints Orthodox Jews as uneducated idiots and Orthodox Jewish scientists as backward-thinking dogmatists. While it seems to me that Nussbaum’s piece, rather than those who are quoted in it, constituted a massive *hillul Hashem*, this only emphasizes how important it is for the Modern Orthodox Jewish community to educate its students effectively on what it believes regarding theistic evolution, as well as to clearly communicate its views in print.

^{xx}I wish to point out here that we should be careful to distinguish between accommodating Torah and evolution and accommodating Torah and cosmology. Evolution is the theory that explains how *life* on Earth became as diverse as it is today; cosmology explains the history of the *universe* and how it became the way it is today. It seems that most Modern Orthodox Jews, even those who are opposed to the theory of evolution, are willing to accept the fact that the world is billions of years old. It has become cliché to explain that “a day (as described in the *Bereshit* creation story) might actually not be 24 hours.” I believe that harmonizing the scientific age of the universe with the Torah’s account of creation is the *easiest* problem with which a God-fearing scientist must contend. Yet, my experience suggests that it is the problem which Jews spend the most time discussing. As an example, when I took an introductory biology class with Dr. Carl Feit in Yeshiva College, he devoted a week to explaining how evolution could be accommodated within a Torah viewpoint. However, the bulk of this time was actually spent explaining how, indeed, a day could be longer than 24 hours. (For a summary of the sources which Dr. Feit presents in this series of classes, see Carl Feit, “Modern Orthodoxy and Evolution: The Models of Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi A. I. Kook,” in Geoffrey Cantor and Marc Swetlitz (eds.), *Jewish Tradition and the Challenge of Darwinism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006], pp. 208-224.) In retrospect, I assume that Dr. Feit focuses on these issues since they are the ones which students assume are most theologically troubling.

^{xxi}Rabbi Lawrence Troster actually discusses the conflict between belief in divine creation and natural selection in “The Order of Creation

“Aviezer contends that generally life is “left alone” by God, perhaps with some mutations occurring. However, at some major points in evolutionary history, such as the advent of man, God intervened and caused a major evolutionary step to occur.”

ural selection only appears random, but that no event really is random: “When a biologist speaks of random mutation, he does not really mean that those changes that occur are completely uncaused and arbitrary, but rather that since we do not know all the details of what occurs, we refer to it by the statistics of randomness.”^{xiv} Dr. Judah Landa similarly writes that “[e]volution is anything but a random process. Every step of the way is supposed to be guided by the laws of nature, particularly those that relate to the behavior of atoms, molecules and subatomic particles.”^{xv}

A fundamentally similar explanation is based on quantum mechanics. According to the theory of quantum mechanics, at the microscopic level (i.e. when dealing with particles as small as electrons), the universe is not deterministic. At any instant, the location of an electron cannot be determined based on its previous location. Rather, there are numerous locations where the electron might be found, with each location in space having a certain *probability* of the electron being there. All of these locations are possible, even though some are more likely than others, and they are all considered within the bounds of nature.^{xvi} Thus, God could control the process of evolution and simultaneously make it seem random through the laws of quantum mechanics. Since at any instant the electrons of a molecule could be in any one of numerous locations, God chose the ones which would eventually lead to the macroscopic changes which comprised evolution. However, since all of these eventualities were indeed possible, and there was no reason to predict that one would happen and not another, the process *appears* to us to be random and unpredictable. In reality, though, the process is being controlled (at the *electronic* level) by God.

Of course, this approach to theistic evolution undermines the advantage of postulating natural selection in the first place. Scientists understand that more advanced, complex forms of life developed because completely random mutations occurred, and those that were most favorable were propagated and passed down to future generations, thus leading to diversification and increased complexity of life. In other words, the advent of man in

and the Emerging God: Evolution and Divine Action in the Natural World,” in *Jewish Tradition and the Challenge of Darwinism*, pp. 225-246. However, he discusses this in the larger context of religious problems created by evolution, and he does not include the range of Jewish views which I am discussing here.

“The term “theistic evolution” is to be contrasted with “intelligent design,” which has nothing to do with evolution. Intelligent design proposes that the form of the universe demonstrates an inherent design which must have been fashioned by an intelligent Creator (the word “God” is generally not used, in order that the theory might sound scientific). Evolution is not a part of this design. Theistic evolution proposes that evolution occurred and can be discussed solely in the realm of science, without resorting to religious notions such as a Creator, but that it can be understood in the realm of religion as being the result of a divine hand.

“One semantic issue that should be better clarified in essays on this topic is what is included in the term “evolution.” In his essay in *Tradition* 29,1 (1994), Baruch Sterman quotes Michael Ruse (*Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* [New York: Prometheus Books, 1998]), who distinguishes the *fact* of evolution from the *path* of evolution, the former referring to the idea that species evolved into other species and the latter referring to the mechanism of natural selection. Usually, the term “evolution” is assumed to include both the fact and the path of evolution, but many Jewish writers who support evolution do not agree with the mechanism of natural selection. I will discuss this position later in this article, but when I use the term “evolution” in this paragraph and later, I will be including natural selection.

^{xv}Note that I will not be discussing the problems the theory of evolution creates in biblical interpretation.

^{xvi}As noted before, I am not discussing issues of cosmology, but I suspect that those who adopt this position would believe that the universe was created via the Big Bang.

^{xvii}There is a plethora of writing on the subject of evolution and creation, and I have certainly not read everything that has been written. I attempted to read major works on evolution from within our community, with an eye toward the parts of those works which discuss the question at hand.

^{xviii}R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Collected Writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch*, vol. 7 (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1997), p. 264.

^{xix}Reuben E. Gross, “On Creation and Evolution,” in *Challenge: Torah Views on Science and Its Problems*, pp. 236-239.

^{xx}There is also the issue of harmonizing this approach with the account in *Bereshit* which suggests that God created the world through a direct process.

^{xxi}Here I am grateful to Yehoshua Blumenkopf, with whom I had an interesting discussion on this point.

^{xxii}Carl Feit, “Darwin and *Derash*: The Interplay of Torah and Biology,” in *The Torah u-*

Madda Journal 2 (1990): 25-36, at p. 30.

^{xxiii}Judah Landa, *Torah and Science* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1991), p. 293.

^{xxiv}This concept has been employed in general and Jewish philosophy to explain many concepts related to divine providence and free will. See Reuven Rand’s article in this issue of *Kol Hamevaser*.

^{xxv}It is noteworthy that in this article, I have cited a total of one biologist (Dr. Feit). In my research to prepare this article, I found that the vast majority of Jewish scientists claiming expertise either on how to accommodate evolution and creation or on how to disprove the possibility of evolution are physicists or mathematicians, not biologists. It is simply amazing that so many physicists have proclaimed themselves experts on the theory of evolution, even though it has almost nothing to do with physics, any more than any other biological process has to do with physics. While I value the efforts of the physicists who have attempted to explain evolution in light of the Torah, I am particularly troubled by those physicists and mathematicians who have decided, with absolutely no academic degree in biology whatsoever, that evolution is impossible. I am not the first to notice this and be offended by it. Baruch Sterman aptly writes:

“A physicist would not countenance a biologist’s flippant rejection of Maxwell’s equations or Einstein’s explanation of the photoelectric effect, two scientific descriptions of optical phenomena universally accepted within physics, even though the simultaneous acceptance of those two theories ostensibly leads to the paradoxical description of light as both wave and particle. [...] A brusque dismissal of the widely accepted views of modern biologists is likewise not warranted, especially by someone who is not an authority in the field. The derision of evolution as high school or popular science, when graduate courses in evolutionary biology are offered in virtually every university, is misplaced.” (Baruch Sterman, “Judaism and Darwinian Evolution,” *Tradition* 29,1 [1994]: 48-75)

^{xxvi}Nathan Aviezer, *In the Beginning: Biblical Creation and Science* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2009), p. 57.

^{xxvii}Aviezer suggests that most scientists believe that punctuated equilibrium, and not gradualism (the theory that evolution is constantly occurring gradually) is correct. I believe that this is not necessarily the consensus of the scientific community, although there is a significant percentage of scientists who do not agree with punctuated equilibrium.

^{xxviii}See Rambam, *Moreh Nevukhim* II:29 and Ramban to *Shemot* 13:16.

The Antithesis between Judaism and Nature in the Thought of Yeshayahu Leibowitz¹

BY: Eli Putterman

It is my object in this piece to illuminate one aspect of the fascinating philosophy of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, one of the most original Jewish thinkers of the 20th century. In doing so, I hope to provide something of an introduction to his philosophical method, along with its analytical insight and its penchant for binary oppositions.² Leibowitz’s clear, precise, and razor-sharp arguments serve as a fruitful point of departure for almost any question with which modern Jewish thought grapples, even if his conclusions may be difficult to digest. The defining characteristic of his thought is its extremism: though his positions are founded upon values well-articulated in Jewish tradition, he shows time and again that taking these values to their logical conclusion results in an outlook very far from that of the average Orthodox Jewish believer. Indeed, perhaps the most significant contribution of the thought of Yeshayahu Leibowitz is his penetrating exposure of the contradictions between some of our deeply-held

of prayer, which Leibowitz views as inherently meaningless rote recitation whose significance lies in its being commanded by the Rabbis, not in its fulfilling any intercessory function.³

Leibowitz’s discussion of the relationship between Judaism and nature, the topic of this piece, is somewhat less radical, with significant precedent for his view found in traditional sources. The core of his presentation is a very powerful religious idea which can be found, *inter alia*, in sources such as R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s “Majesty and Humility” and *U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham* and Prof. J. J. Schachter’s article in a previous issue of *Kol Hamevaser*.⁴ Yet, as in the case of Divine Providence, Leibowitz’s approach leads to conclusions which are difficult to accept from a Modern Orthodox standpoint.

The first step in Leibowitz’s argument is a sharp fact-value distinction. For Leibowitz, knowledge of the natural world or of history can never yield normative conclusions;⁵ an “is” never implies an “ought.” The choice of a particular axiology by which to guide one’s

“Though his positions are founded upon values well-articulated in Jewish tradition, he shows time and again that taking these values to their logical conclusion results in an outlook very far from that of the average Orthodox Jewish believer.”

values; what he, of course, does *not* do, is resolve them.

To provide a brief example: one of the central themes in Leibowitz’s thought is the slogan *avodah li-shemah* – worship of God for its own sake – certainly a message with ample precedent in Jewish sources.⁶ Yet in Leibowitz’s hands, this principle leads to a denial of Divine Providence – for the traditional account of *sakhar va-onesh* (reward and punishment) dispensed by God for performance or nonperformance of the commandments implies that God serves humankind. In Leibowitz’s words: “Folkloristic religion makes God the functionary of human society, performing for it the tasks of Minister of Health, Minister of Justice, Minister of the Police, Minister of Welfare, and Minister of the Economy.”⁷ The halakhically committed Jew must therefore forgo all beliefs which posit a divine response to human worship – even in the case

life lies not in the cognitive but in the conative realm;⁸ it is therefore a completely free choice.⁹ *Prima facie*, this argument is easily refutable – would not certain knowledge of the divine origin of the commandments render halakhic observance a compelling, rational decision? Even if you personally witnessed the revelation at Sinai (itself a difficult notion in Leibowitz’s thought), does the fact that God legislated a particular set of commands compel you to the observance of these commands? Only if you have already chosen the worship of God as the highest value, argues Leibowitz, does it do so.¹⁰ Thus, the fact-value distinction immediately leads to a disconnect between “nature,” a term whose meaning expands in this context to include all factual data about the world, and Judaism, which, as a system of norms and values, cannot be derived from or refuted by such knowledge.

Leibowitz's next step is his analysis of competing ideologies as motivated by different conceptions of the *summum bonum*, the highest value. Secular morality is essentially a form of humanism, the axiology which takes humanity to be the supreme end.^{xiii} Leibowitz also defined fascism as a value system that takes the good of the State, or *raison d'État*, as having intrinsic value,^{xiiii} and harshly criticized (Religious) Zionism for allowing inroads to this kind of reasoning.^{xiv}

On the other hand, Judaism, in its Leibowitzian interpretation, views God and His worship as the supreme good. Since God Himself is the *telos* of the halakhic system, this worship – which, for Leibowitz, is the performance of the mitzvot, no more and no less^{xv} – does not have any this-worldly meaning or purpose. This is in stark contrast to many Jewish thinkers such as Maimonides,^{xvi} who viewed Jewish law as instrumental to the attainment of intellectual perfection, and Eliezer Berkovits, who saw the goal of Halakhah to be the achievement of moral ends.^{xvii} On the other hand, Leibowitz has nothing but scorn for theologies which posit that halakhic observance in some way affects the Deity – i.e., the Kabbalah.^{xviii} These quite simply constitute idolatry – worship of a God in the image of man (quite literally, in the case of the Sefirotic pleroma). Thus, Leibowitz invalidates the entire enterprise of *ta'amei ha-mitsvot* (reasons for the commandments) *a priori*.

But this leads to the obvious question: If Halakhah fulfills no function in either the human or divine realms, what, in fact, motivates the Leibowitzian to observe Halakhah? A possible answer is implicit in what we have already stated – if Leibowitz does not compromise on his fact-value distinction and ignores any claims about cultural influence on one's value system, then it appears as though the choice to be observant is unmotivated, irreducible, and unexplainable. Indeed, some interpreters of Leibowitz have taken this route,^{xix} and this reading seems to be confirmed by Leibowitz's explicit statement, "There are no ways to faith, since faith is the supreme, if not the only, manifestation of man's free choice."^{xx}

But this passage admits of more than one interpretation. A free choice (Leibowitz, in the original, uses the term *behirah hofshit*)^{xxi} is not necessarily an unmotivated one, depending on how one defines freedom; Maimonides (and later, Kant), for example, defined freedom as activity in accordance with the dictates of reason rather than those of the body – a notion almost diametrically opposed to the contemporary conception of free will.^{xxii} *Prima facie*, Leibowitz does not seem to have this escape route, as he explicitly removes value choices from the cognitive realm. But this may not be the end of the story.

In "Religious Praxis," an early article which covers many of the main themes in Leibowitz's thought, appears a passage which, though it bears directly upon this issue, has not merited scholarly attention.^{xxiii} In this passage, Leibowitz argues that commitment to a theocentric religion, a value system which places an entity other than man at its center, is the only possible method of liberating oneself from the "bondage of nature," the state in which man's own desires drive his behavior. He emphasizes that this attribute of religion is not shared by axiologies in which "rational or secular ethical" considerations rather than selfish inclinations are the overriding value – such as humanism and nationalism – as one might think. Instead, secular value systems are themselves a form of bondage to nature, since the ends they aim to achieve – the good of the State, human happiness, etc. – are not transcendent. The fact that moral and national aims are products of the "human spirit" rather than blind instinct matters not for Leibowitz:

"From a religious point of view the classification of being as nature, spirit, and God has no validity. There is only the dyad: nature, which includes the human spirit, and God. The only way man can break the bonds of nature is by cleaving to God; by acting in compliance with the divine will rather than in accordance with the human will."^{xxiv, xxv}

The uniqueness of Judaism as an axiology, in Leibowitz's thought, lies precisely in the fact that it is antithetical to nature and all values derived from it.

This passage may be taken as a justification of halakhic observance or as simply descriptive (see the previous note for a full discussion). In either case, Leibowitz's point is profound, valuable, and deeply troubling: profound, because it builds upon the powerful human yearning for transcendence; valuable, for drawing a clear demarcation between Judaism and competing modern value systems which could be put to great use in Orthodox

“Leibowitz argues that commitment to a theocentric religion, a value system which places an entity other than man at its center, is the only possible method of liberating oneself from the “bondage of nature.”

ideology; and troubling, because the price of this maneuver is denying the possibility of an Orthodoxy which aims to synthesize the best of secular culture – which, if limited to value-neutral science or even other areas of culture without extending to the realm of ideals, aspirations, and values, results in an impoverished synthesis indeed – with traditional

Judaism. This of course is precisely the route taken by Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and to him we may turn to demonstrate the implications of such a step.

Leibowitz's view of morality as inimical and irrelevant to Judaism was one of his central contentions.^{xxvi} In a previous article, I have had occasion to cite his bluntest quota-

neighbor as yourself" does not, as such, occur in the Torah. The reading is: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am God.'^{xxviii}

In the final analysis, for all the philosophical virtuosity evident in Leibowitz's analysis, it is quite difficult to accept it as simply a presentation of the traditional Jewish view, as

“Since God Himself is the *telos* of the halakhic system, this worship – which, for Leibowitz, is the performance of the mitzvot, no more and no less – does not have any this-worldly meaning or purpose.”

tion on the topic: "There is no distinction between 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18) and 'You shall surely erase the memory of Amaleq' (Deuteronomy 25:19). As for 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' its characterization as the ethic of Judaism is none other than a heretical falsification of the Torah."^{xxvii} This passage expresses Leibowitz's astounding notion that the "moral law" of the Torah, the commandments which appear to derive from the Bible's revolutionary conception of human value, have in fact nothing to do with morality at all. This is a necessary consequence of Leibowitz's system, as the following passage, which I have quoted at length on account of its centrality, illuminates:

"Ethics, when regarded as unconditionally asserting its own validity, is an atheistic category *par excellence*. [...] The Torah does not recognize moral imperatives stemming from knowledge of natural reality or from awareness of man's duty to his fellow man. All it recognizes are Mitzvot, divine imperatives. [...] The counsel of conscience is not a religious concept. The 'God in one's heart'

Leibowitz contends.^{xxix} To take a well-known example, Abraham's demand of God, "Shall the Judge of the earth not do justice?"^{xxx} seems to presuppose an independent standard of morality to which not only humans but even God is held.^{xxxi} Thus, advocates of synthesis need not feel unduly threatened by Leibowitz.

Nevertheless, Leibowitz does brilliantly expose the tension between the religious ideals of sacrifice and *avodah li-shemah* and the deeply held commitments of Modern Orthodoxy to universal morality, a tension which cannot be recast positively as a fructifying "dialectic" but constitutes rather a genuine philosophical difficulty, as Leibowitz shows. How does Modern Orthodoxy reconcile the Abraham who challenges God's ways in the name of a universal morality with the Abraham who a few chapters later willingly submits to God's demand for human sacrifice? What does *avodah li-shemah* mean, if not a willingness to jettison all values in the face of the divine command? Can the Orthodox relationship to nature and "nature's laws" be other than Leibowitz's indifference and negation? The Leibowitzian critique has shown us that a facile identification of the *telos* of the Halakhah with moral or otherwise natural ends is, if not idolatry, certainly a step which calls into question other fundamental religious concepts. What we must do is articulate an ideology which preserves both our unconditional commitment to the Halakhah as expressed in the ideal of *Torah li-shemah*, and our most dearly held intuitions about halakhic Judaism's attitudes toward nature and morality. Modern Orthodoxy demands no less.

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ⁱI would like to thank *avi mori* for allowing me to take some of Yeshayahu Leibowitz's books to Israel where (on the plane, exhausted but unable to sleep) I was first exposed to his thought, and Prof. Daniel Rynhold of the Jewish Philosophy department, who offered a highly stimulating course in 20th-century Jewish philosophy, one of whose foci was Leibowitz, last summer.

ⁱⁱA wide selection of Leibowitz's articles has been translated into English in the volume *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1992), edited by Eliezer Goldman. The editor's introduction (pp. vii-xxxiv) is almost certainly the best summary of Leibowitz's thought available in English. References will be made to this volume when possible.

ⁱⁱⁱ*Avot* 1:3; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah*, ch. 10.

^{iv}Yeshayahu Leibowitz, "Ha-Rambam – Ha-Adam ha-Avrahami," *Be-Terem* 211 (1955): 20-23, at p. 22.

^vOn prayer, see "Of Prayer," in *Judaism*, pp. 30-36.

^{vi}Strictly speaking, from this argument it follows only that the prospect reward or punishment should not be the motivating factor in observance, not that God does not reward or punish. A fuller presentation of this point would explain how Leibowitz's denial of Divine Providence follows directly from his metaphysics – in which the idea of divine transcendence is taken to its logical extreme. However, the tightly integrated nature of Leibowitz's thought means that we will come across a closely related point – though in an axiological rather than metaphysical context – shortly.

^{vii}Jacob J. Schachter, "Submitting to Divine Religious Authority in a World of Personal Autonomy: The Challenge of Choice," *Kol Hamevaser* 3:1 (August 2010): 5-7.

^{viii}Readers will forgive, I hope, my failure to mention or adhere to the distinction between norms and values, which is irrelevant for our purposes.

^{ix}This argument is entirely analogous to one developed by Menahem Fisch, according to which rationality serves as a progressive methodology for achieving a particular goal, but has nothing to say about the choice of goal. See Fisch, *Rational Rabbis* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 34-35.

The fact-value distinction in the strong formulations of Leibowitz and Fisch runs directly counter to Enlightenment attempts, notably by figures like Kant, to derive a morality from rational principles. It does not contradict the general Enlightenment optimism according to which reason would be able to achieve human happiness, so long as it is recognized that such humanism itself is the product of an unmoti-

vated choice; indeed, Leibowitz, as a scientist, is less than interested in proclaiming the limits of reason within the purely cognitive realm.

^xLeibowitz, *Judaism*, p. 37. Jewish thinkers influenced by postmodernist trends have criticized Leibowitz for ignoring the formative role played by upbringing in determining the value system eventually chosen by a person; not that blind inertia necessarily determines one's life trajectory, but that growing up within a particular tradition and way of life shapes one's processes of reasoning such that his or her notion of what is "rational" behavior, or argument, or way of life, tends to be different from that of someone raised with a different background. See Gili Zivan, *Dat le-Lo Ashlayah Nokhah Olam Post-Modernisti* (Jerusalem: Hartman Institute Press, 2005), and Avi Sagi, *Eitgar ha-Shivah el ha-Masoret* (Jerusalem: Hartman Institute Press, 2003) for a discussion of the difficulties with Leibowitz's conception of faith, and Daniel Rynhold, *Two Models of Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), for a discussion of the "biased" rationality which believers use in connection with their religious faith.

^xThis argument serves as a powerful *reductio ad absurdum* against Divine Command Morality, *ve-ein kan makom le-ha'arikh*.

^{xii}Hearing about the reward and punishment associated with Jewish law might drive a selfish person to observance, but by adopting such a lifestyle, he has also thereby made a value choice, not a purely rational one – that of egoism. Of course, as noted, Leibowitz does not accept traditional notions of reward and punishment, so he considers such *avodah she-lo li-shemah* as not only religiously abhorrent but misguided.

^{xiii}Leibowitz usually referred to the moral system of the "atheist Kant" (*Judaism*, p. 19) when discussing morality, but his point applies whether the system is a deontological prescription of certain absolute duties towards other humans as ends in themselves, or a consequentialist ethic seeking to maximize human happiness.

^{xiii}Leibowitz, *Judaism*, p. 218.

^{xiv}See especially "After Kibiyeh," in *ibid.*, pp. 174-184; see also *ibid.*, p. 150, where Leibowitz accuses Religious Zionism of "deifying" the State of Israel.

^{xv}*Ibid.*, p. 44.

^{xvi}Assuming one takes his treatment in the *Guide of the Perplexed* III:25-49 seriously and not, as Leibowitz does, as a smokescreen for suspiciously Leibowitzian views (which allows him to call Maimonides "the greatest of believers;" see *Judaism*, pp. 39, 121, and also p. 56). This interpretation of Maimonides is found in a number of his articles, as well as in his short book, *Emunato shel ha-Rambam* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Press,

1980).

^{xvii}See Eliezer Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism* (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2002), pp. 3-39.

^{xviii}Leibowitz, *Judaism*, pp. 76, 112-114. Gershon Scholem essentially agreed with Leibowitz's assessment that Kabbalah, with its mythical elements and its theurgy, represents a foreign graft onto Rabbinic Judaism, but Moshe Idel, arguing that theurgic ideas are well-attested in rabbinic literature and in fact reflect a Jewish mystical tradition dating to rabbinic times, has disputed this. See Gershon Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), pp. 21-25, and Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), esp. pp. 30-34, 156-172.

^{xix}See note x. Avi Sagi, "Yeshayahu Leibowitz – A Breakthrough in Jewish Philosophy: Religion without Metaphysics," *Religious Studies* 33,2 (1997): 203-216, at p. 215.

^{xx}Leibowitz, *Judaism*, p. 37.

^{xxi}Idem, *Emanah, Historiyah, va-Arakhim: Ma'amaram ve-Hartsa'ot* (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1982), p. 13.

^{xxii}See David Shatz, "Judaism, Free Will, and the Genetic and Neuroscientific Revolutions," in Yitzhak Berger and David Shatz (eds.), *Judaism, Science, and Moral Responsibility* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002), pp. 85-86.

Such "positive" definitions of freedom are attacked by Isaiah Berlin in his famous essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty," *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), as conducive to totalitarian ideologizing.

^{xxiii}Leibowitz, *Judaism*, pp. 21-23.

^{xxiv}*Ibid.*, p. 22.

^{xxv}If this passage is read as I read it – as an attempt to justify halakhic observance, even *post facto*, as opposed to any secular value system, and hence an escape route from the regnant understanding of Leibowitz as denying any sort of motivation for observance – Leibowitz's argument runs into a difficulty. For a justification of a particular choice of axiology against all others to succeed, it must appeal to some human "spiritual instinct" (I use scare quotes in deference to Leibowitz). In this case, Leibowitz appeals to the human yearning for the transcendent. However, by Leibowitz's own argument, the human spirit is simply a part of nature; thus, the human need to grasp at something transcendent is no different from any other inclination. If so, the question returns in full force: if Leibowitz does not in any way privilege the drive for the transcendent over other human drives, he has provided no justification for halakhic observance.

In my read, Leibowitz simply failed to realize this difficulty, but his very attempt demon-

strates that he did not believe that the choice of the believer is completely unmotivated. However, if one reads this passage as merely a further development of Leibowitz's phenomenology of Judaism rather than as an attempt to ground it in what seems reasonable, then one arrives again at a Leibowitz who believed that the religious choice is an arbitrary one.

^{xxvi}A well-known difficulty with Leibowitz's position is that it appears to conflict with his harsh moral critique of the national security policies of the State of Israel. On this, see Eliezer Goldman, "Religion and Morality in the Thought of Yeshayahu Leibowitz," in Avi Sagi and Daniel Statman (eds.), *Between Religion and Morality* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), pp. 107-114, and Moshe Halbertal, "Yeshayahu Leibowitz: Between Religious Thought and Social Criticism," in Avi Sagi (ed.), *Yeshayahu Leibowitz: Olamo ve-Haguto* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1995), pp. 221-227. In a previous article, I approvingly cited Goldman's position, but I find that I currently lean towards Halbertal's understanding.

^{xxvii}Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Religion, and the Jewish State* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Schocken Press, 1979), p. 310.

^{xxviii}Idem, *Judaism*, pp. 18-19.

^{xxix}At least one other 20th-century Jewish philosopher was afflicted with the malady of *ex cathedra* pronouncements in the name of the Halakhah, *ve-hamevin yavin*. It seems unfortunate that a lack of critical reflection and historical consciousness seems to be a prerequisite for theological innovativeness.

^{xxx}Genesis 18:25.

^{xxxi}This argument is cited by Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, *By His Light* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2003), p. 108, in the name of Benjamin Whichcote. In *Judaism*, pp. 53-54, Leibowitz attempts to wave away the challenge to his system posed by Abraham's discussion with God in Genesis 18 but without much success.

Does Jewish Tradition Recognize a Spirituality Independent of Halakhah?

BY: Danny Shulman

Last Shavu'ot, I attended a shi'ur in which the rabbi reported being asked the following question: is it acceptable to use psychedelic mushrooms to enhance *tefillah* (prayer)? Or, as it was reframed, does Judaism believe that creating feelings of transcendence and connection with God through "alternative" means qualifies as a legitimate form of spirituality and worship of Him? The speaker responded that, according to the Jewish tradition, spirituality must emerge from *shemirat ha-Halakhah* (halakhic observance) and *behirah hofshit* (free will); alternative methodologies are not acceptable.

To clarify this viewpoint, it seems that, unlike either Yeshayahu Leibowitz's or Halakhic Man's rigid legalistic viewpoints, which limit the totality of religious life to concrete halakhic observance, this perspective *does* believe that complete Jewish living goes beyond formal actions by entering into the subjective and personal world of emotions and feelings. Yet, despite maintaining that *avodat Hashem* (worship of God) enters the subjective, personal and intimate realm of Man's emotional life, this viewpoint insists that objective halakhic living must be the foundation of spirituality and religiously-significant emotional experiences. Spirituality, then, is really the handmaiden of mitsvot and only emerges secondarily in divine worship.

Is this the only acceptable approach to spirituality in Judaism? Does Judaism really believe that spirituality achieved independently of Halakhah is illegitimate? While the

how we understand the interplay between spirituality and mitsvot in the broader context of our *avodat Hashem*.ⁱ

The first relevant source is an enigmatic passage in *Massekhet Shabbat* dealing with

"Does Judaism really believe that spirituality achieved independently of Halakhah is illegitimate?"

multiple types of *simhah* (happiness).ⁱⁱ The Gemara begins by reconciling a contradiction in Ecclesiastes by distinguishing between two types of *simhah*: *simhah shel mitsvah* (happiness resulting from a mitsvah) and *simhah she-eino shel mitsvah* (happiness not resulting from a mitsvah). While Ecclesiastes praises *simhah shel mitsvah* because, ostensibly, the powerful spiritual emotions are associated with performance of a mitsvah and connecting with God, Ecclesiastes criticizes *simhah she-eino shel mitsvah* because it appears to lack those qualities. Although the Gemara is dealing with *simhah*, I assume *simhah* is synonymous with spirituality, as both refer to identical transcendent and euphoric emotional experiences. This source seems to be definitive support for the theory that Judaism believes spirituality must be associated with mitsvot and is otherwise meaningless.

However, in light of the Gemara's continuation, it seems that there is an added layer of complexity which must be addressed. The Gemara proceeds to cite 2 Kings 3:15, where Elisha requests a musical performance in

that man must be in an uplifted spiritual state to receive divine revelation. This exposition seems to indicate an extremely positive perspective on such spiritual experiences – even though they do not qualify as typical *kiyyumei*

mitsvah (fulfillments of mitsvot). Thus, it seems that the Gemara is teaching that *simhah she-eino shel mitsvah* is only meaningless and degenerate when it is limited to its natural state. When, however, it is channeled towards connecting with God, it can be the foundation of divine revelation.

In this light, we can now reanalyze our initial distinctions and better understand that there are really three types of *simhah* in the Gemara. On the one hand, the Gemara deals with the noble and wonderful *simhah shel mitsvah*, the mode of spirituality which integrates performance of a mitsvah with transcendent emotional feelings of connecting to God. In this vein, Rashi cites the example of *hakhnasat kallah* (providing funds for weddings) as a mitsvah which has direct associations with euphoric and transcendent emotions, in order to demonstrate what *simhah shel mitsvah* means.^v This, the Gemara believes, is the ideal type of spirituality.

On the other hand, the Gemara also deals with the meaningless and vacant *simhah she-eino shel mitsvah*. This type of spirituality, never transcending the status of being purposeless – "*eino shel mitsvah*" – is the kind of spirituality associated with hedonistic behavior. It involves achieving an intense feeling of bliss associated with extreme physical pleasure that is unredeemed and unhallowed. This type of spirituality is criticized in the Gemara because it is meaningless and limited to eliciting pleasant and enjoyable feelings.^{vi}

Finally, the Gemara presents the third model of spirituality – one which is channeled towards God. Inherently, the music Elisha listened to was unconnected to a mitsvah; it was a mundane action which he found spiritually uplifting. However, when he embraced the experience and used it to channel his emotions towards God, it became a religiously meaningful event. In fact, it was so significant that the Gemara used music as the example to teach the necessary preparatory mindset for experiencing divine revelation.

Along the same lines, there is also an im-

portant source in *Bereshit* which is relevant to our discussion. Before blessing Esav, Yitshak requested that he "prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessings."^{vii} This story reflects the same mentality – that an enlightened and uplifted emotional state achieved through mundane means can be used to encounter the Divine. In fact, Rabbeinu Bahya and Rabbeinu Nissim both connect this story to the Gemara in *Shabbat* and the related story of Elisha in 2 Kings mentioned above.^{viii} They explain that Yitshak requested the food to initiate a spiritual experience in order to prepare himself for an encounter with the Divine.^{ix}

In this light, it seems from these sources that there is legitimate religious value to spirituality that flows from sources which are independent of Halakhah. If Elisha and Yitshak utilized "natural" means of achieving a spiritual feeling before they communicated with God, it seems that the common man should be able to utilize and channel such mechanisms to try and achieve spiritual experiences as well. If we view Tanakh as our guide, the lesson of these stories seems to be that in the course of searching for spirituality and uplifting experiences, we can use means which, while of course not violating Halakhah,^x are not technically mitsvot, in order to reach beyond ourselves and try to rendezvous with the Infinite.

Finally, there is one last question that is relevant to this discussion: do we need a source in the tradition in order to legitimize spirituality? Undoubtedly, having a precedent in Tanakh or the Talmud helps bolster this attitude towards spirituality; but is it really needed? Can there be a wrong approach to spirituality if it is personal and subjective? Assuming we are working within the bounds of Halakhah, if someone finds something to be religiously fulfilling, can anyone deny the religious value of that? In fact, even if we accept the suggestion that the "ideal" approach to spirituality and connecting to God according to our tradition is the more traditional approach of keeping Halakhah and mitsvot, because of the complexities and proclivities of each individual, it seems difficult to suggest that his or her own mode of connecting with God would be illegitimate. In this vein, I am reminded of a fabulous quotation I heard from R. Moshe Taragin of Yeshivat Har Etzion some years ago (though I do not recall the context): "God is infinite; there must be an infinite number of ways to connect with Him."

"If Elisha and Yitshak utilized 'natural' means of achieving a spiritual feeling before they communicated with God, it seems that the common man should be able to utilize and channel such mechanisms to try and achieve spiritual experiences."

perspective which the rabbi adopted seems to be a legitimate traditional Jewish approach to spirituality, possible the ideal Jewish approach – is it the exclusive view? In suggesting an alternative perspective to Judaism's view of spirituality, the remainder of this article will analyze a fascinating Gemara on this topic, cite two relevant stories from Tanakh, and conclude with an open-ended question. This will help to challenge, question and clarify

order to allow him to prophesy: "Get me a musician;" as the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him." Expounding on this story, the Gemara teaches that "one cannot experience divine revelation in a depressed state [...] rather, only in a state of *simhah*."^{xiii} Thus, based on a verse dealing with the value-neutral *simhah* of music, which ostensibly should be defined as *simhah she-eino shel mitsvah*,^{xv} the Gemara teaches the universal principle

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However, because of the far more pressing considerations of Halakhah, this is wholly unacceptable in the Jewish tradition; Halakhah prevails, even when faced with a competing value, such as spirituality.

^{vii} Bereshit 27:4.

^{viii} Rabbeinu Bahya to Bereshit 27:5; Rabbeinu Nissim, *Derashot ha-Ran, Derashot Sheni va-Hamishi*.

^{ix} Alternatively, a number of commentators explain that Yitshak was offering Esav a merit so that he would deserve the blessings. See the commentaries of Seforno, Abravanel and Netsiv.

^x In light of the opening story, it must be noted that many consider drugs to be forbidden; see, for example, *Iggerot Moshe, Yoreh De'ah* 3:35. Nonetheless, the social reality we are faced with is one in which people use such substances; thus, encouraging the channeling of such experiences towards God seems to be the best available approach. However, it seems that the ideal scenario would more closely follow Elisha's example and use music, or something of that nature, to achieve an uplifted spiritual state.

ⁱ I want to make very clear that I am not condoning the use of drugs. I am merely analyzing a theoretical question to better understand Judaism. In this vein, spiritual experiences triggered by activities such as meditation, listening to or playing music, and exercise are all included within the purview of our analysis.

ⁱⁱ *Shabbat* 30b.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*.

^{iv} Interestingly, the Gemara does call this *simhah shel mitsvah*. However, Rabbeinu Hannanel, in both *Shabbat* and the parallel *sugya* in *Pesahim* 117a, leaves out "*shel mitsvah*." Also, Rashi to *Pesahim* 117a, s.v. "*Simhah shel mitsvah*," explains that the *mitsvah* is one of *hashra'at ha-Shekhinah*, which means that the *mitsvah* is an after-effect of the *simhah*, and not vice versa.

^v Rashi to *Shabbat* 30b, s.v. "*Simhah shel mitsvah*."

^{vi} That being said, it is possible that it is also a genuine, religiously spiritual experience.

On Bikinis and Earthquakes

BY: Reuven Rand

It was near the end of the *Kol Hamevaser* Shabbaton in Teaneck, New Jersey. The forty students who identified with the magazine or simply felt like going out for the Sabbath were congregated in the basement of Congregation Rinat Yisrael for a question and answer session with R. Jeremy Wieder, a rosh yeshivah at Yeshiva

Because of three [evil] things which prevailed there: idolatry, immorality [*gillui arayot*], bloodshed. [...] Immorality [prevailed] as it is written: 'Moreover the Lord said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and make a tinkling with their feet.' 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty,' i.e., they

“So why have we moved so far from the formulations of our forebears, to the extent that divine intervention is viewed by many as an impossibility?”

University. R. Wieder was responding to a set of prepared questions and brought up a recent news article.

“I just saw in the news that an imam blamed the Haiti earthquake on women dressing immodestly.ⁱ Does anyone here consider this a reasonable position?”

A grand total of zero hands were raised in response to R. Wieder's question.

What if the question had been different? What if the Sages of the Talmud had been under fire, rather than an Iranian cleric? Suppose a pulpit rabbi had stood up and posed the following question: “I read in the Talmud that twenty-four thousand students of Rebbe Akiva died for the sin of not sufficiently respecting one another.ⁱⁱ Does anyone in this room believe such a thing?” Would we raise our hands in support of the Talmud, however unintuitive its claim? Why, then, should we so quickly reject this poor Muslim prayer leader, when he says something so similar?ⁱⁱⁱ

There appears to be a startling disconnect between the Modern Orthodox worldview and the positions of its predecessors. As demonstrated by the show of hands in response to R. Wieder's question, Modern Orthodox Jews are remarkably unwilling to connect acts of God to actual divine retribution. But earthly reward and punishment have been prominent features of all forms of Judaism since its miraculous revelation at Sinai. For if there is one principle that remains constant and unquestioned from Genesis to Job, it is this: God acts. God brings floods and famines, Babylonians and wicked viziers, all to punish His people. Furthermore, the Talmud states:

“Why was the first Sanctuary destroyed?

used to walk with proud carriage. 'And wanton eyes,' i.e., they filled their eyes with kohl. 'Walking and mincing as they go,' i.e., they used to walk with the heel touching the toe. 'And make a tinkling with their feet,' R. Isaac said: They would take myrrh and balsam and place it in their shoes and when they came near the young men of Israel they would kick, causing the balsam to squirt at them and would thus cause the evil desire to enter them like an adder's poison.”^{iv}

Not only does God act, Rabbinic Judaism claimed to know why He acts. It certainly claimed to know what He detested, and breaches of sexual propriety were near the top of the list. So how did attributing misfortune to corruption and immorality become unacceptable?

The quintessential formulation of God's reward for good deeds and punishment of sins comes in Moses's speech to the Hebrews in Deuteronomy 11, part of which is immediately recognizable as the “*Ve-Hayah im shamo'a*” chapter of the *Shema*. In it, Moses details the repercussions of following the Lord or rejecting Him. The included promises of peace and prosperity troubled the Talmudic Sages, who debated whether God really rewards good deeds on Earth. In *Kiddushin* 39b, the Sages confront the problems of theodicy by claiming that God rewards the righteous in the afterlife, rather than on Earth. However, this rule is not universally applied; the Gemara admits that anyone who sets off to perform a good deed will be protected from unlikely injuries. Moreover, the Gemara contends that people are punished for sinning against God

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when it attempts to justify the death of a man by claiming that he had idolatrous thoughts. Throughout the Gemara's discussions, in *Kiddushin* and elsewhere, one thing is clear: God does possess the power to influence events on Earth and He makes use of that power. And, of course, we pray thrice daily for God to heal our wounds and bring forth fresh produce from the Earth, which presupposes God's ability to influence the physical world directly.

So why have we moved so far from the formulations of our forebears, to the extent that divine intervention is viewed by many as an impossibility? Much of this divergence can be explained by the decline of the "God of the Gaps" theology. Early religious people saw God's hand in bolts of lightning and other mysterious phenomena. As a modern society that has recognized that lightning, like other "supernatural" events, is merely a natural process, we are understandably wary of repeating the mistakes of disproved fundamentalists. Moreover, modern science leaves very little room for outside influence, so how can we attribute natural misfortunes to God? I know of two approaches to this question.

The first, advocated by Maimonides, is that God does not control nature but does influence human minds and can thereby affect who is in a position to be hurt by earthquakes and to what extent.^v However, as the cognitive sciences progress in their understanding of the human brain, I expect that this theory will be-

tational difficulty of problems), yet the very laws of our universe must lead to a solution. And though one misplaced stone or unintended injury during the course of history could ruin the endeavor, God must punish great sins with calamities of similar magnitudes.^{ix} Despite the difficulties with these two approaches, they seem to be the most plausible scientific frameworks for divine interference.⁸

Though clinging to a perspective of the universe that is admittedly difficult to reconcile with its physical laws cannot be an easy proposition, the alternative may be a non-starter. The moment a stock market crash, an earthquake or any personal misfortune can no longer serve as an impetus to reflect upon one's actions (to conduct a *heshbon ha-nefesh*, to use the Hebrew formulation), Judaism will lose a crucial bridge between religion and daily life that has sustained it for centuries. Concluding a long arc of history, in which the perception of God's influence on Earth gradually shrank to almost nothing, we will reject *hashgahah peratit* (divine providence) entirely and thereby expel God from our lives. It would be an ignoble end to a proud tradition and one that I expect most Orthodox Jews would rather stave off for as long as reason permits.

Modern Orthodox Jews may naturally shrink away from talking about divine punishment, because they associate such discussion

longer present to a significant degree in any sector of modern Jewry, even the most religious.^{xiii} If Orthodoxy takes this even further, and rejects the notion of a personal God in doctrine as well as experience, this, too, would be a tragedy.

In the Book of Jonah, an ever-present God asks: "Should I not have mercy upon Nineveh, that great city?"^{xiv} But how should we react to the modern Ninevehs of New Orleans, Haiti and Islamabad, where God's mercy simply was not enough? When the floodwaters surged through Pakistan to leave the land desolate, perhaps our first duty was to contact our aid agencies and see how we could help those who were spared. But our second duty, as religious people, must be to consider why God brings such calamities upon mankind and attempt to learn from them. I imagine R. Wieder would prefer that we learn our lessons from calamities brought about by factionalism and strife rather than tight clothing, and I would agree with him. But if we add our voices to the jeers that greeted the poor Iranian prayer leader that dared claim that God may punish immodesty, I fear it will come back to haunt us. For the next time a rabbi tries to attribute an event like the stock market crash of 2008, not to a lack of Congressional oversight or the overleveraging of Richard S. Fuld, but to the greed and avarice that characterized men like Bernard L. Madoff, he, too, may be jeered. But the greatest blow will not be to the preacher, but to a newly godless religion.

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“Modern Orthodox Jews may naturally shrink away from talking about divine punishment, because they associate such discussion with the angry, bigoted statements of men like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson.”

come harder to maintain – Artificial Intelligence may bury it.^{xvi} The other approach, based in part on Maimonides' theory of miracles,^{xvii} argues that God knew mankind's future from the time of Creation and built earthquakes and similar changes into the Earth itself (and timed them to go off) in order to punish mankind when appropriate. This theory must take account of the fact that changes propagate themselves. That is, if one man misplaces a set of keys, he may miss his plane and an important meeting. The cancelled meeting will change the schedules of a dozen other people who will then change others' lives as well. Hence, if God were to cause an earthquake, it would need to be carefully calibrated to affect every man on Earth in direct proportion to his merits. This problem is obviously more complex than virtually any studied by complexity theorists (who analyze the compu-

with the angry, bigoted statements of men like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson.^{xviii} When R. Ovadia Yosef famously proclaimed that the six million victims of the Holocaust were *gilgulim*, or reincarnations, of earlier sinners, many Jews were justifiably outraged.^{xix} Though he was talking about the beloved parents and siblings of Jews still living that had died gruesome deaths, he somehow found it within him to label them the reincarnated thugs, murderers and rapists of previous generations. But for all of R. Yosef's insensitivity, we cannot ignore the Holocaust from a theological perspective. For generations, we attributed the tragedies that befell us to our sins and our Exile to God's retribution; shall we now treat the Holocaust as simply a chance of fate? Dr. Haym Soloveitchik claimed that, after the Holocaust, "it [is] safe to say that the perception of God as a daily, natural force is no

ited to grant God many of the powers He is assumed to have. For example, if you follow this approach of Maimonides, the yearly prayer for God to bring down rain would seem to be an exercise in futility.

^{xviii} Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* II:29.

^{ix} Such a flaw would presumably require a fundamental working of the laws of physics, assuming that God has not directly interfered with its laws since the Big Bang. However, a proponent of this theory might respond that there is no upper bound to the number of theoretical substructures for universes; hence, God could view problems and their solutions until He produced the works of Shakespeare, as it were. We may also offer that God's judgment need not be exact and that some wrongs may be righted in the World to Come (as per the Talmud), but this does little to change the nature of the dilemma. If a more rigorous mathematical analysis of the problem were possible, I would like to see it.

^x A third formulation rests upon the principle of quantum indeterminacy, which contends that God can influence the incalculable position of elementary particles and thereby influence events on Earth. (This principle is also invoked in order to justify free will.) I do not know of any actual physical model for the propagation of this influence and therefore cannot judge whether it is feasible or not.

^{xii} It goes without saying that they would be repulsed by the recent actions of the Westboro Baptist Church, which picketed the funerals of fallen soldiers, blaming their deaths on homosexuality within the military. The distinction between preaching that we as a society have sinned and engaging in the verbal abuse of individuals (the biblically proscribed *ona'at devarim* – see *Bava Metsi'a* 58b) should be clear.

^{xiii} Jack Katzenell, "Rabbi Says Holocaust Victims were Reincarnations of Sinners," *The Independent* (August 6, 2000), available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/rabbi-says-holocaust-victims-were-reincarnations-of-sinners-711547.html>.

^{xivii} Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition* 28,4 (1994): 64-130.

^{xiv} Jonah 4:11.

^{ix}Iranian Cleric Blames Quakes on Promiscuous Women," *BBC News* (April 20, 2010), available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8631775.stm>.

^{ix}*Yevamot* 62b.

^xI should note that it is possible to construe R. Wieder's challenge in an entirely different light. He may have objected that the prayer leader's statement served to reinforce the Iranian patriarchy by denigrating women and blaming them for natural disasters. However, none of the men and women with whom I talked after the session offered this as their rationale for rejecting the prayer leader, objecting to his statement on broader grounds. It is these grounds that I wish to address.

^{xi}*Yoma* 9b, Soncino translation.

^{xii}Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III:17.

^{xiii}It should be noted that Judaism may require a similar formulation in any case, in order to protect the notion of free will, so we may well accept Maimonides' solution in order to kill two birds with one divinely foreordained stone.

^{xiv}Maimonides' approach also proves too lim-

From Hasidut to “Avatar”

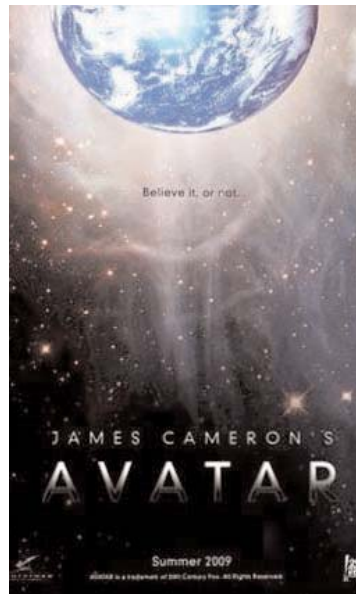
BY: Adam Hertzberg

In the film “Avatar,” written and directed by James Cameron, we are introduced to a species of humanoids called Na’vi who inhabit the planet Pandora. We are introduced to them through the eyes of avatars, which have human minds but are contained in Na’vi bodies. The avatars are sent to Pandora by a company looking to mine a mineral called “unobtainium” and are instructed to infiltrate the Omatiyaya tribe of Na’vi to learn about their lifestyle, as well as to instruct them in the ways of humans and teach them the English language as well as human culture. Through the lens of one avatar, Jake Sully, who becomes ensconced in the habitat of these creatures, the audience learns much about the culture, lifestyle and religion of the Na’vi. When watching the film, one familiar with Hasidic ideas cannot help but see the similarities between the philosophical underpinnings of the religion of the Na’vi and mystical strains of Judaism, especially Hasidut.ⁱ As R. Benjamin Blech, a Professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University and author of a number of books, put it, “I had the feeling that if Cameron never went to Hebrew school he surely had to discuss his work with a rabbi. The connections with Torah, Midrash, and Hebrew words are just too frequent and striking to be accidental.”ⁱⁱ What is most striking is the resemblance between their respective theological beliefs as well as their connection with the natural world.

One of the most pervasive themes in the movie is the connection between the Na’vi and their deity, Eywah. As one of the main characters explains, Eywah is “their deity, their goddess made up of all living things. Everything they know.” Their theology appears to be one of pantheism. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “pantheism” is defined as “the belief or doctrine that God and the Universe are identical; the doctrine that God is everything and everything is God.”ⁱⁱⁱ This philosophy believes that God and the world are one, that God does not exist outside this world.

However, there are at least two characteristics of their faith that would indicate that the Na’vi may not believe in pantheism. Firstly, in general, pantheism is not limited to just living things. It usually includes the belief that *everything* is God, including inanimate objects. The Na’vi practice a more naturalistic form of pantheism, believing, namely, that God consists of all living things.

Additionally, one could see the theology of the Na’vi as more similar to paganism. Throughout the film, the characters often say that they are acting for the sake of Eywah and pray to Eywah with the hope of efficacy. According to the principles of pantheism, however, it seems that prayer should not be efficacious, for the course of life is just the



natural world of God unfolding; God cannot intervene in world affairs and disrupt the progress of nature, for God is one with nature.

Still, there is a scene in the movie that seems to suggest that the theology of the Na’vi is most similar to pantheism. Towards the end of the film, Jake Sully, as an avatar, is preparing for a battle between the humans and the Na’vi. He realizes how desperate the situation of the Na’vi is and goes to pray at the Tree of Souls, the central place of worship for the Na’vi. As he finishes his prayer, imploring Eywah to help them, Neytiri, Jake’s Na’vi mate in the world of Pandora, approaches him and tells him that the will of Eywah will happen regardless. She says, “Our Great Mother does not take sides. She protects only the balance of life.” This is like Baruch Spinoza’s pantheism, according to which the events of nature are just a manifestation of God unfolding. As Matthew J. Milliner of the Witherspoon Institute,^{iv} a graduate student studying Art History at Princeton University, puts it, “When the film’s main character, Jake Sully, implores

divine assistance, he does not pray *to* a tree. He prays, almost sacramentally, *through* a tree to the deity.”^v

“Avatar’s” pantheistic elements have been the talk of many media in the last year. Ross Douthat of *The New York Times* says, “‘Avatar’ is Cameron’s long apologia for pantheism – a faith that equates God with Nature.”^{vi} Milliner, on the other hand, points out that there is more theism in the movie than Douthat gives it credit for. He notes that the deity, Eywah, does seem to intervene in the end.^{vii} However, one could posit that the divine intervention was naturalistic, just the history of the world unfolding, consistent with pantheism.

Another journalist, Tam Hunt, on the other hand, maintains that the religion depicted in “Avatar” is more of a panentheistic religion. As he defines it, “Panentheism holds that the universe is within God but not identical with God.”^{viii} This is to say that the world exists within God, but God’s existence is not limited to the world. He understands Eywah in “Avatar” as a network of energy inhabiting the world that the Na’vi believe they can access. Hunt sees Eywah as an allusion to Hinduism and its belief in the divine entity, called “Brahman,” which, in his words, “is the source of all things.” As a result of the similarity between Eywah and Brahman, Hunt theorizes that the Na’vi theology is in fact panentheistic, just like Hinduism. He said, “‘Avatar’ does not really describe pantheism; rather, it describes a panentheistic way of life, made very real for its

resembles Hasidut. He says that the Na’vi philosophy “is a bit of pantheism, a bit of nature mysticism and a surprising dash of monotheism, as well. In other words, it’s Kabbalah, as filtered through the Hasidism of the 19th century and the neo-Hasidism of the 20th and 21st.”^{ix}

There has been much uncertainty as to the nature of the theology of Jewish mysticism, and specifically of Hasidut, stemming from the fact that Hasidic literature can be read in different ways. While some understand it to express a pantheistic theology, others view it as panentheistic material. For instance, there is a parable found in the *Degel Mahaneh Efrayim*, written by the Hasidic master R. Moshe Hayyim Efrayim of Sudilkov, that allows for both possible readings of Hasidut.^{xiv} The parable is about a king who sets up his palace in such a way that there are many barriers one needs to pass in order to see him, and behind each barrier there are scattered treasures. Some people are immediately deterred by the barriers. Others pass a number of barriers, collect some treasure and then return to where they came from. But the son of the king, who desires to see his father, will pass through all of the barriers in order to do so. So, too, God exists in this world, as if beyond a number of barriers that block access to Him. Some will not even attempt to see Him; others will attempt, but will be distracted by everything else in this world and lose sight of Him. But he who is truly God’s son desires to see Him, so he will do whatever it takes to do so. It is clear that this para-

“The question as to whether Hasidut is a pantheistic or panentheistic philosophy is similar to the debate over the nature of the theology found in Avatar.”

people due to the actual physical connections the Na’vi enjoy with Eywah.”^x

The current pope, Benedict XVI, was quoted as referring to the film, not as pantheistic or panentheistic, but as portraying “neo-paganism,” warning against turning nature into a “new divinity.”^x Likewise, John Podhoretz of *The Weekly Standard* criticized the religion of the Na’vi as “mindless worship” and “pagan rituals.”^{xi} R. Blech, in his article, calls the Na’vi “pagans” as well.^{xii}

Where does Hasidut fall in this picture? Jay Michaelson, of *The Huffington Post*, believes that the religion portrayed in the film

ble emphasizes the extreme immanence of God in this world. It is not entirely clear, though, whether the parable implies that God only exists in this world, or, on the other hand, that God exists in this world but beyond as well. What is certain, however, is that God can be found in the physical world, whether in the model of pantheism or of panentheism.

The question as to whether Hasidut is a pantheistic or panentheistic philosophy is similar to the debate over the nature of the theology found in “Avatar.” While the prevailing opinion is that the theology of the

Na'vi is pantheistic, or possibly pagan, there are those who maintain that it follows more of a panentheistic philosophy. On the other

scholar of Jewish mysticism and Hasidut, understands the connection between God and this world to be a much deeper one, more

“This accordingly, yields a strong attentiveness to the creations of God and the environment in which one finds. In this way, Green portrays Hasidut as an eco-friendly religion, very similar to the Na’vi religion in Avatar.”

hand, most consider Hasidut to be more likely a pantheistic ideology, due to the fact that a strictly pantheistic philosophy is religiously troubling, but, at the same time, there are those who assert that it comes closer to pantheism. As such, Hasidut and Na'vi theology are similar in that they both flirt between the lines of pantheism and panentheism, while possibly finding themselves on different sides of the spectrum.

What follows from a philosophy of pantheism or panentheism, for the Na'vi, is a strong connection with nature. The Na'vi view their planet Pandora as one network of energy flowing through all forms of life, and their deity, Eywah, is, as one of the humans studying them puts it, the “network of energy that flows through all living things.” The Na'vi care very much about all of the creatures of the forest and are described by the humans as having a “deep connection” with them. They live in harmony with the animals and vegetation of the forest, trying not to disturb the equilibrium of nature. At one point during his training, Jake Sully must kill one of the animals in the forest. He prefaces his action by saying to the animal, “I see you and thank you. Your spirit belongs to Ewyah.” Here, he acknowledges the eternal connection of all living things through Ewyah and therefore thanks the being that he is killing in recognition that although the body will be no longer, the spirit will remain as part of the network of energy. This conscientiousness fosters an extremely environmentalist society.

While Hasidut has similar notions of a connection to nature, it differs in its overall philosophy. Elliot R. Wolfson, the Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University, describes Kabbalah and Hasidut as belief systems that understand this world as mirroring the world of the Divine, in a Platonic type of way.^{xv} Hence, while such a theology does not ascribe any divinity to this world, per se, it establishes that this world is created as a model of the divine world.

However, Arthur Green, an educator and

similar to the theology of the Na'vi. He says, “The understanding that God is the innermost reality of all that is, and that God and the universe are related not primarily as Creator and creature, but as a deep structure and surface, is key to the Judaism of the future.”^{xvi} Furthermore, he thinks that Kabbalah and Hasidut provide that connection. He notes that Kabbalah and Hasidut have become more appealing in recent years, for people have become more environmentally conscious in the last few decades and are looking for a religious basis for their newfound conscientiousness. Green discusses the process of Creation as God transfusing Himself into his creations. He speaks of the letters of the Tetragrammaton transforming

“As such, Hasidut and Na’vi theology are similar in that they flirt between the lines of pantheism and panentheism, while possibly finding themselves on different sides of the spectrum.”

into the word “*havayah*” (“being”), or God becoming the beings that He formed. In this way, Green believes that Kabbalah and Hasidut represent the idea that this world is divine and contains God in it. This, accordingly, leads to a strong attentiveness to one’s environment, which is the manifestation of God in this world. Although Man is a higher form of being than all other creations, each creature embodies the life-energy and hence the presence of the One, and even though other creations are at Man’s disposal to use, “we still seek a life of harmony and balance with them.”^{xvii} Hasidut represents the idea of God’s manifestation in this world. This world is divine and contains God in it. This, accordingly, yields a strong attentiveness to the creations of God and the environment in which one finds oneself. In this way, Green portrays Hasidut as an eco-friendly belief system, very similar to the Na’vi religion in

“Avatar.”

What can be seen from this discussion is a close resemblance in theological outlook between the culture set forth in the movie “Avatar” and the philosophy of mystical Judaism, and specifically Hasidut. They are similar in their theological outlook. Both present a strong theology of divine immanence and dance between the lines of pantheism and panentheism, stressing a strong connection to nature due to its divine quality and, as a result, according value to nature and life in this world.

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ⁱ Mystical Judaism refers to the general category of Judaism that deals with more mystical ideas, including Kabbalah. Hasidut refers to the specific ideology of mystical Judaism that was founded by the Ba’al Shem Tov and his followers.

ⁱⁱ Benjamin Blech, “Avatar and the Jews,” *Aish* (February 6, 2010), available at: <http://www.aish.com/j/as/83524437.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Pantheism,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheism#cite_ref-0.

^{iv} “The Witherspoon Institute is an independent research center that works to enhance public understanding of the moral foundations of free and democratic societies. Located in Princeton, New Jersey, the Institute promotes the application of fundamental principles of republican government and ordered liberty to contemporary problems through a variety of research and educational ventures.” Source: <http://www.winst.org/index.php>.

^v Matthew J. Milliner, “Avatar and its Conservative Critics,” *Public Discourse* (January 12, 2010), available at: <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2010/01/1095>.

^{vi} Ross Douthat, “Heaven and Nature,” *The New York Times* (December 21, 2009), available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/21/opinion/21douthat1.html?_r=1.

^{vii} Milliner, “Avatar and its Conservative Critics.”

^{viii} Tam Hunt, “‘Avatar,’ Blue Skin and the Ground of Being,” *NoozHawk* (January 16, 2010), available at: http://www.noozhawk.com/local_news/article/011610_tam_hunt/.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x “Vatican Critical of Avatar’s spiritual message,” *CBC News* (January 12, 2010), available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/film/story/2010/01/12/avatar-vatican.html>.

^{xi} John Podhoretz, “Avatarocious,” *The Weekly Standard* (December 28, 2009), available at: <http://weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/017/350fozta.asp?pg=1>.

^{xiii} Blech, “Avatar and the Jews.”

^{xiii} Jay Michaelson, “The Meaning of Avatar: Everything is God (A Response to Ross Douthat and Other Naysayers of ‘Pantheism’),” *The Huffington Post* (December 22, 2009), available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-michaelson/the-meaning-of-avatar-ave_b_400912.html.

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^{xiv} Based on a classroom discussion with Dr. Jonathan Dauber, Professor of Jewish Philosophy at Yeshiva University (Spring 2010).

^{xv} Elliot R. Wolfson, “Mirror of Nature Reflected in the Symbolism of Medieval Kabbalah,” in Hava Tirosh-Samuels (ed.), *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 305-331.

^{xvi} Arthur Green, “A Kabbalah for the Environmental Age,” in *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed World*, pp. 3-15.

^{xvii} Ibid.

Korbanot, Kapparot, and What Keeps Us Compassionate

BY: Kaitlyn Respler

Towards the beginning of our early childhood education, we were probably taught the important halakhah of making sure our pets are fed before sitting down to a meal ourselves. As a kindergartener, I was

force an ox and a donkey to thresh together.^x Ibn Ezra comments that the reason we do not allow an ox and a donkey to thresh together is because it will be unfair to the donkey, which is visibly weaker than the ox.^{xi} Even with respect to *Hilkhot Shabbat*, we are lenient when it comes to taking care of animals.^{xii} In short,

possible for him suddenly to discontinue everything to which he has been accustomed.^{xiii} In order to keep the faith of the people and allow them to serve a new deity with some semblance of convention, God commanded sacrificial worship but set severe limitations so that the people would remain faithful to Him. According to Rambam, worship based on *korbanot* is not a *le-ka-tehillah* (ideal) situation, and it will not be necessary when the Jewish People are less heavily influenced by the practices of other religions. The Midrash in *Vayikra Rabbah* supports such an idea, claiming that in the future, all sacrifices, besides for the thanksgiving sacrifice, will be abandoned.^{xv} R. Avraham Yitshak ha-Kohen Kook takes an approach similar to that of Rambam and the Midrash in his commentary on the *siddur*, *Olat Re'iyah*, stating that in the days of Mashiah, there will no longer be animal sacrifice but only sacrifices of wheat or wine.^{xvi} He also believes that it is ideal to maintain a vegetarian diet, again reflecting his

Kippur this year, Israel's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) began its annual outcry against this traditional practice. R. Shlomo Aviner, head of Jerusalem's right-wing Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim and community rabbi of Beit El, joined the SPCA's cause this year and even went so far as to supply the movement with a religious declaration against the practice of using chickens for *kapparot*. The article reported R. Aviner as stating, "Because this is not a binding obligation but a custom, in light of problems related to kashrut and the suffering of animals, and given the edicts of the aforementioned rabbis, a recommendation must be made to favor performing kaparot through money, by performing the great mitzvah of providing for the needy."

Besides for R. Aviner, many other rabbis have written against this practice of *kapparot*. R. Yosef Karo writes about *kapparot* that "*yesh limnoa ha-minhag*" – "it is better to prevent this practice."^{xvii} He also quotes from Ramban and Rashba, who both completely op-

"[T]he many laws mentioned here are all catered to the needs, emotional and physical, of the animals involved"

extremely *makpid* (strict) on this halakhah and always made sure to sprinkle a few flecks of goldfish food into my fish tank before having dinner. When I was a few years older, and slightly wiser, I began to contemplate the extreme sensitivity that the Torah displays towards animals, besides for the elementary example I remember from kindergarten, for Judaism prides itself on the nation-wide feeling of *rahamanut* (pity) that exists amongst our people.ⁱ

Our halakhic system reflects this Jewish character trait and embodies the Torah's sensitivity to animals. For instance, the Torah promises long life to whoever shoos away the mother bird before taking her eggs or chicks from her nest so that the mother bird does not have to painfully witness her children being taken away from her.ⁱⁱ We are also forbidden to eat a limb from an animal without killing it first.ⁱⁱⁱ This halakhah is regarded with such gravity that it is not only included in our long list of 613 mitzvot from the Torah, but it is also counted among the *sheva mitsvot Benei Noah* (seven Noahide laws).^{iv} Even our ritual slaughter laws force us to check the knife used in order to guarantee that it is as sharp as possible so that it will cause immediate death and the animal will feel as little pain as possible.^v

The Mishnah in *Hullin* goes as far as to name all the types of knives and saws that cannot be used because they cause a lag between the time the knife cuts the animal's neck and the time the animal dies.^{vi} We are also commanded not to kill a parent animal and its child on the same day.^{vii} Rambam explains that this is prohibited because

"the pain of animals under such circumstances is very great. There is no difference in this case between the pain of people and the pain of other living beings, since the love and the tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning, but by feeling, and this faculty exists not only in people but in most living things."^{viii}

Even when it comes to harvesting our fields, we are given strict commandments on the proper way to treat the animals working for us. We are commanded not to muzzle an ox as it threshes,^{ix} and we are instructed not to

the many laws mentioned here are all catered to the needs, emotional and physical, of the animals involved.

Rahamanut, however, seems to be lacking when it comes to the ritual sacrificial practices of the Beit ha-Mikdash. The entire idea of *korbanot* (sacrifices) seems to be in direct opposition to the sensitivity towards animals that the Torah expresses in other instances. Besides for the overarching idea of killing innocent animals as a means of serving God, the actual practices carried out before offering the animal seem to be extraneously inhumane. The *korban* was slaughtered according to the laws of *shehitah* (ritual slaughter), but the blood was then extracted and sprinkled on the *Mizbeah* (Altar). Following the sprinkling, the remaining blood was poured out at the base of the *Mizbeah*, and the animal was then skinned and cut up before being offered. The steps taken after killing the animal seem to be overly insensitive and without apparent significance to justify them.

Rambam addresses the idea of future *korbanot* in *Guide for the Perplexed*.^{xiii} He first notes the conceptual difference between two types of service of God: prayer and sacrifice. While prayer is encouraged in every facet of life and for every single person, sacrificial worship is limited to the Kohanim in the Beit ha-Mikdash and to specific times and purposes. According to Rambam, God com-

"The entire idea of korbanot (sacrifices) seems to be in direct opposition to the sensitivity towards animals that the Torah expresses in other instances"

manded that we bring *korbanot* to serve Him because when we were taken out of Egypt, we were entrenched in a culture that was centered around the sacrificial worship of pagan gods. He explains that "[i]t is, namely, impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other: it is therefore according to the nature of man im-

sensitivity towards animals.^{xvii}

Similar to sacrifices, the practice of modern-day *kapparot*, of transferring our sins onto a chicken, has a similar tinge of inhumanity. *Kapparot* are believed to help achieve repentance for our sins before being judged on Yom Kippur. By transferring our sins onto an animal and then slaughtering it, we are absolving ourselves of sin in the hopes of being guaranteed a sweet, healthy New Year. Many rabbis have spoken out against the pre-Yom Kippur practice of waving chickens over our heads and then watching as they

pose the custom.^{xvii} Ramban apparently declared the practice of *kapparot* prohibited because it resembles *darkhei ha-Emori*, Gentile practices, even if it is not actual idol worship. While the *Tur* quotes Ramban's opinion,^{xviii} we do not have the original source the works of Ramban available today. However, we do still have Rashba's comments on *kapparot*.^{xix} He explains the process of the custom, which involves swinging a rooster over a young boy's head, beheading the bird, and then hanging its head over the doorway as a sign that the practice was completed. Rashba declares this *darkhei ha-Emori* because of its traces of superstition and claims that he successfully had the minhag eradicated in his city. However, he adds that since *Hakhmei Ashkenaz* (the Torah scholars of Ashkenaz) practiced and endorsed this minhag, he would refrain from declaring the *shehitah* of the rooster to be invalid.

The practice of *kapparot*, which has less halakhic significance since it is merely a minhag and can be performed in more than one way, calls for some kind of reform. In my opinion, a practice which is so inhumane and does not have strong roots in halakhic literature does not need to take place. Although doing *kapparot* with money instead of a chicken does not give that same warm and fuzzy feeling that is experienced when one transfers his sins onto something else, the

are slaughtered. There has been a proposition to revert back to the older practice of using money for *kapparot* instead of chickens as the object that accepts our sins.^{xviii}

The most recent example of outrage over *kapparot* was reported in the *Haaretz* newspaper just a few weeks ago.^{xix} Right before Yom

Creation and Evolution: Toward a Methodology of Addressing Challenges to Faith

BY: Ariel Caplan

“The conflict between ‘religion’ and ‘evolution’ has outlived its usefulness and it is high time it was allowed a quiet demise. [...] We must learn to lose our fear of evolution.”ⁱⁱ

The acceptance of evolution as the best explanation for the diversification of biological beings has been hotly debated, in terms of both fact and educational practice, since the publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* in 1859. In the United States, the war continues in personal, communal, and legal settings. While rational arguments are often advanced, the underlying motivation behind the arguments is clear: those opposing the acceptance and teaching of evolution have almost invariably concluded that it is false because it contradicts the Creation story offered by the Torah, the fundamental source of religious insight on the topic of the origins of life for the most powerful and populous religions in the country.

The believing Jew cannot close his or her eyes and ears to the issue, for at least two reasons. One is practical. Namely, evolution is prevalent in many parts of daily life. Anyone who has taken antibiotics for a ten-day period, received an annual flu shot, or interacted with a domesticated or selectively bred animal or plant has encountered firsthand the products of evolution. Any attempt to reject evolutionary theory must either explain the emergence of new forms of life in some other way or else risk undermining much of modern medicine and agriculture.ⁱⁱⁱ

The second consideration is educational. In the current educational model of yeshivah day schools, students are taught the story of Creation at a young age, generally according to a strictly literal reading of the Torah, perhaps with some slight additions from Midrashim. Simultaneously, they are surrounded by museums and media which assume that the universe is billions of years old, and that all beings stem from lower life forms; these ideas are eventually presented as facts in high school Biology classes, if not earlier. The contradiction between the competing histories is given at best scant attention; at worst, it is ignored entirely. Students often walk away either rejecting a fundamental unifying theme in Biology or, incomparably worse, losing respect for Torah as a source of any sort of truth.

The first issue is, I believe, less pressing, as realistically one can act as if something is true, even if he or she does not actually be-

lieve it to be so. For example, the Israeli zealots who banned yogurt featuring pictures of dinosaurs (which they assume cannot have existed, despite modern scientific claims)ⁱⁱⁱ presumably still take their medications as prescribed by doctors. However, the educational issue is more severe, particularly for anyone who believes in serious engagement with both Torah and secular studies. Unless we create

Attitude 1: Rejectionism

The two approaches outlined in this section are, in a sense, at opposite ends of the spectrum, though they both take one historical reconstruction as true and find a way to invalidate the other.

The first approach, offered by R. Avigdor Miller in several books, accepts the Torah as

“Unless we create a science-free enclave, we cannot shield our children from evolution, nor do we necessarily want to do so.”

a science-free enclave, we cannot shield our children from evolution, nor do we necessarily want to do so. Hiding the Torah’s Creation narrative is an obvious impossibility. So we must tackle the contradiction of histories head-on.

How this is to be done is a serious question, and it is one which extends far beyond the local issue. Each of us deals with various challenges to our faith: the Orthodox biologist worries about evolution and the post-Flood presence of flora and fauna in the Americas and Australia; the *frum* physicist is troubled by the Big Bang Theory and mechanistic determinism; the religious textually-adept and academically-inclined literati fret over Biblical Criticism; the historian wonders about the lack of evidence for specific biblical events; the humanist will be torn by the classic question of why bad things happen to good people; etc.^{iv} This obviously constitutes no more than a partial list, but it reflects an uncomfortable truth that we must acknowledge for the benefit of our own spiritual health: religious belief does not come easily, and many objections can be raised against the fundamentals of our faith. Since challenges to faith are so numerous, it is essential to develop a methodology for handling questions. Therefore, I would like to survey the responses that the Jewish world has developed to the problem of evolution and Creation and, through this analysis, bring to light fruitful points of contemplation that can be used in other situations, whether we find the answers satisfying in the local context or not. To that end, I have selected a representative sample,^v each representing a category of responses that are offered, so as to clarify the overall picture that emerges. I can only hope that the principles developed herein will aid the reader in developing his or her own methodology for personal, interpersonal, parental, and educational use.

literal truth and rejects as false any apparent contradiction thereto. In rancorous rhetorical style, R. Miller spends one chapter of *Sing, You Righteous* dismantling the scientific establishment and portraying scientists as a group characterized by an “effort to ignore the Creator.”^{vi} Capitalizing on cases where scientists committed crimes, R. Miller insists that scientists “disbelieve in Free Will and the concomitant concept of right and wrong.”^{vii} In the following chapter, R. Miller objects to scientific methods of dating the universe and the fossils which have been found. He also points to highly-trumpeted scientific evidence which was later found to be questionable or even falsified. R. Miller concludes that “evolution has become a religion” accepted to excuse refusing “to acknowledge the open evidence that the Creator made the Universe.”^{viii} As proof against evolution, R. Miller notes the existence of biological systems that seem irreducibly complex and could not have evolved through random mutations. Hence, R. Miller confidently asserts, “Just as the teachings of Aristotle, which formerly were considered the acme of scientific knowledge, have been revealed as worthless, so will the theories of evolution and of the age of the world someday be revealed as rubbish.”^{ix}

R. Miller’s declarations are more than questionable. Regarding his accusations of the un-Godliness of the scientific community, we may cite a 2007 poll indicating that among natural scientists, 33% believe in a higher power.^x While atheists and agnostics dominate, believers certainly form a significant percentage of the scientific community. Regarding his objections to the methods used, it is difficult to see anything more than overzealous rhetoric in R. Miller’s arguments. As for the lack of evidence, we may well note that new studies have brought the ball firmly into evolution’s court. Modern molecular biology techniques have shown that organisms

merit from giving *tsedakah* would seem to compensate for that missing feeling, especially right before entering the Day of Judgment.

This type of extreme sensitivity to animals is not a simple matter that should be disregarded. We know that when Eliezer, Avraham’s servant, was choosing a suitable mate for Yitshak, the attribute of Rivkah that caught his attention most was her extreme awareness of the needs of his camels and the fact that she drew water for them in addition to drawing water for him. Furthermore, *Shemot Rabbah* comments that Ya’akov Avinu, Moshe Rabbeinu and David ha-Melekh developed their effective leadership traits by being shepherds.^{xiv} It seems that shepherding develops feelings of sensitivity for other creatures. This is a necessary attribute for a quality leader of the Jewish People, for an individual who cares for animals with sensitivity will act similarly towards his fellow man. It seems that the idea of *rahamanut* that my kindergarten teacher had been trying to instill in my classmates and me was not just a simple message to teach young children, but a lesson that we should all internalize and channel towards planting the seeds of leadership within ourselves as individuals and as a nation.

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ⁱYevamot 79a.
ⁱⁱDevarim 22:6-7, as well as Rambam’s explanation in *Guide for the Perplexed* III:48.
ⁱⁱⁱBereshit 9:4.
^{iv}Sanhedrin 56a.
^vHullin 9a.
^{vi}Ibid. 1:2.
^{vii}Vayikra 22:28.
^{viii}Guide for the Perplexed ibid.
^{ix}Devarim 25:4.
^xIbid. 22:10.
^{xi}Ibn Ezra’s commentary to ibid.
^{xii}Shabbat 128b.
^{xiii}Guide for the Perplexed III:32.
^{xiv}Ibid.
^{xv}Vayikra Rabbah 9:7.
^{xvi}R. Avraham Yitshak ha-Kohen Kook, *Olat Re’iyyah* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1962), p. 492.
^{xvii}Idem, “Hazon ha-Tsimhonut ve-ha-Shalom,” chapter 3.
^{xviii}Mishnah Berurah, *Orah Hayyim* 605.
^{xix}Yair Ettinger, “Leading Rabbi Joins Animal Rights Group’s Campaign Against Kaparot,” *Haaretz* (September 9, 2010), available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/leading-rabbi-joins-animal-rights-group-s-campaign-against-kaparot-1.313459>.
^{xx}Shulhan Arukh, *Orah Hayyim* 605.
^{xxi}Beit Yosef to *Tur*, *Orah Hayyim* 605.
^{xxii}*Tur*, *Orah Hayyim* 605.
^{xxiii}Teshuvot ha-Rashba, responsum 395.
^{xxiv}Shemot Rabbah 2:2.

can be hierarchically classified based on both coding and non-coding sections of DNA in a manner consistent with evolutionary theory. Other techniques, new and old, have similarly been brought to bear to provide ever-stronger evidence for evolution.^{xi}

All this said, perhaps the greatest objection to R. Miller's approach is that it makes Torah seem ridiculous and outdated. As more evidence is adduced, adherents of R. Miller's position must seriously question whether sticking to their guns on this issue might be at best unproductive, and at worst a *hillul Hashem* (desecration of God's Name).

The opposite approach is taken by RIETS Rosh Yeshiva R. Jeremy Wieder in a lecture entitled, "Non-Literal Interpretation of Scripture in the Jewish Tradition."^{xii} R. Wieder states that we can accept the Torah's presentation of Creation as non-historical truth, meaning that it is meant to convey moral lessons rather than a factual account of the origins of the world. Of course, without proper backing in intellectual Jewish history, this view would be unacceptable. However, R. Wieder does provide such support in the form of several comments from the Geonic and Rishonic periods, including citations from R. Sa'adya Ga'on's *Emunot ve-De'ot*,^{xiii} Rambam's *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*,^{xiv} and a *teshuvah* of Rashba.^{xv} Each source establishes that its author would be willing to explain verses non-literally to accord with modern knowledge or observations if the new explanation would not contradict Halakha or fundamentals of faith.^{xvi}

R. Wieder's interpretation and application of sources leaves much room for argument. The major problem is that the sources cited refer to non-literal interpretation of verses, not outright rejection of verses as telling a story that never happened. For example, Rambam makes it clear that the question is whether to interpret verses literally or as allusions to the real truth, similar to the interpretation of anthropomorphisms as metaphorical. This is a far cry from assuming that a story is told for pedagogic purposes but is not, in any sense, a reflection of history. The jump is not completely illogical, but the *hiddush* (innovation) entailed in going this far is readily apparent.^{xvii}

Attitude 2: Revisionism

This section, like the last, will outline two approaches that are opposite in direction. The common denominator is that each explanation accepts both sides as having valid a basis, but revises one of the sides to bring it in line with the other.

The first approach is that of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, expressed in a letter sent to a scientifically-inclined questioner in 1961.^{xviii} Much of the letter rings with R. Miller's skepticism; the Rebbe boldly states, "If you are still troubled by the theory of evo-

lution, I can tell you without fear of contradiction that it has not a shred of evidence to support it." However, there is a unique element introduced in the Rebbe's treatment. Noting that evidence for evolution is based on extrapolation (not interpolation) from a brief (on an evolutionary time-scale) period of observation and ignores potential external influences, the Rebbe argues that, on scientific grounds, there are fundamental problems with the theory. The Rebbe also offers two explanations for the existence of fossils: either they were formed recently in unknown extreme circumstances, or "G-d created ready fossils [...] without any evolutionary process." Anticipating the question of why God would bother creating fossils, the Rebbe counters that "The question, Why create a fossil? is no more valid than the question, Why create an atom?"

Certainly, the Rebbe is unwilling to accept the consensus of the scientific community. Significantly, however, he does not malign scientists or accuse them of immoral motivations. In fact, he indicates respect for the scientific method and acknowledges that "[s]cience cannot operate except by accepting certain working theories or hypotheses, even if they cannot be verified." Even his objections work within the framework of science. Hence, the Rebbe's approach is best described as an attempt to accept the literal understanding of the Torah and, while accepting the scientific evidence as valid, revise its interpretation to match the Torah view.^{xix}

The Rebbe's reasoning is questionable. As mentioned above, the last half-century has seen abundant new evidence for evolution. As for the Rebbe's point regarding fossils, we might easily respond that the fossil record is too complex to have been produced by a small set of cataclysmic events, and the question of why God would create a fossil is indeed valid. While the existence of an atom is logical, representing part of the complexity of the world, fossils are marks of history, which would seem to be meaningless if they were to represent a history that never happened.

The second approach is advanced by a set of scientists who differ in their exact formulations but are united in their overall stance that the Torah does not contradict scientific theories regarding the age of the universe or the origin of species. Based on the sources mentioned above (regarding R. Wieder's approach) which address the issue of non-literal interpretation of verses, this group explains the Torah's account of Creation in a manner which accords with scientific theory, neatly avoiding the problem of entirely rejecting the historical relevance of the story.

The interpretations offered are varied, but they draw support from a few significant sources within the Jewish tradition which suggest that the Creation story specifically is not meant to be taken literally.^{xx} Several

Midrashim explicitly reference a time before the six days of Creation. *Bereshit Rabbah* cites R. Yehudah bar Simon's assertion that there was a time before the first day, as well as R. Abbahu's extension that God created and destroyed worlds during that period.^{xxi} We also find R. Simon bar Marta's reference to "the dating of the world" going back to the sixth day of Creation and "another dating system" for that which came before it.^{xxii} Later, in the Rishonic period, we find Ramban's comments to *Bereshit* 1:3, where he first indicates that the world was created in six literal days, but then states that the days represent Kabbalistic *Sefirot*.^{xxiii} Another source, the *Otsar ha-Hayyim* of R. Yitshak de-min Akko, implies a calculation approximating the age of the universe at over fifteen billion years.^{xxiv} Somewhat recently, there is the *Derush Or ha-Hayyim* by R. Yisrael Lifschitz (author of *Tiferet Yisrael*^{xxv}), which draws upon many of these sources and, citing fossil evidence, concludes that the Kabbalistic approach of an extended Creation has been vindicated.

Two problems, though not devastating, present themselves regarding this approach. The first is that it relies heavily on one Kabbalistic opinion and a small selection of vague Midrashim, which is a most unusual approach to understanding Tanakh. The second is that the theories advanced by this group are often marked by either bad science, bad theology, or both. Without getting into specifics, certain approaches seem strained at best, and unfaithful to one or both sides at worst.

Attitude 3: Separation of Spheres

This section and the next constitute two interpretations of a pair of statements by R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, so we will begin by citing both, to allow the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. The first, concerning evolution alone, appears in *The Emergence of Ethical Man*:

"Indeed, one of the most annoying scientific facts which the modern *homo religiosus* encounters and tries vainly to harmonize with his belief is the so-called theory of evolution. In our daily jargon, we call this antinomy 'evolution versus creation.' The phrase does not exactly reflect the crux of the controversy, for the question does not revolve around divine creation and mechanistic evolution as such. We could find a solution of some kind to this controversy. What in fact is theoretically irreconcilable is the concept of man as the bearer of the divine image with the equaling of man and animal-plant existences."^{xxvi}

The Rav indicates his confidence that an answer might be found, but is more troubled by the philosophical implications of the emergence of man through an evolutionary process.

The second quotation is from *The Lonely*

Man of Faith:

"I have never been seriously troubled by the problem of the Biblical doctrine of creation vis-à-vis the scientific story of evolution at both the cosmic and organic levels, nor have I been perturbed by the confrontation of the mechanistic interpretation of the human mind with the Biblical spiritual concept of man. I have not been perplexed by the impossibility of fitting the mystery of revelation into the framework of historical empiricism. Moreover, I have not even been troubled by the theories of Biblical criticism [...] However, while theoretical oppositions and dichotomies have never tormented my thoughts, I could not shake off the disquieting feeling that the practical role of the man of faith within modern society is a very difficult [...] one."^{xxvii}

Here, the Rav lists evolution among various challenges to faith which do not bother him. Clearly, the Rav felt that evolution is not a bothersome problem. Generally, the Rav seems to have grouped evolution with other philosophical challenges to faith and consigned them all to a back burner. What must be explained, however, is why he did so.

The first explanation I have seen, paralleling the work of Stephen Jay Gould, claims that the various issues mentioned in *The Lonely Man of Faith* are not problematic for the Rav because they are abstract and philosophical rather than practical.^{xxviii} In the case of evolution and Creation, no practical contradiction exists, since science is a method of empirical analysis of reality while religion teaches us about God's interaction with the world and the purpose of Creation. Hence, the two represent separate spheres which need not interact or be reconciled.

The problem with this attitude is articulated beautifully by Dr. Carl Feit, if perhaps unintentionally:

"The notion that Torah and science are entirely distinct enterprises is only true on a superficial level. In fact, the Torah does recognize the validity and importance of the kind of empirical evidence required by scientific methodology [...] Halakha takes into account the results of empirical evidence as a means of determining truth."^{xxix}

Dr. Feit cites sources within Hazal to prove his point, but it seems relatively straightforward: if the Torah tells me one thing, and I can observe another, a problem exists. Halakha relies on empirically determined truths, and science is a systematic method of determining such truths. Hence, I personally find this reading difficult at best.

Attitude 4: Transcendence

R. Michael Rosensweig offers a different reading of the Rav, which unifies the points made in *The Lonely Man of Faith*.^{xxx} Essen-

tially, R. Rosensweig asserts, the Rav felt that challenges to Torah may be worth investigation but should not engender a crisis of faith. After all, we only need to know that there is an answer; the exact formulation of the answer is less critical, as any solution will allow us to accept the Torah as true and proceed as servants of God. Hence, argues R. Rosensweig, if we are confident that there is indeed an answer, the question becomes purely academic. The Rav, whose *emunah* (faith) convinced him that answers could be found, was less troubled by the issues, since they receded, for him, into the realm of theoretical questions. Hence, the Rav chose to focus on issues of practice and purpose, which impact real life far more severely, and about which he could speak far more effec-

tively and authoritatively. I have found precedent for this approach in earlier sources and in the Rav's own philosophy. In *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, Rambam raises the problem of divine foreknowledge contradicting free will and immediately admits that "the answer to this question is lengthier than the land and wider than the sea,"^{xxxix} incomprehensible to mere mortals. He then offers just a hint of an answer by distinguishing God's knowledge from that of humans. Ra'avad sums up Rambam's approach: "He began with queries and objections, and left the matter as a question, and returned it to [blind] faith!"^{xxxix} Far earlier than Rambam is *Sefer Iyyov*, which mainly addresses the issue of seeming divine injustices and ultimately reaches no clear conclusion. The Rav himself, considering the problem in *Kol Dodi Dofek*, asserts that rational consideration is futile: "Certainly, the testimony of the Torah that the cosmos is very good is true. However, this affirmation may be made only from the infinite perspective of the creator. Finite man, with his partial vision, cannot uncover the absolute good in the cosmos."^{xxxix} We are finite beings incapable of appreciating a sufficiently complex answer. Hence, argues the Rav, one will only find comfort by attempting to create meaning within suffering and then growing through it.^{xxxix}

“[T]he Rav felt that challenges to Torah may be worth investigation, but should not engender a crisis of faith. After all, we only need to know that there is an answer; the exact formulation of the answer is less critical”

tively and authoritatively.

This approach is (to my mind) defensible and widely applicable and would not disrespect or distort either Torah or external sources of truth, so I find it personally most beneficial. It allows me to comfortably work with evolutionary principles in the laboratory

without being troubled by evolution's theological implications. Although I find all the answers given to be unsound, unconvincing, or troubling, I am confident that an answer exists – likely one beyond my own comprehension – because I have sufficient reason to believe in the truth of Torah. However, I recognize that many are unwilling to live with unanswered questions, and it is to them that the other sections of this essay are addressed.

Concluding Notes

I have attempted to present a representative spectrum of approaches that Orthodox Jewish thinkers have taken to address the apparent contradiction between scientific evolutionary theory and the Torah's account of Creation. I hope it is clear that there are many

perspectives on the issue, and it would be intellectually dishonest to present one as absolute truth to the exclusion of others. Educationally, I will comment that I have been more drawn to different answers at various times, and I suspect students would similarly benefit from exposure to multiple explanations.

More significantly, this analysis could serve as a paradigm for approaches which might prove valid in addressing challenges to faith from empirical evidence. Even an approach that is useless regarding evolution might be valuable in another context. In other words, the particular applications may be incorrect, but the instincts behind these approaches are certainly valuable: we must readily question our perceptions of both the Torah's perspective and the implications of external sources of knowledge; not all sources of information are equally reliable; we need to be able to put each issue in its place. In the long run, a larger arsenal of theological weaponry can only benefit us.

Finally, as noted early on, there is an endless supply of theological challenges, and the believing Jew needs a systematic approach for handling them. This approach can draw upon any combination of the ideas presented, as well as any I have neglected to mention. However, any method will fail unless it is coupled with the positive pursuit of reasons to believe, whether they are rational, emotional, experiential, or otherwise.^{xxxv} This dual occupation can only make us better *ma'aminim* (believers), educators, and *ovedei Hashem* (servants of God).

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ⁱ AOJS Students' Questions Panel, "Actual and Possible Attitudes to Evolution within Orthodox Judaism," in Aryeh Carmell and Cyril Domb (eds.), *Challenge: Torah Views on Science and its Problems* (New York: Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists, 1976), pp. 254-285, at p. 268.

ⁱⁱ I realize that some have justified these phenomena while rejecting evolution by distinguishing between macroevolution (the evolution of new species) and microevolution (essentially anything short of macroevolution). The distinction seems artificial to me, and I will not deal with it, but it may be useful to others.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ari L. Goldman, "Religions Notes," *The New York Times* (August 14, 1993), available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/08/14/us/religion-notes.html?pagewanted=2>.

^{iv} I personally find it both fascinating and unjustifiable that this question bothers people far more than the question of why good things happen to bad people.

^v I state this to clarify that the selection was made in order to expose the reader to the variety of approaches that exist, and should not imply comparisons between people or an assertion that these are the greatest theologians of our generation or of the previous generation. Certain noteworthy approaches have been simply omitted for the sake of simplicity and (relative) brevity.

^{vi} Avigdor Miller, Sing, You Righteous: A Jewish Seeker's Ideology (Israel Bookshop Publications, 2006).

^{vii} *Ibid.*, p. 60.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 113.

^{ix} *Ibid.*, p. 191.

^x Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle, "Religion among Academic Scientists: Distinctions, Disciplines, and Demographics," *Social Problems* 54,2 (2007): 289-307, at p. 296.

^{xi} The situation might best be described by a passing comment I once heard from a Yeshiva College Biology professor, who said that evolutionary scientists should be grateful to the deniers who have forced them to consistently come up with ever tighter proofs for evolution.

^{xii} Jeremy Wieder, "Non-Literal Interpretation of Scripture in Jewish Tradition," *YUTORAH Online* (November 5, 2006), available at: http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/716561/Rabbi_Jeremy_Wieder/Non_Literal_Interpreter_of_Scripture_in_Jewish_Tradition#.

^{xiii} R. Sa'adya Ga'on, *Eminot ve-De'ot, ma'amar 7, ot "alef"*.

^{xiv} Rambam, *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* II:25.

^{xv} *Teshuvot ha-Rashba* 1:9.

^{xvi} Rashba also includes a requirement that no tradition of interpretation be violated.

^{xvii} The idea of a story being invented to teach values, but not expressed as a tall tale, also leads to very troubling conclusions: it implies that God could not manage to convey the same messages either directly, through true stories, or in clearly defined allegories, and that God intentionally convinces the masses of falsehood just to make an ethical point.

^{xviii} Menachem Mendel Schneerson, "The Age of the Universe," *Chabad.org: Ideas and Beliefs* (December 25, 1961), available at: http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/435111/jewish/The-Age-of-the-Universe.htm.

^{xix} It is true that R. Miller offers many arguments which indicate familiarity with science. However, an important distinction must be made. The Rebbe accepts the scientific findings as valid, but goes on to reinterpret them. R. Miller, however, insists on rejecting the findings themselves. For example, whereas the Rebbe explains why fossils seem old, R. Miller claims that we have no reason at all to think that the fossils are old.

^{xx} The sources cited here are a sampling of those presented by Dr. Carl Feit in his YC Biology class. Different members of this camp will, of course, cite different sources.

^{xxi} *Bereshit Rabbah* 3:7.

^{xxii} *Ibid.* 9:14 (all translations are the author's).

^{xxiii} Also see Ramban's comments to *Bereshit* 1:1, in which he interprets the entire Creation story based on Kabbalistic concepts.

^{xxiv} R. Yitzhak de-min Akko, *Otsar ha-Hayyim*, pp. 86b-87b.

^{xxv} This short work can be found in some editions of Yakhin u-Bo'az Mishnayot after Masekhet Sanhedrin.

^{xxvi} Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, ed. by Michael S. Berger (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2005), pp. 4-5.

^{xxvii} *Idem*, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), p. 7.

^{xxviii} The source of this explanation preferred not to be quoted.

^{xxix} Carl Feit, "Darwin and *Derash*: The Interplay of Torah and Biology," *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 2 (1990): 25-36, at pp. 26-27.

^{xxx} Based on a personal conversation with R. Rosensweig.

^{xxxi} Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah* 5:5 (translation is the author's).

^{xxxii} Ra'avad ad loc. (translation is the author's).

^{xxxiii} Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny: From the Holocaust to the State of Israel*, transl. by Lawrence Kaplan (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2000), pp. 5-6.

^{xxxiv} *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

^{xxxv} For an enlightening discussion of this point, see Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, p. 49, n. 1.

How are You Different from an Animal, and Why Should You Care?

A Halakhic-Biological Taxonomy

BY: Jonathan Ziring

When we think about Judaism and nature, many questions come to mind. Some are practical halakhic questions – questions about *mitsvot hateluyyot ba-Arets* (commandments that are contingent on the land of Israel) such as *pe'ah* (the obligation to set aside the corner of the field for the poor), *shemittah* (the sabbatical year), *terumah* (tithes), etc. Others may be theological in the broadest sense, such as to what extent should we attempt to master our surroundings and to what extent should we allow ourselves to be reliant on nature, perhaps thus being more directly dependant on God? Perhaps we think about the responsibility to recognize the greatness of Creation and enjoy it.ⁱ However, a basic question that is often ignored is: to what extent are we, as human beings and as Jews, part of nature and to what extent are we above it? If we were to construct a Torah-based taxonomy of the world, what would that look like? How would that system impact how we view the world around us?

It seems that there are three basic philosophical camps concerning the status of a Jew in relation to nature within the canon of Jewish thought. Each opinion carries with it some difficulties, and we may have strong intuitive notions of which perspective must be correct. However, if we want to fully understand the range of opinions in our tradition, we must be honest about the views that have been presented, even if some of them may run against our most deeply held convictions. One camp claims that all men are equally unique, in a class of their own that is distinct from the animal and plant world; man is *sui generis* and cannot be categorized in the same system as the rest of nature. The position at the other extreme claims that mankind, Jews included, is an integral part of the broader world, and, although man has numerous aspects that make him unique within the animal kingdom, there is still a part of him that belongs in a more universal taxonomy. The third camp claims that the class of mankind must be internally divided, arguing that, just as humans are fundamentally different from animals, Jews belong to a different class than Gentiles. Each perspective has broad implications for the way in which we view the world.

Let us begin with the first and second opinions, namely, the view that man is unique and the opinion that man belongs in the spectrum with the rest of Creation. R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik points out that the main thrust of the Jewish philosophic tradition has assumed that man is qualitatively different than any other creature. As he describes this view, “The world of man [...] is incongruous with that of the animal and plant, notwithstanding the fact

that all three groups of organic life are governed alike by kindred rigid natural processes and structural developmental patterns [...] he is not a particular kind of animal. He is rather a singular being.”ⁱⁱ He points out that this perspective was central within Greek thought, and that it was assumed by most of the medieval Jewish thinkers to be the biblical view as well.ⁱⁱⁱ Although the specific reasons given for human uniqueness are different for the Greeks than for many religious thinkers, the common denominator is that man stands above all other creations.^{iv} R. Soloveitchik, on the other hand,

“If we construct a Torah-based taxonomy of the world, what would that look like? How would that system impact how we view the world around us?”

argues that the biblical perspective is in fact the second option—that, while man clearly has many unique elements, he is fundamentally on the same spectrum as not only the animal world, but the plant world as well—a perspective that in many ways mirrors the perspectives developed in light of Darwin’s theory of evolution.^v

The difference between these views is stark and their implications great. To date, I know of no better analysis of the significance of this debate than Alex Ozar’s “A Preliminary Taxonomy of Rabbinic Anthropologies,” published in *Kol Hamevaser* last year.^{vi} Ozar argues that the position that man is *sui generis* tends to view man as primarily a soul, and the body becomes deemphasized. Along with this, physicality becomes something that must be fought and overcome. He points out that this view has its benefits and accords well with some of our more spiritual tendencies, as religion is often more focused on the next world and on spiritual pursuits than on worldly ones. However, this perspective brings with it many dangers, such as the possibility of rejecting anything that cannot be immediately categorized into easily defined spiritual boxes. As he writes:

“Certainly it is hard to explain why we should we [*sic*] care about aesthetics and the like. If physical stuff has no value, why should it matter if it is shaped nicely? What makes the beauty and grandeur of nature worth appreciating? Aren’t the Grand Canyon, the elegantly soaring eagle, and the pristine sunset just so much distraction on our way to the world to come? Also unclear is why we should care about other people and our

relationships with them. Unless you can help me get to the next world, why should I waste my time on you? “Surely there are answers to these questions, and probably even good ones, but they remain as questions that demand answering. A ‘man as soul’ anthropology significantly militates against a serious valuation of human life and everything that goes along with it.”^{vii}

On the other hand, the view that he characterizes as belonging to R. Soloveitchik promotes a positive view of this world and more easily allows for a broad understanding of

mal human relationships as well – though we may grant our family special status, we do not think they are superior to other people. Yet, *Midrash Shemuel* argues that the former statement in the Mishnah refers only to Jews, as only they were created in the divine image.^{xii}

Of course, those who believe that Jews and non-Jews are equally human will militate against such notions. To return to our last example from *Avot*, Rashi understands the Mishnah’s claim that people are created in the divine image as referring to all human beings.^{xiii} *Tif’eret Yisrael*, a commentary on the Mishnah, uses this as a jumping-off point to discuss the lofty status that righteous Gentiles can achieve, pointing out that the Mishnah’s source text here is from the Creation story, at which point in time there was no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. To further emphasize his belief that non-Jews are, in fact, great manifestations of the divine image, he waxes elegantly about how great non-Jews who keep the seven Noahide laws can become, achieving the status of *ger toshav*,^{xiv} or even *hasidei ummot ha-olam*, the righteous among the nations of the world. What emerges from his discussion is a strong notion of the greatness of humanity, both Jews and non-Jews. Many rationalist Jewish philosophers stress this same point, such as Rambam, who is famous for asserting that Aristotle reached great levels of insight and even approached the status of a prophet.^{xv} Me’iri in many instances blurs the lines between Jews and righteous Gentiles, going as far as to claim that as long as a human being is righteous, he can supersede the natural order, and have the statement “*ein mazzal le-Yisrael*,”^{xvi} the constellations do not affect Jews (meaning that their lives are not predestined, but rather are affected by Divine Providence on account of their actions), apply to him as well. Me’iri writes:

Overall, I agree with Ozar’s assessment. What I would like to focus on is the view he did not deal with, the notion that Jews and non-Jews fit differently into this taxonomical system. This view is perhaps best presented by R. Yehudah ha-Levi in his famous work, the *Kuzari*. Many medieval thinkers, R. Yehudah ha-Levi among them, assumed a four-part taxonomy of the world based on the Greek tradition. They divided the world into *domem* (the inanimate), *isomeah* (plant life; lit., “growing”), *hai* (animal life; lit., “living”), and *adam* (mankind). However, R. Yehudah ha-Levi seems to add a fifth category to this hierarchy: *Yisrael*, the Jews. According to the *Kuzari*, Jews are as different biologically from non-Jews as a cat is from a rock. As he puts it, non-Jews are men, Jews are angelic.^{xviii} This tradition is found through many Kabbalistic writings as well. In particular, this view is found throughout the *Tanya*, the Kabbalistic work by the first Rebbe of Lubavitch,^{xix} as well as in works of Ramhal (R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzato)^{xx} and many others. Often, writers of these works seem to force this view into texts whose simple meanings imply the opposite. For example, the Mishnah in *Avot* states: “Beloved is mMan who was created in the image [of God] [...] More beloved is Israel who were called the sons of the Omnipresent.”^{xxi} The simplest read of this statement is that all people are equally human, but Jews have an additional quality of being the sons of God. We know this to be true in nor-

mal human relationships as well – though we may grant our family special status, we do not think they are superior to other people. Yet, *Midrash Shemuel* argues that the former statement in the Mishnah refers only to Jews, as only they were created in the divine image.^{xii}

Of course, those who believe that Jews and non-Jews are equally human will militate against such notions. To return to our last example from *Avot*, Rashi understands the Mishnah’s claim that people are created in the divine image as referring to all human beings.^{xiii} *Tif’eret Yisrael*, a commentary on the Mishnah, uses this as a jumping-off point to discuss the lofty status that righteous Gentiles can achieve, pointing out that the Mishnah’s source text here is from the Creation story, at which point in time there was no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. To further emphasize his belief that non-Jews are, in fact, great manifestations of the divine image, he waxes elegantly about how great non-Jews who keep the seven Noahide laws can become, achieving the status of *ger toshav*,^{xiv} or even *hasidei ummot ha-olam*, the righteous among the nations of the world. What emerges from his discussion is a strong notion of the greatness of humanity, both Jews and non-Jews. Many rationalist Jewish philosophers stress this same point, such as Rambam, who is famous for asserting that Aristotle reached great levels of insight and even approached the status of a prophet.^{xv} Me’iri in many instances blurs the lines between Jews and righteous Gentiles, going as far as to claim that as long as a human being is righteous, he can supersede the natural order, and have the statement “*ein mazzal le-Yisrael*,”^{xvi} the constellations do not affect Jews (meaning that their lives are not predestined, but rather are affected by Divine Providence on account of their actions), apply to him as well. Me’iri writes:

“For inasmuch as the conclusion is prepared to be good or evil, every person possessed of religion will remove himself from preparation for evil by restricting himself with the restrictions of his ethical qualities, and that is what the sages of blessed memory refer to when they say ‘Israel is not subject to the stars,’ which is to say everyone restricted by religious ways, for his restrictions will free him from what might have been decreed for him by simple causation. One restricted by the ways of religion, whether Jew or gentile, is not given over to the arbitrariness of the astrological signs.”^{xviii}

This position is the complete opposite of the view advocated in the *Kuzari*, allowing for almost total equality between Jews and non-Jews.

This question is not just one of theory, but

one of practice. Many halakhic decisors have utilized a possible distinction between the nature of Jews and non-Jews as the basis of practical legal decisions. For example, the position of the *Tanya* that the Jewish soul is fundamentally different from the Gentile soul is utilized by Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli to justify reprisal raids against non-Jews, specifically the raids carried out in the city of Kibiah in 1953.^{xviii} He begins by arguing that war is permitted because of assumed universal consent among warring parties, a justification based on social contract. However, he must explain how this leads to the possibility of permitting what would otherwise be murder. In order to do that, he claims that people own their bodies and souls and therefore can choose to accept a system which allows their lives to be forfeited in certain circumstances. Having done this, he goes on to develop the argument that non-Jews have total ownership of their bodies and souls, for their souls belong to the physical world, a world in which human dominion is absolute and God's is nil. As he puts it,

"The souls of the nations of the world find their root in the physical world in which it is possible for human beings to extend ownership, as 'the world is given over to man.' This is not the case with the Jewish soul, which is literally part of the God above. Thus, with regards to it, there are different parameters and with regards to it, it makes sense to use Rambam's expression that the soul is the property of God. What comes out from all of this is that non-Jews can consent to remove the prohibition of bloodshed..."^{xix}

R. Yisraeli argues that non-Jews have the right to forfeit their lives, both body and soul, without any legal interferences. This reasoning leads him to claim that war is justified generally because of a sort of international social contract, and since people, especially non-Jews, own their bodies,^{xx} they have the right to accept war as legitimate and thereby permit the implicit killing involved. Thus, as war is part of international diplomacy, carrying out any war, even reprisal raids, is permitted as a function of the people's acceptance of this system.^{xxi}

R. Abraham Isaac ha-Kohen Kook takes this metaphysical distinction and claims that postmortem organ donations are problematic because of *nibbul ha-met*, desecration of the dead, but only because human bodies are sacred.^{xxii} Therefore, he argues that Jews, whose bodies are sacred, are prohibited from donating organs postmortem, but non-Jews, whose bodies are not sacred, are permitted to do so. R. Kook therefore encourages Jews who need organs that can be used after a person has died to seek out such organs from non-Jewish donors. He presents the basis for his argument in two ways. The first does not posit a fundamental distinction between the humanity of Jews and non-Jews. Rather, he claims that the right to prevent *nibbul ha-met* is a "privilege of being holy," an argument that does not undermine the humanity of non-Jews, though it does posit that Jews have special qualities.

However, he closes his argument with a second, far more extreme claim. He writes, "The prohibition of degrading the dead stems from the *iselem E-lohim*, the divine image, that is in man, which is especially poignant with regard to Jews because of the holiness of the Torah." R. Kook argues that the fact that Jews have the Torah actually gives them more *iselem E-lohim*, more of a Divine image, than non-Jews. As R. Kook concludes, Jews therefore may not donate their organs after death, because that would require tampering with their partially divine bodies, "and who has the right to permit [tampering with] the divine part?"^{xxiii}

Perhaps the most startling formulation is that of Hatam Sofer.^{xxiv} He wonders how it is possible that we derive medical information about Jews from experiments performed on non-Jews. He claims that the physical structure of the bodies of non-Jews who eat impure

"[S]ometimes we have no choice but to rely on our deepest moral convictions, and assess whether we believe that the Torah really intended we take certain positions. We must analyze the positions, spell out their logical conclusions, and ask whether we can accept them."

food and commit other sins as well could possibly be similar to the structure of Jewish bodies. He assumes *a priori* that, from a biological standpoint, Jews and non-Jews must be different.^{xxv}

What becomes clear is that this is not just an abstract philosophical question. It is not just a question about metaphysical speculation, an abstract question of how we set up a Torah-based taxonomical system. If we choose to understand that Jews and non-Jews have different places in the natural order, then that has very serious halakhic and practical consequences. And a choice it is. As we have shown, there are sources in our tradition to support any one of the perspectives we have raised. But sometimes we have no choice but to rely on our deepest moral convictions, and assess whether we believe that the Torah really intended we take certain positions. We must analyze the positions, spell out their logical conclusions, and ask whether we can accept them. Thus, when we analyze the most basic question about the relationship between Judaism and nature, the question of where we place human beings generally, we must also ask where we should place Jews, and what ramifications that placement would have. If we conclude that human beings are removed from nature, then we must be comfortable with a world where our interaction with the physical is limited and viewed negatively. If we conclude that there are natural differences between Jews and non-Jews, then it is possible

to maintain that we can take advantage of their organs and perhaps even permit bloody wars of vengeance. Such a conclusion also opens the possibility of rejecting all of medical knowledge.

Until this point, I have mostly presented these positions objectively, without presenting my own opinion on the issue. However, while in most cases I would be able to leave my view out of an article, due to the sensitivity of the topic I cannot do so in this case. When a perspective challenges our deepest moral convictions, it is justifiable to embrace another opinion with equally strong basis in our tradition. The third view we have discussed is at best racist, and, as we have shown, at worst potentially much more harmful than that. *Derakheha darkhei no'am* – the ways of the Torah are pleasant, and such a perspective is anything but that. My understanding is by no

^vR. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, pp. 3-64.

^{vi}Alex Ozar, "A Preliminary Taxonomy of Rabbinic Anthropologies," *Kol Hamevaser* 3,4 (February 2010), pp. 20-22.

^{vii}Ibid., p. 21.

^{viii}*Kuzari* I:103.

^{ix}See *Tanya*, section two, and the quote below.

^xQuoted in a lecture by R. Hanan Balk entitled, "The Concept of the Chosen People: Do Jews Possess A Soul That Is Superior to That of Non-Jews?," available at: http://www.yu-torah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/727895/Rabbi_Hanan_Balk/The_Concept_of_the_Chosen_People:_Do_Jews_Possess_A_Soul_That_Is_Superior_to_That_of_Non-Jews?

^{xi}*Avot* 3:18 (translation mine).

^{xii}*Midrash Shemuel* to *ibid*. A discussion of this move can be found in the lecture mentioned in n. 10 above.

^{xiii}Rashi to *Avot* 3:14.

^{xiv}The definition of this category is discussed in *Avodah Zarah* 64b.

^{xv}Ya'akov Shilat (ed. and trans.), *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Ma'aliyot, 1988), p. 553.

^{xvi}Me'iri, *Beit ha-Behirah* to *Shabbat* 156a.

^{xvii}Me'iri, *Hibbur ha-Teshuvah*, p. 637. These passages were pointed out by Moshe Halbertal in his article, "'Ones Possessed of Religion': Religious Tolerance in the Teachings of the Me'iri," *Edah Journal* 1:1 (2000): n.p. (translations are his).

^{xviii}Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli, "Takrit Kiviyah le-Or ha-Halakhah," *Ha-Torah ve-ha-Medinah* 5-6 (1953-1954), p. .

^{xix} *Ibid.*, sections 21-22 (translation mine).

^{xx}As for Jews, he claims that they are partial owners of their bodies, but are also owned by God. The implication is that his argument might fail with regards to Jews, as they should not have the right to choose whether or not to forfeit their lives. R. Yisraeli's claim that Jews have a partnership in their soul with God is disputed by Rabbi S. Y. Zevin in *Mishpat Shylock, le-Or ha-Halakhah* (Tel Aviv: Zioni Publishing, 1957), pp. 318-335.

^{xxi}He assumes the system has in fact been accepted.

^{xxii}R. Avraham Yitshak ha-Kohen Kook, *Da'at Mishpat Kohan* 199, quoted as well in Responsa *Tsits Eliezer* 4:14.

^{xxiii}*Ibid.* (translation and emphasis mine).

^{xxiv}R. Moshe Sofer, *Hiddushei ha-Shas*, *Avodah Zarah* 31b, s.v. "Aidi."

^{xxv}Though one might have assumed that Hatam Sofer is claiming that non-Jews are more removed from Jews than animals are from people, as we in fact do derive medical knowledge from experimentation on animals. However, presumably Hatam Sofer would have rejected the validity of such research as well, negating this inference.

means canonical, and I have therefore tried my best to at least present all the views and spell out their implications. This way, whatever view you choose to adopt – however you choose to place yourself in the world as a human being and as a Jew – the implications of that choice will be clear. Realize what it as stake, and choose carefully – I would hope your intuitions agree with mine, but if they do not, at least you know the intellectual consequences of disagreeing.

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ⁱSee, for example, the *Yerushalmi* to *Kiddushin* 4:12.

ⁱⁱR. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2005), p. 3.

ⁱⁱⁱAdmittedly, many thinkers felt that people who did not take advantage of their intellectual faculties would not be considered human beings and would remain mere animals. Rambam, in *Guide of the Perplexed* III:51, writes that those who do not have religion have the same status as dumb creatures and do not reach the status of human beings. However, we will not focus on the implications of such views.

^{iv}Rambam, *Guide for the Perplexed* III:8.

FEATURE

Kol Hamevaser Forum on the Orthodox Forum

The Orthodox Forum is celebrating the release of its 20th volume, entitled *The Relationship of Orthodox Jews with Believing Jews of Other Religious Ideologies and Non-Believing Jews*, edited by R. Dr. Adam Mintz. The Orthodox Forum has been instrumental in engendering edifying conversations on topics of intellectual and sociological nature that face the Orthodox community. Aside from providing a book review of this most recent installment, *Kol Hamevaser* is featuring an interview with R. Robert Hirt, series editor, as well as shorter pieces by R. Yosef Blau, on the overall purpose of the Orthodox Forum, and by R. Shmuel Hain, on future frontiers facing the Orthodox Forum.

The Orthodox Forum: What and Why

BY: Rabbi Yosef Blau

For over two decades, a group of Orthodox thinkers has gathered annually for a two-day discussion focusing on a single topic affecting the Jewish world. Originated by Rabbi Norman Lamm, Rosh HaYeshiva and then-President of Yeshiva University, the Orthodox Forum participants, comprising rashei yeshivah, rabbis, educators and academicians from America and Israel, have exchanged ideas and critiqued each other's papers. The format involves attacking an issue from many perspectives, halakhic, historical and philosophical. Papers are prepared in advance, read by all the participants and analyzed in a question and answer format. The book that has resulted from each Forum consists of the papers given, modified to incorporate insights and criticisms emerging from the sessions.

The underlying concept is that through dialogue and exposure to the perspectives of others, formulations are sharpened and ideas clarified. The Talmud points out the weakness of a person's studying alone.¹ In the description of Rav Yohanan's mourning for the death of his disciple and disputant Reish Lakish, Rav Elazar's attempt to console Rav Yohanan by providing support for his views is rejected.² Only through questions and answers, arguments back and forth, can the Halakhah become clarified.

Most, though not all, of the Forums related to issues of modernity. Topics covered over the Forum's twenty-one years have ranged from "Rabbinical Authority and Personal Autonomy" to "War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition." Issues emerging from science and modern scholarship, democracy and tolerance, ethics and egalitarianism, were each analyzed. Responses to the emergence of the State of Israel and interaction with non-traditional Jews were discussed. Volumes have appeared about enhancing *yir'at Shamayim* (fear of Heaven) and the impact of *Lomdut* (the conceptual approach to Jewish learning). At times, there was conflict over whether some ideas presented were within accepted bounds

of Orthodoxy, but, in general, civility has marked the discussions.

The goal of the Forum and the books that have appeared was not to formulate specific policies but to enhance awareness of differing perspectives in confronting issues important to Orthodoxy's future. One of the challenges to the Forum is to avoid involving the same people, as talented as many are, and in particular to effectively introduce greater participation by the next generation. Last year's Forum (the book has yet to appear) was dominated by the contributions of younger scholars.

Keeping the number of participants to a manageable size while allowing new people to hear the give-and-take has prevented many who would gain from the exposure from being invited. The cost of the volumes published has also limited the Orthodox Forum's impact; having some appear in paperback has been helpful in that regard. There is a wealth of material in the twenty volumes that have so far been published.

The Orthodox Forum reflects the intellectual strength of Modern Orthodoxy both in Israel and America. Our community, primarily but not exclusively comprised of products of Yeshiva University, has produced *talmidei hakhamim* and scholars in many disciplines who are enriching Jewish thought and are confronting many of the issues that challenge us in our complex world.

Rabbi Yosef Blau is *Mashgiach Ruchani* of RIETS.

¹ *Makkot* 10a.

² *Bava Metsi'a* 84a.

Orthodox Forum 2.0: Thoughts on the Future of the Orthodox Forum

BY: Rabbi Shmuel Hain

For over 20 years, the Orthodox Forum has produced an invaluable body of literature addressing, in a sophisticated, comprehensive and academic fashion, the central issues confronting the Orthodox Jewish community.

This past year, in recognition of 20 years of the Forum, the Series Editor, Rabbi Robert Hirt, along with the Steering Committee (led by Dr. David Shatz and Dr. Moshe Sokol), decided to convene a different kind of Forum, one that would reflect on the history of the Forum while engaging a new generation of leaders and readers.

I had the privilege of co-Chairing this effort, and, armed with a great deal of input from Rabbi Yehuda Sarna and a number of young Jewish leaders, we designed and executed a forum consisting of 18 papers and 6 panel discussions featuring the next generation of Modern Orthodoxy's leaders discussing essential questions for the Jewish community. The Forum included original papers on the odyssey years and the role of "emerging adults" in the Jewish community, the impact of new voices (female, academic and spiritual) on the traditional *beit midrash*, and new perspectives on social justice and rabbinic authority/personal autonomy, as well as sessions discussing the future of Modern Orthodoxy and its educational system.

Perhaps just as important as the fruitful discussions of these subjects produced at the Forum, the Forum's new format and focus underscored that an updated and enhanced model has much to offer the Yeshiva University community and the broader Jewish world.

One of the central tenets of the Forum is that truly open and honest dialogue occurs within a cohesive community committed to common values. By modifying the format (from paper presentations to panel discussions) and by inviting to participate a young and varied cohort of men and women comprised of academics, Ramim (Talmud lecturers), communal leaders, educators, students and others who share the ideals of the "Forum regulars," we furthered the

Forum's mission to create a diverse, interdisciplinary community of Jewish thinkers to discuss and debate ideas. The intergenerational dialogue, the balance of academic and more popular perspectives, and the new venue (Yeshiva University's Belfer Hall) all combined to create a new energy and vitality to the discourse.

Several additional new elements will further transform the Forum into an even more significant vehicle for year-round discussion and debate. This past year, on the Shabbat before the Forum, several synagogues hosted Forum participants to bring the Forum discussions to the broader Jewish community. New initiatives to engage the entire community should include a Forum website featuring new analyses and assessments of earlier Forum topics and papers as well as ongoing discussion of issues that future Forums should address. The Steering Committee and the student body of Yeshiva (including those students involved in *Kol Hamevaser*) can collaborate to engage the future leaders of Modern Orthodoxy in the conversation by encouraging student clubs to host special colloquia on Forum subjects and by co-sponsoring a call for papers from undergraduate students with the winner invited to participate in the Forum.

By building on the accomplishments of the Forum and adding these new ingredients, the Orthodox Forum will continue to fulfill the words of the prophet Malakhi, cited and beautifully applied by Rav Aharon Lichtenstein at a special address at this past year's Forum:

"Then they that feared the Lord spoke one with another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name."³

Rabbi Shmuel Hain serves as *Rosh Beit Midrash of The Graduate Program in Biblical and Talmudic Interpretation* and as *Rabbi of Young Israel Ohav Zedek in North Riverdale*.

³ *Mal'akhi* 3:16.

An Interview with Rabbi Robert S. Hirt

BY: Jonathan Ziring

Can you provide a basic history of the *Orthodox Forum* over the last twenty years?

The Forum was started in 1989, and we are now in our twenty-first year. The objective was to expose the yeshivah- and college-educated graduate, not just the Yeshiva University graduate, to thoughtful consideration of the interface of Judaism and general culture that would speak with a degree of authority, but not authoritarianism. The readers do not have to be Orthodox necessarily, but they do have to be sensitive to the concerns of Modern Orthodoxy for these issues to speak to them and enrich their lives. We wanted to present things that were sufficient in length that the Forum could conduct serious discussions, but not necessarily articles that would be printed in academic journals. We would ask people to write who would have an impact on the Modern Orthodox community and beyond, would be able to think in interdisciplinary terms, and would want to talk with leaders they would not otherwise see. The Forum has drawn many more people throughout the years. We have a Steering Committee of twenty people who choose the people involved each year.

Our goal was really twofold, then: to bring people together – Americans, Israelis, Brits, men and women – and to have them look at issues from a multidisciplinary point of view, through the lenses of Halakhah, history, sociology, and political thought, in order to produce a body of literature that the general public could read and learn from. Over the past twenty years, we have produced twenty volumes with over two hundred articles from rashei yeshivah, academics, community leaders, rabbis, Jewish educators, and communal professionals. R. Aharon Lichtenstein, for instance, has written eleven articles for the Forum, making him the most significant contributor. Today, we are hoping to expand the pool of participants to include younger scholars

“We live in a competitive world – we could end up with “Torah U-Parnasah” or “Torah and the Jets,” and people’s lives would not be as enriched... we would do much better for our self-esteem as a community if people were exposed to some of the thinkers here, not just the latest shiur or the latest piece in response to a popular crisis.”

in their thirties and forties who will be the leaders of the Modern Orthodox community in the future.

Do you think the goals of the Orthodox Forum have changed over the years, and is the shift towards younger participants an indication of that?

I would say that the goals have not shifted, but there is the recognition that people may be thinking about things differently and may look at the same issues in different ways, so we have to adjust accordingly. Pieces have to be shorter; authors have to gear their work to a younger au-



dience; they often have to write outside of their own disciplines. It encourages the development of new leadership to have younger people rather than the classic names one would expect to see. So while the goals have changed, the awareness of a different generation of leadership has developed. The articles do not have to be more authoritative because of who wrote them, but they have to be substantive so people can think about the issues. And they also have to be made more publicly available. As part of this goal, we have put some of the articles on YU Torah and the like.¹

The community is meant to be broad, but the Forum books are often expensive, making them difficult for students to procure. On the other hand, some of the articles are available on YU-Torah. What does this indicate about who the audience of the Orthodox Forum is meant to be?

The books run at about thirty dollars each. I think the question is whether you prefer prime value or prime grill – which one feeds you better. Considering what they contain, the books are not overpriced, but if students would want them for a lower price, they could come to my office and get them for such a price. For the general public, though, it is reasonable.

Furthermore, as mentioned, many of the articles are made available on YU Torah and other forums. For example, an article by R. Aharon Lichtenstein on the relationship between Orthodox Jews and non-believing Jews of other reli-

gious ideologies, or non-believing at all, which was featured on Hirhurim, received two hundred responses in the first weeks. That means it has been successful. Are people reading blogs? Yes they are. For me, that is a way to go for the future. I am not sure that if the books were \$10 there would be many more readers or purchasers, and our goal is not to sell books but for people to read them.

Are there any intended goals of the Forum that have not been achieved?

No, I would say the two primary goals have been achieved. We continue to attract people who want to write for it. Very few people refuse,

unless the date does not work, and I am happy about that. I see the volumes quoted often, in journals and student publications, and I am satisfied with that as well.

What I would like to see moving forward is that *shuls*, in addition to the classic things they do for adult education, would set up study groups using these articles, maybe with question guides, so that people can engage these issues. At these groups, educators and lay people could get together and say, “This is what we want to study this year.” You do not need a book club, you just need an article. I think this would be important in attitude building, because our community has been perceived by the outside as having moved away from the substantive concerns of the rest of Jewish life outside of Orthodoxy. And I think we should not rely on sermons, sound bites, and internet pieces that are reprinted for such education – there is a need for more serious engagement with the issues.

I think adult education classes are not well attended within the Orthodox community. Outside of our community, there are groups like the Me’ah program,² the Wexner program,³ and the

“The objective was to expose the Yeshiva-and college-educated graduate, not just the Yeshiva University graduate, to thoughtful consideration of the interface of Judaism and general culture that would speak with a degree of authority, but not authoritarianism.”

Melton program,⁴ and we are not doing enough of that here. Not that I would substitute this type of group for a *daf yomi* shi’ur (daily class on one page of the Talmud), but I do not think there has to be competition between them.

For our community to grow, we need to use these pieces – not dumb them down but make them accessible. And that means we have to show rabbis and educators how to do it, which was not originally our goal. I think many young people are growing up less as readers than they were before, unless they are in the more intellectual tracks in Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women. Still, I do not believe when they are thirty-five, they are going to be less interested in these issues – on the contrary, they are going to be *more* interested but may not have the keys to access discussions of them. That is something that should be working on. This is true if our general Hashkafah (worldview) and ideology is to be advanced. People should buy into it, not just because of our lifestyle and not just because our personalities are interesting, but because it is more substantively engaged.

We live in a competitive world – we could end up with “Torah u-Parnasah” (Torah and a profession [but not secular studies]) or “Torah and the Jets,” and people’s lives would not be as enriched. People get tired about the things they do regularly, even if they continue to do them anyway. I think even that we would do much better for our self-esteem as a community if people were exposed to some of the thinkers here, not just the latest shi’ur or the latest internet

piece in response to a popular crisis.

Have there been moves to develop these types of programs?

Not enough. President Richard Joel has an interest in it and Rabbi Kenneth Brander has been involved with some discussions through the Center for the Jewish Future, but it needs to move at a much more accelerated rate. I am sure the readers and writers of *Kol Hamevaser*, upon reading this, would like to encourage people to do these types of things. I think there is a value in the readership saying, “This is what we would like to receive,” as opposed to waiting for top-down leadership. The days of top-down leadership in many areas of Jewish life, even within Orthodoxy, have been greatly reduced. That does not mean that we do not look to rabbis for a *pesak* (legal decision) or have *emunat hakhamim* (trust in scholars), but I do think people are getting information wherever they want to get it, so we should try to find out what people want and get it to them.

Is there something in particular you would suggest younger people, students and the like, do to encourage the proliferation of serious Jewish thought?

Let me give some examples. If you are giv-

ing a shi’ur, you could draw upon sources in the Orthodox Forum and the like. Or if you are going on the Aaron and Blanche Schreiber Torah Tours, you can show the communities that there is something different that you can do because of your education, as opposed to just doing the classic things that you could have done even if you had not gone to Yeshiva. I think utilizing our student ambassadors and faculty is a better way to go than just sending a guest lecturer. I do not think it would take so much, but no one has ever suggested it to people like you. I would like to see much more of a student initiative, rather than just waiting for the people who are supposedly more prepared to start reaching out.

Moving to the methodology of the Forum, can you explain how the Forum is run, how many people are invited, how they are picked, who is allowed to be in the audience, etc.?

I would have to change the word “audience” to “participants” – that is exactly the point. We do not want an audience. About one hundred people are invited from across the spectrum. Sixty to eighty people end up participating over a two-day period in the session. The papers are distributed to participants in advance and everyone sits down together at a table to discuss them. There are usually two or three people on each panel, depending on the topic that we are dealing with. They sometimes make an opening statement for a minute or two, and then there are lots of questions. In this way, authors basically get a chance to review their articles before publishing them.

Dr. David Shatz, who is very much involved with the Forum, wrote a book on peer review, in which he discussed, among other things, how books get vetted.^v I think it is better that things not get vetted from top down. Instead, the discussion is around the table. Everyone has to read the articles in advance. Then people are able to refine and revise what they have done based on the insights of others.

If you had two hundred people at each Forum, you could not do that. We want a sense of community, so it is not open to the public, and we want the people to read in advance so they can participate. No one speaks who has not read, and anyone who speaks generally has something to say that will contribute to the quality of the article being discussed. It should be selective, but it should not be limited. Some students are invited – we invite the Kollel Elyon and Stern scholars if they are interested, and those who approach us and say, “Can I come?,” but not more than that, so that we can have one table with everyone around it. I think it should be continued like that. Although I said we do not want to have observers, the exception are these groups – when the Kollel Elyon students and Stern scholars come, they are observers. They could raise their hands if they wanted to, but they do not generally. Otherwise, everyone in the Forum is a participant. I think this format works and the people who come are amazed at the level of the interaction. It does not always work, but nine times out of ten it works well and I think that process should be continued.

Finally, after the session is over, I sit down, as the Series Editor, with the editor of the particular volume, and we try to think about things that could enrich the papers.

How are speakers and topics chosen?

We have a Steering Committee composed of about eighteen people, including Rabbi Jeremy Weider, Rabbi Yosef Blau, Dr. David Shatz, Dr. Judith Bleich, Dr. Rivkah Blau, Rabbi Shmuel Hain, as well as a range of academics, like Dr. Moshe Sokol from Touro and Dr. Lawrence Schiffman from NYU. The Steering Committee is responsible for coming up with ideas. We meet as a Steering Committee and I ask them what they think we should talk about in a year or two from now. Then, a small group will meet and they will come out with suggestions that will enable carrying out seven or eight sessions over two days, and then they will run it by the larger group. If it is approved, we will see whether we have enough people who can write original articles on the topic, not rehashing what they have done before. This coming year, we are dealing with religion and all the changes of culture – high culture, medium culture, and low culture, including Internet issues and the like. What impact does it have on our thinking? That topic was developed two years ago. We have not run out of topics yet.

Is the Forum planning on revisiting any topics, or focusing only on new ones?

Well, in terms of the most recent book on the relationship between believing Orthodox Jews and non-Orthodox Jews, some people may think that this is the same as the book we had on the *Jewish Tradition and the Nontraditional Jew*. If you look at it, though, the topics are much broader now than they were then. The concerns are different: apathy, secularization of the community, the differences between America and Is-

rael, the relationship between the religious and non-religious in the army, etc. That did not exist before. This volume deals with the status of the secular Jew in society, from a halakhic point-of-view and a non-halakhic point-of-view. Who is in and who is out? That is very different from the world that existed almost twenty years ago. I think this book is much more embracing of the fact that there are believing Jews who are not necessarily Orthodox. How do we see our community moving forward in a time of polarization? The distinctions we had years ago between the Orthodox community and the outside have broadened because the community has nar-

“These topics get into the personal engagement with life and listen to what drumbeats people are marching to rather than pertaining to classic topics.”

rowed.

So a topic can be revisited if the communal situation has changed and if we approach it from a new perspective than we had taken before. Just because we did a topic a long time ago does not mean that we have to redo it, of course, but equally true is the fact that if an issue was discussed a long time ago, there can still be new nuances many years later.

Do the changes of topics dealt with in the Orthodox Forum reflect changes in the Jewish community generally and the Orthodox community in particular?

If I look at the topics of the last five years, I think it reflects concerns that we have. *Yir'at Shamayim* (fear of Heaven), for example, was one recent topic, because we feel it is on the decline. Our community is more geared towards professionalism and the intellectual, but where is the *yir'at Shamayim*? With the decline of authority, in a post-denominational, multicultural world, do we think there is awe? Similarly, gender relationships – there was a volume on that three years ago, because the education available for women was a big issue even before the recent ordination question.^{vi} We have a book on philanthropy in an era of economic hardship.^{vii} Overall, I think there is a sense of relevance to what the community should be looking at. Also, if one looks at some of the topics over the years, such as *tikkun olam*, engaging modernity, Jewish perspectives on suffering, those are classic issues.

What topics are currently being planned to respond to the community's concerns?

The issue coming out next year, which is being edited by Rabbi Shmuel Hain, relates to the “Odyssey Generation.” David Brooks had written about the ages between twenty-five and thirty-five being very unsettling for many people.^{viii} The word “odyssey” refers to these people who are on a journey – as opposed to in earlier generations when you could feel settled at twenty-five, only at thirty-five is it now standard that one has a stable job and family. There are many people who delay those important decisions. It is a concern in terms of what our community will look like in ten years with more people unmarried, not yet settled down, and so forth. Contemporary culture in general – how do we view it: with trepidation or as an opportunity for spiritual and religious expression? What are the borders because of the normative system we

have? These topics get into the personal engagement with life and listen to what drumbeats people are marching to.

Over the last few years, there has been an Orthodox Forum held in Israel – can you explain its purpose? How does it differ from the American one and how is it similar?

I do not think it has reached a point where they know what types of discussions will qualify as meaningful in Israel. The process is different. Papers are not written in advance. No book is published afterward. The Forum in Israel has yet to define itself and develop a real sense of

what ought to happen. Additionally, with the issues facing Israeli society being more pressing in nature, I think Americans are more free to address broader agenda issues, a luxury Israeli yeshivot do not have. Also, in Israel the relationship between the academics and the rabbis is more stratified, whereas here many of the people we invite are comfortable talking with both. All these factors change the possible dynamic.

As for the future, I do not know what direction the Israeli Forum should take. They might be comfortable meeting for a weekend and discussing topics at the table, something that would not be sufficient for us. They are generally less comfortable preparing for longer terms, unless they are actual academics, while we try to prepare ahead. I think the best chance at coming up with a working parallel institution would be if we could put together the best of Har Etzion, Ma'ale Gilboa, Bar-Ilan, and Orthodox academics and see what are their concerns and look at those issues. Otherwise, they have other venues in which they can express themselves if they so wish.

A forum like this, though, has not yet captured the Orthodox Israeli imagination, which is unfortunate. The closest they had in Israel was the Kibbutz Lavi conference, but that was much more political – it was sort of a gathering of Modern Orthodox thinkers, talking about what our community needs practically. Perhaps, that is what is right for that community. They want to talk about the issues that are pressing, even if there is not something that can be done about them. With us, though, the purpose of the Forum is much more for its educational value. Ours is freer from the demand to have an immediate effect on society, which allows us to think more freely.

Are some of these limitations carried over when the Israelis come to the American Forum?

No, they are very excited about the Forum and the opportunities it provides: the openness, the ability to sit for two days without the pressure of going about their normal business (in Israel, it is very rare that a person gets two days off), the vehicle for expression, etc. We have had people such as R. Yuval Cherlow, R. Benny Lau, people from Ma'ale Gilboa, Har Etzion, Beit Morasha, and others. They are more independent; they do not necessarily identify only with certain institutions.

Has their involvement changed how the

Americans interact in the Forum?

Not enough, but I think that is something that we should talk about in the future. Like I said, we always try to include both Israelis and Americans because we think that it is important. On the ground, we are one community, though I am not sure the Israelis always see America that way. This is not because of *shelilat Benei ha-Golah* (denigration of Diaspora Jews) or because they deny the value of the Diaspora, but because they think the center of Jewish life is in Israel, which makes the impact they can have on our community more limited. However, the people we try to involve see the world as one, because of travel, internet, and other factors. These people have much to add to the Forum, as they value our community as well. For example, Esty Rosenberg was involved with issues of education last year, and she found it very enlightening, and had many enlightened views – more than many of the people here. Having people like that has added a great deal.

Do you have any closing comments?

I think that the Forum in general follows a particular process, but it should be open to students for ideas on how they can utilize this process, these people, and these volumes. We would be open to hearing how people would like to do that, with or without support. It is basically what *Kol Hamevaser* is trying to do, except that we have around-the-table discussions.

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Jonathan Ziring is a senior in YC majoring in Philosophy and Jewish Studies and is an Associate Editor for *Kol Hamevaser*.

^vAvailable at: <http://www.yutorah.org/browse/?browse.cfm#series=4101&lang=cfm&organizationID=301>.

^{vi}Available at: <http://www.hebrewcollege.edu/meah>.

^{vii}Available at: <http://www.wexnerfoundation.org/>.

^{viii}Available at: http://www.fmams.org.il/1f_israelseminars/1_seminars.htm.

^vDavid Shatz, *Peer Review: A Critical Inquiry* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

^{vi}Adam Mintz (ed.), *The Relationship of Orthodox Jews with Believing Jews of Other Religious Ideologies and Non-Believing Jews* (New York: Yeshiva University Press; Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2010).

^{vii}J. J. Schacter (ed.), *Jewish Tradition and the Nontraditional Jew* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aaronson, 1992).

^{viii}Marc D. Stern (ed.), *Yirat Shamayim: The Awe, Reverence, and Fear of God* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2008).

^vRivkah Teitz Blau (ed.), *Gender Relationships in Marriage and Out* (New York: Yeshiva University Press; Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2007).

^{vi}Yossi Prager (ed.), *Toward a Renewed Ethic of Jewish Philanthropy* (New York: Yeshiva University Press; Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2010).

^{vii}David Brooks, “The Odyssey Years,” *The New York Times* (October 9, 2007), available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/09/opinion/09brooks.html?em>.

The Relationship of Orthodox Jews Believing in Denomination and Non-Denomination Believing Jews

BY: Shlomo Zuckier

Reviewed Book: Adam Mintz (ed.), The Relationship of Orthodox Jews with Believing Jews of Other Religious Ideologies and Non-Believing Jews (New York: Yeshiva University Press; Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2010). Price: \$30.00.

The first thing one notices when picking up *The Relationship of Orthodox Jews with Believing Jews of Other Religious Ideologies and Non-Believing Jews* is (as the reader of this sentence may currently notice) its long and unwieldy title.¹ Aside from its onerous span, the devoted Orthodox Forum series reader will notice that this topic appears to have been covered in an earlier issue, namely, the aptly-titled *Jewish Tradition and the Nontraditional Jew*.² However, one should not judge a book by its cover (even if it does qualify as a significant debacle) and the reader must actually open the book to examine its contents, so I proceeded to peruse the substance of the volume itself.

This volume includes articles sociological and theoretical, progressive and traditional, Israeli and American. It contains a historical overview of Orthodox and non-Orthodox relations by Dr. Jonathan Sarna, as well as several articles relating to educational institutions that employ Orthodox faculty members but cater to the broader Jewish community, such as Birthright Israel and the Heschel School. R. Mark Dratch presents a strong survey of basic issues relevant to Orthodox interaction with non-Orthodox Jews, and *mori ve-rabbi* R. Aharon Lichtenstein presents an broader explication of the relevant factors involved in relating to non-Orthodox Jews, including issues of belief and practice, *keiruv* (outreach), improving the world, inclusiveness, collaboration between denominations, maintaining distinctions between denominations without a sense of competition, and a short discussion of the proper halakhic category into which the nonobservant fall. R. Yona Reiss proffers a summary of different approaches on the halakhic status of other Jews, while R. Yuval Cherlow advocates for a more accommodating stance towards irreligious people in the contemporary State of Israel. Marc D. Stern discusses, at an anecdotal level but sprinkled with knowledge of the relevant halakhic and pragmatic issues, the experience of an Orthodox Jew at a non-denominational Jewish organization. Finally, the volume contains several articles regarding Israel, including a comparison of the secular-religious divides in Israel and America, a realistic look at the relationships between secular and religious soldiers in the IDF, a description of the Religious Zionist view of secular Zionism, and an argument from the American perspective to allow civil marriage in Israel. To summarize, the volume includes many well-written and reasoned theoretical pieces, as well as an abundance of relevant sociological information.

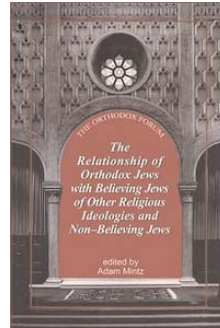
The truck³ one might have with the latest installment of the Orthodox Forum series com-

prises two distinct but related issues. The first problem, which I briefly noted above, is the similarity between this issue and the 1992 issue entitled, *Jewish Tradition and the Nontraditional Jew*. Which new topics appear in this issue that merit the devotion of an entire second volume to this topic? This problem is directly confronted by R. Lichtenstein (“What novel teaching was there at the study hall today?”), and he provides several answers: the earlier volume focuses on the individual deviant, while this issue also encompasses the community, and, more significantly, this volume focuses on belief as opposed to observance. He also notes that the theories of postmodernism have exerted some influence on society since the last volume on this topic was published, and so a re-evaluation of the topic is entirely appropriate. However, he does not think these theories have played too significant a role in this context.⁴

The distinction I find more relevant between the two volumes regards not the reactions to philosophies of *postmodernism* per se, but to the sociological realities born of the *postmodernity* of the world in which we currently live. In other words, there has been a profound change in the reality of the denominational landscape and, by extension, in the nature of the inter-denominational conversations to be held. This radical shift is portended in a couple of passages in the volume, though its full force is not felt at any point. In the area of philanthropy, Marc D. Stern notes that philanthropists are now, more than ever, interested in knowing exactly how their hard-earned money is to be spent, as opposed to in the past, when they were largely satisfied to simply dump large sums of money on a Jewish organization’s front porch. In the broader sense, the generation that has entered adulthood over the past eighteen years and is significantly impacting the world (and whom this Orthodox Forum might have addressed more directly), is not interested in the institutionalized infrastructure that has been at the forefront of Jewish life in past decades.⁵ In the words of R. Reiss, who most clearly relates to this phenomenon, “The individualization of ritual practice is consistent with a comment that I recently heard from a colleague that we are now living in a ‘post-denominational’ age.”⁶ His characterization of the phenomenon is also apt: “There is both a utopian opportunity latent in post-denominationalism as well as a serious danger.”⁷

In this younger generation, people are not looking to associate with one label or another; they seek truth and meaning – they want to adhere to their tradition, but they want to do so in a way that appeals to them. (Note the recent move towards ritual observance across the board in Judaism.) This appears to be the wave of the future, and since people tend to shift significantly in their affiliations and beliefs between ages 15 and 30, the young demographic is the more volatile and exciting one, representing a major shift from the past. However, instead of focusing on the future, in which the Jewish world will be dominated by post- and non-denominational collaboration among individuals,

this Forum book repeatedly looks over its shoulder to a prior stage to this one. Many articles



mention the Synagogue Council of America’s goal of having all denominations sit down at the table together, and the suggestion of renewing this practice is raised in a semi-idyllic light. What was not noted was that these past issues, though they may cast a certain shadow on the discussion intellectually, are relegated to theoretical importance, as the Jewish community has moved beyond the points where that scenario has significance.

Let us consider, as an example, the phenomenon of independent *minyanim*.⁸ They comprise a group of participants who are largely unaffiliated with any denomination and are mostly traditional in practice, with the major exception of being completely egalitarian. The independent *minyan* serves a young population, and it is has been a significant force in that sector of Jewish society over the last ten years. As Dr. Sarna puts it, “Independent *minyanim* remain among the most exciting and successful innovations of American Jewish life [...] nurturing a new generation of Jewish leaders and worshippers.”⁹ As they seem to be leading the charge of the new generation, independent *minyanim* and what they represent could have been seen as a new and important trend, existent today but not eighteen years ago, which the Forum might have related to.

The Orthodox Forum could have considered the following questions: What are independent *minyanim* doing that we in the Modern Orthodox community can emulate? How can we relate to their adherents, who may want to settle on a denomination at some point? Is there an authentic Orthodox response to the formidable challenges of egalitarianism, which turn away so many educated young people from Orthodoxy? For a book whose title does not mention any denomination outside of Orthodoxy, one would expect that there be at least one article dealing with this class of people. The challenge of 21st-century Modern Orthodoxy is and will be the question of how to keep idealistic and religiously interested, but open and secularly exposed, Jews (especially those from an Orthodox background) who are drawn to egalitarianism, within the fold of Orthodoxy. The goal, as always, must be to present a coherent Orthodoxy that is responsive to the contemporary challenges, without sacrificing any religious principles.

This Orthodox Forum installment did a good job presenting on all the old issues, but unfortunately missed the boat on many of the new ones. Significantly, last year’s Forum (whose proceedings have yet to be published) dealt with many issues of the younger generation (though not specifically from the perspective of Orthodoxy’s relationship to non-believers), which is a positive development. Thus, though the “Orthodox Jews believing in denomination” may have won the day in this volume, there is still ample opportunity for Modern Orthodoxy and its Forum to present a response relevant to the “Non-Denomination believing Jews.”

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¹ This critique of the title is quite distinct from Dr. Alan Nadler’s close reading and deconstruction of the title in his review of the book, “What Modern Orthodoxy Thinks of Its Neighbors: Gloomy Reflections on a Divided Religion,” *The Forward* (October 06, 2010), available at: <http://www.forward.com/articles/131911/>, which he uses to further his argument depicting the Forum as closed-minded and parochial. The creative and midrashic nature of his reading, while it does reflect his Orthodox training in rabbinic casuistry from a previous life, quite certainly does not hold up to the academic standards he is more accustomed to in his current situation, and this reviewer certainly does not agree with his conclusions.

² J. J. Schacter (ed.), *Jewish Tradition and the Nontraditional Jew* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aaronson, 1992).

³ A favorite figure of speech, often employed by R. Lichtenstein, including in *The Relationship of Orthodox Jews*, p. 216. See also Mishnah, *Eduyot* 1:3.


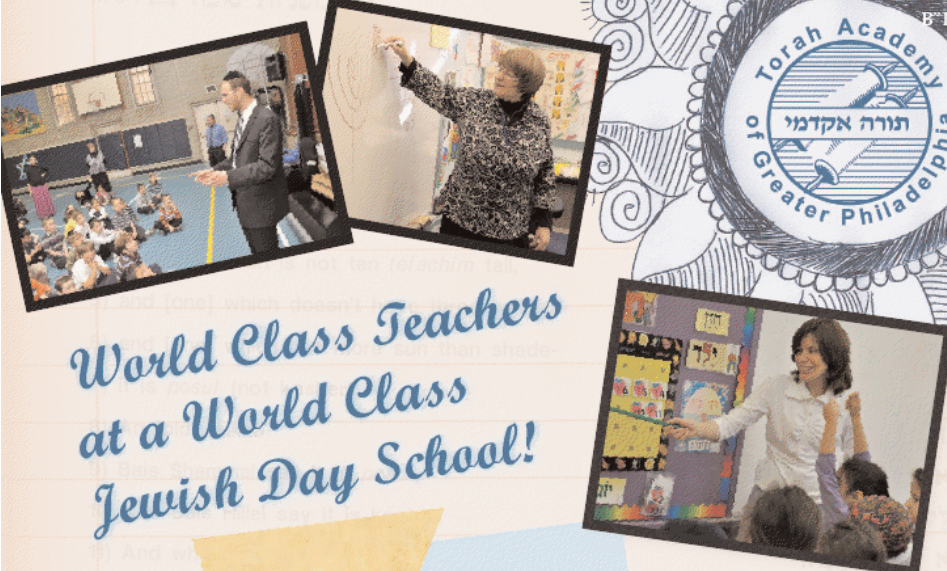
⁴ R. Lichtenstein, p. 188.

⁵ A recent study, commissioned by the AviChai Foundation and carried out by Jack Wertheimer, notes that there is a rising group of young and impactful Jewish leaders who see no need to connect to preexisting institutions. For a news analysis of the phenomenon, see Jacob Berkman, “New Study of Emerging Jewish Leaders Shows Class Differences,” *JTA* (October 12, 2010), available at: <http://www.jta.org/news/article/2010/10/12/2741249/as-the-jewish-world-evolves>.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 252.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Independent *minyanim* occupy a significant position in the playing field of organizations patronized by young, educated, and involved Jewish. There is a growing body of literature regarding the movement, prominent among it a recent book by Elie Kaunfer, *Empowered Judaism: What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us About Building Vibrant Jewish Communities* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010), and an article by Ethan Tucker online, “What Independent Minyanim Teach Us About the Next Generation of Jewish Communities” available at <http://www.zeek.net/801tucker/>. The recently established Yeshivat Hadar is associated with these movements, and it represents

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