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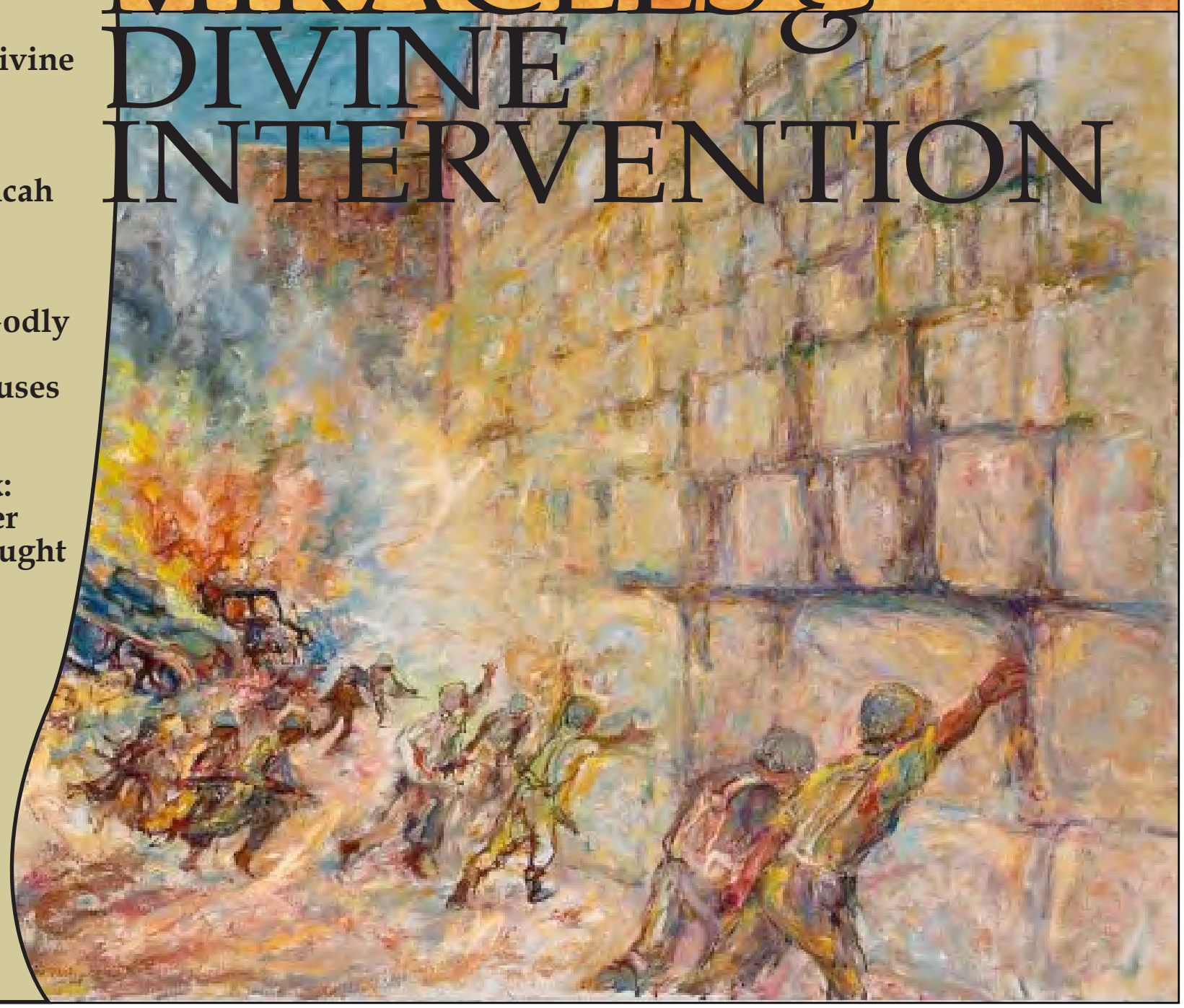
KOL HAMEVASER

The Jewish Thought Magazine of the Yeshiva University Student Body

MIRACLES & DIVINE INTERVENTION



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THE JEWISH THOUGHT MAGAZINE OF
THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY

MIRACLES AND DIVINE INTERVENTION

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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 thinkers to engage Judaism intellectually and creatively, and to mature into confident leaders.

Kol Hamevaser is published monthly and its primary contributors are undergraduates, although it includes input from RIETS Roshei Yeshivah, YU professors, and outside figures. In addition to its print magazine, *Kol Hamevaser* also sponsors special events, speakers, discussion groups, conferences, and shabbatonim. We encourage anyone interested in writing about or discussing Jewish issues to get involved in our community, and to participate in the magazine, the conversation, and our club's events. Find us online at www.kolhamevaser.com, or on Facebook or Twitter.

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Editors' Thoughts: Incorporating the Divine into the Ordinary

By: Gabrielle Hiller

Miracles and divine intervention: Somehow, just saying these words elicits in our minds images of wonder and feelings of awe. Many of us have different understandings of these two interconnected ideas. Some view miracles and divine intervention as virtually irrelevant to our current lives where the hand of God is hidden, while some perceive every act of nature as a miracle, as a sign of God's hand in our world. And still others are jolted by the periodic signs of miracles and divine intervention in their lives that they just cannot ignore.

But what role, ideally, are miracles and divine intervention meant to play in our lives? Many claim that if only the hand of God were transparent in our lives, everything would be clearer and simpler. We would all believe in God. Gone would be the doubts of faith.

But as we see from our turbulent history, such is not the case.

Doubts of faith are common now, and they were common in the generation that witnessed the splitting of the sea and the receiving of the Torah. Indeed, divine intervention is a complex idea within our *mesorah*, and Jewish thinkers throughout the ages have debated its nature. What is the potential function, then, of miracles? What should divine intervention mean to us, and has the answer to that question changed over the course of Jewish history?

These are some of the many questions that we explore in this issue of *Kol Hamevaser*. And this is only the beginning. The goal of *Kol Hamevaser* is to create a community of thinkers invested in Jewish thought and its application to our lives. We invite you to read, write, and respond, and, ultimately, spark discussion even beyond the written word. As we embark on a new year of *Kol Hamevaser*, we hope that this issue serves as the foundation for many discussions throughout the year—whether that is at one of our events, article clubs, *shabbatonim*, on our website (kolhamevaser.com), or on Facebook—and we urge each one of you to contribute your own unique perspective.

Mazal Tov to editor-in-chief Chesky Kopel on his engagement to former staff writer Talya Laufer!

Staff Editorial: Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik, Yeshiva University, and the Jews

By: Chesky Kopel

The creation of the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought last year afforded a special opportunity for Yeshiva University. Among the student body and the Modern Orthodox communities who look to YU as a flagship, there was great hope that the Center would serve as a much-needed academic forum to explore the fusion and confrontation of Torah ideas with those of modern Western society. My friends and colleagues, both on the *Kol Hamevaser* staff and in the larger YU community, were excited at the prospect of many new lectures, seminars, and special events concerning Torah and Western Thought, under the direction of R. Dr. Meir Soloveichik.

A year has passed and the Center's activities continue with great success – as measured by enrollment in its seminars and turnout at its events featuring prominent public figures. But an unsettling trend has emerged in the content of R. Dr. Soloveichik's message as director of the Center, amplified by the moves he has recently undertaken as a high-profile figure in the American public sphere. With this point I no longer presume to represent the opinions of others in the student body or larger YU community, but I am deeply compelled by my own conscience to speak out.

The director has consistently conveyed the sentiment that Jews and Christians in the United States share a heritage of religious morals, stressing the centrality of this shared heritage in his analyses of our Torah beliefs and our role in shaping general society. Perhaps most typical of R. Dr. Soloveichik's approach to this subject is his argument in "A Nation Under God: Jews, Christians, and the American Public Square," an article presented to the seventeenth Orthodox Forum.[1] R. Dr. Soloveichik there highlights a letter of the Rav titled "On Interfaith Relationships"[2] as a proof-text to demonstrate that "the universality of basic biblical beliefs [shared by Jews and Christians]… can unite faiths in their public engagement."[3] He has held true to this belief, protesting abortion rights with Christian activists in the 2000 March for Life; testifying in the House of Representatives on va panel with Catholic, Lutheran, and Baptist clergy in February 2012 on behalf of the right of religious institutions not to pay for employees' contraceptives; and delivering the opening invocation at the 2012 Republican National Convention (having achieved recognition as a capable and eloquent spokesman for socially conservative values alongside the Christian establishment.)

As bearers of the halakhic tradition, the increasingly politically conservative Orthodox community ought to pay attention to America's broad Jewish population and strive to speak to its sensibilities.

Furthermore, I have observed the extent to which this sentiment, along with R. Dr. Soloveichik's impressive background in Christian theology, plays out in his presentations on Jewish belief and identity. I have yet to attend a *shi'ur* of his that does not quote extensively from Christian sources. His talks often elucidate matters of Jewish life and theology through the prism of comparison and contrast with Christianity, even when the titles do not reflect that angle: R. Dr. Soloveichik's April 2012 presentation on "The Scandalous *Yichus* of the *Mashiach*" defined the Jewish conception of the Messiah only in distinction from the Christian version, and his August 2011 public conversation with Senator Joe Lieberman on the topic of "Religion and Democracy" emphatically addressed the senator's relationship with his Christian colleagues on account of their sharing doctrines of monotheistic faith. To be clear, I am not a student of the Straus Center, nor have I been in the past. But I am a concerned student of Yeshiva University. When I attend *shi'urim* and dialogues like these, I wonder why the YU community is experiencing this Christian-centric brand of "Torah and Western Thought," a brand which presents Torah as comparative theology and Western Thought as exclusively religious. And when I read the national news, I wonder why the name of my Yeshiva is now publicly associated with the camp of the Christian Right in American politics and activism.

A simple and important principle underlies this discomfort, and I feel that it bears mention in this publication: Judaism and Christianity are antitheses in the way they are commonly practiced and expressed. Judaism is the heritage of a nation chosen by God to uphold a special mission, charged with a set of values and a detailed legal code. Christianity, in any one of its many forms, is solely a religious tradition–fundamentally antinomian, universalist, belief-based, and generally detached from national identity. In the American context, Christianity has a great deal at stake in the public sphere; its leaders in this country undertake the responsibility to ensure that society and government abide by Christian morals. Judaism, as a national faith and way of life, does not seek to impose its values or laws upon other nations, even those that act as its gracious host and invite its adherents to participate in public life.

This principle is a crucial counterpoint to R. Dr. Soloveichik's approach to Jewish activism and association with the Christian Right. Rather than arguing theology with the doctor of theology, I want to emphasize what he has chosen to deemphasize. Whenever different ideological groups form alliances for activist purposes, they must stress their similarities and downplay their differences, and I take issue with the manner in which R. Dr. Soloveichik does that. Without question, Judaism and Christianity share a biblical heritage and many of the same values, but the two traditions have also embraced profoundly different

roles vis-à-vis world society. Deemphasizing this latter fact conflates Judaism and Christianity too much for comfort.

American Jews, as an influential bloc of society, have not tried to preach their religious values to the general public, nor have they joined the Christians in preaching theirs. As a rule for the last four decades, the majority of Jews in this country have voted with their liberal principles, choosing not to side with the Christian Right.[4] This is not to say that there have not always been exceptions within the Jewish community, nor to imply that whatever the majority of American Jews do is necessarily right for Judaism. I am not referencing this trend as some sort of proof or backing for my discomfort; what I would like to convey, however, is a sense of the ideological basis that drives these Jews to stay away from Christian politics, because it is a basis with which I strongly identify. I recognize that attitudes toward this issue may be changing, especially within the Orthodox community, and that R. Dr. Soloveichik is a leader at the forefront of these changing attitudes. But he is also now a representative of my Yeshiva who bears great responsibility in speaking on behalf of the YU community to the American public. Before he continues to do so, I have chosen to express my view on the matter, and I hope that others in this community will do so as well.

When those other American Jews and I look at Christianity, we see beyond the limited similarities it bears to our own faith in its monotheism and biblical origins and perceive something fundamentally different. We relate respectfully to our Christian brethren as fellow citizens and are genuinely interested in their beliefs, but we keep our political distance and, in the voting booths every single year, ask the Christians kindly not to impose their religious values on all Americans.

American Jews of many different stripes famously find difficulty with relating publicly to God, especially as compared to their Christian counterparts. We do not speak about God to our neighbors; much less do we try to convince anyone of His presence and role in worldly matters. And this is not a matter of shame; not in the slightest. Jews are too this-worldly to join Christians in perceiving transcendentally that which we see around us, too concerned with *nigleh* (the revealed) to constantly recourse to the *nistar* (the hidden) – more attentive to the terrified pregnant woman than to her unborn fetus and more concerned with the death row inmate than with the biblical sense of capital justice that put him or her there.[5]

As bearers of the halakhic tradition, the increasingly politically conservative Orthodox community ought to pay attention to America's broad Jewish population and strive to speak to its sensibilities. Simply put, the Torah was meant for the Jews and speaks directly to the Jews. *Devarim* 33:4 declares, "*Torah tsivah lanu Moshe, morashah Kehillat Ya'akov* – Moshe commanded us the teaching [Torah] as a heritage of the Congregation of Jacob."[6] When Orthodox rabbis detach the matter of Jewish faith and practice from the larger Jewish community and align it with the generic bracket of American "religious values," they commit a terrible disservice to the foundations of Torah. And when they try to impart Halakhah to the Gentile public, even for matters of sexual morality, they overstep the bounds of its jurisdiction and the will of the nation for which it is intended.

Judaism, as a national faith and way of life, does not seek to impose its values or laws upon other nations, even those that act as its gracious host and invite its adherents to participate in public life.

If we Orthodox Jews in America begin to see ourselves and are seen by others as more closely associated with Christian communities and interests than with the other members of our own nation, I will feel a sense of profound failure. This is not to say that we *shomrei mitsvot* should make our peace with other denominations' abrogation of Halakhah, but that, despite it, our community should more quickly associate with them, as a Jewish nation, than with the Christian establishment, as part of a larger religious America. Let us not allow our insulated communal life to deprive our future generations of a sense of Jewish nationhood.

Because of recent events, my beloved Yeshiva University is becoming a media-favored anomaly – an Orthodox Jewish institution in New York whose de facto ideological spokesman is heard and seen so prominently among the Christians. If I may address R. Dr. Soloveichik publicly here, I ask him to consider the discomfort of students like me, to shift the conversation of Torah and Western Thought beyond the lens of Judaism's relationship to Christianity, and to reassess his public activism that so deeply affects the image of YU.

Chesky Kopel is a senior at YC majoring in English and History, and is an editor-in-chief for Kol Hamevaser.

1 Meir Soloveichik, "A Nation Under God: Jews, Christians, and the American Public Square," *Yirat Shamayim: The Awe, Reverence, and Fear of God*, ed. by Marc D. Stern (New York: Yeshiva University Press; Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2008), 321-347.

2 Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "On Interfaith Relationships (a)," in *Community, Covenant, and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications*, ed. by Nathaniel Helfgot (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2005), 325-326. Whether or not R. Dr. Meir Soloveichik's reading is an accurate characterization of the Rav's position in not my concern, and addressing it here at any length would detract from the larger issue at hand. For more on the Rav's position, see R. Dr. Yoel Finkelman's rejoinder: Yoel Finkelman, "The Rav on Religion and Public Life: A Rejoinder," *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 15 (2008-9), 237-252. See also Jake Friedman, "Confronting 'Confrontation:' Understanding the Rav's Approach to Interfaith Dialogue," *Kol Hamevaser* 4:2, (2010): 17-18, available at www.kolhamevaser.com.

3 Meir Soloveichik, Ibid.

4 See, for instance, the Solomon Project's survey findings: Mark S. Mellman, Aaron Strauss, and Kenneth D. Wald, "*Jewish American Voting Behavior 1972-2008: Just the Facts*," July 2012, available at www.thesolomonproject.org.

5 See, for instance, the Pew Research Center's survey findings concerning American Jews' views on abortion: "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey," *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, August 2007, available at www.pewforum.org; the Pew Research Center's findings on American Jewish movements' attitude toward capital punishment in the USA: "All of the major Jewish movements in the United States either advocate for the abolition of the death penalty or have called for at least a temporary moratorium on its use." Excerpt from "Religious Groups' Official Positions on Capital Punishment," *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, 4 November, 2009, available at www.pewforum.org.

6 My translation.

Stay Tuned for the Upcoming Issue of *Kol Hamevaser* on

Politics and Activism

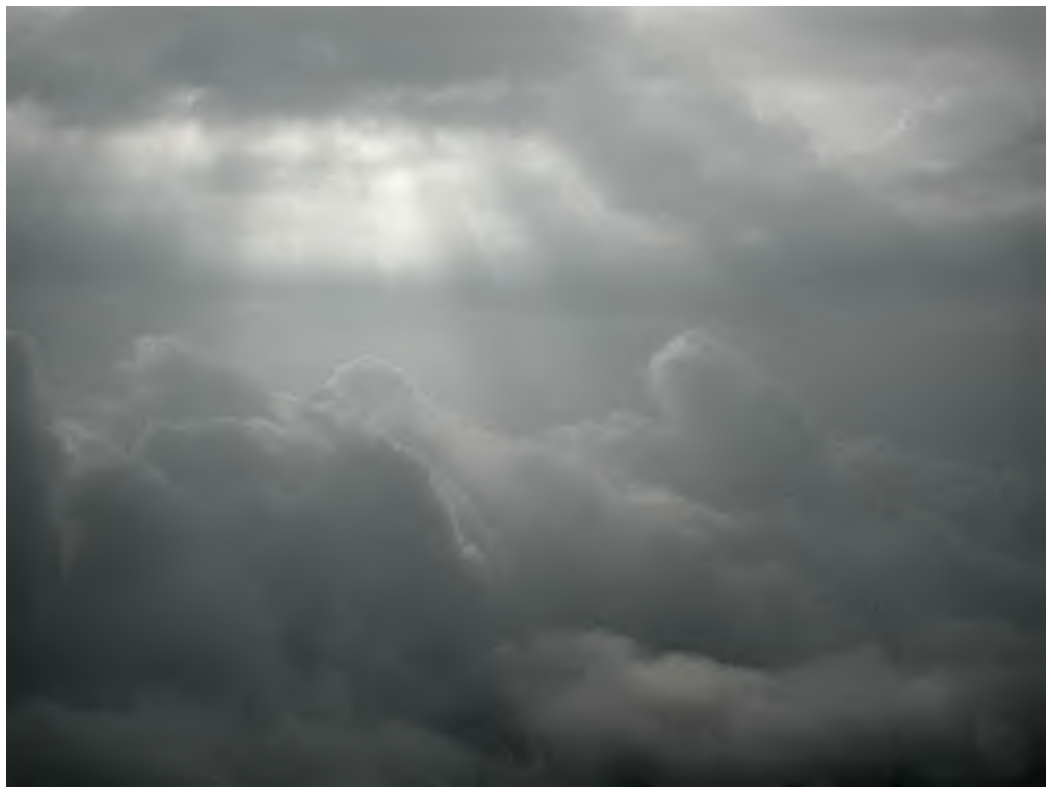
Thanksgiving 2012

Miraculous Intervention in Halakhah

By: Atara Siegel

The text is *Bava Metsia* 59b, one of the most renowned and important aggadic passages in the Talmud. R. Eli'ezer stands defiantly, calling on forces of nature to support his claim that *tanuro shel Akhnai,* a detachable oven,[1] is incapable of accepting *tum'ah*. After the Hakhamim disregard each of the miracles performed on his behalf, R. Eli'ezer invokes his trump card, asking God Himself to prove the truth of his claim. God obliges and sends a *bat-kol*, an echo[2] or a heavenly voice, which announces that R. Eli'ezer's opinion is correct —not only in this instance, but in all cases. In the face of flying trees, reversing currents, falling walls, and direct instructions from God, R. Yehoshua stands up and tells R. Eli'ezer that he is wrong; the oven is, in fact, *tamei*. Halakhah does not take into account miracles or divine intervention. God (so to speak) laughs and agrees with R. Yehoshua. We, the students, learn the principle of *Lo ba-shamayim hi*[3]- [the Torah] is not in Heaven; in other words its interpretation is not subject to Divine intervention.

But the principle of *Lo ba-shamayim hi* is not so simple. The Gemara in *Eruvin* 13b tells the story of another famous tannaitic argument, but with a *bat-kol* playing a very different role. *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai* argue for three years, each group claiming that Halakhah accords with its position in their many disputes. A *bat-kol* appears and settles the long-standing dispute by declaring both opinions "*divrei E-lohim Hayyim,*" words of the Living God, but also decisively ruling that Halakhah follows *Beit Hillel*. This *bat-kol's* intervention is taken very seriously by the Gemara, even in halakhic contexts. In five different locations in the Gemara, in *Berakhot* 52a, *Eruvin* 7a, *Pesahim* 114a, *Yevamot* 14a and *Hullin* 44a, the Gemara uses this *bat-kol* to question why the preceding discussion seemed to assume *Beit Shammai*'s opinion was viable. Why do individuals still follow *Beit Shammai*'s opinion? Alternatively, should the Gemara even need to state that Halakhah follows *Beit Hillel* in a specific case under discussion? Has not the *bat-kol* already declared that the Halakhah is always like *Beit Hillel*? To deal with this problem each one of the five *sugyot* proposes that it is permissible to continue to follow *Beit Shammai*'s opinion even after the *bat-kol's* ruling. However, this is only true according to R. Yehoshua, who believes divine intervention is irrelevant to deciding the halakhah.[4] In *Bava Metsia*, R. Yehoshua's claim that divine intervention has no place in deciding Halakhah seems accepted by the rest of the *Hakhamim*. Although the *bat-kol* rules in favor of R. Eli'ezer, the sages stand with R' Yehoshua and in *Kelim* 5:10 agree that *tanuro shel akhnai* is impure. Even God, through His laughter, seems to agree with R. Yehoshua in *Bava Metsia*. Yet in the case of the *Beit Hillel* vs. *Beit Shammai* controversy, the Gemara assumes that the *bat-kol* of *Beit Hillel* has real halakhic authority, and ascribes the principle of *Lo ba-shamayim hi* to R. Yehoshua alone.



Tosafot ad loc. in *Bava Metsia* provide two explanations for the discrepancy between the *aggadah* in *Bava Metsia*, where R. Yehoshua seems to act as the representative of the *Hakhamim* in general, and the five *sugyot* where the consensus seems to be that the *bat-kol* of *Beit Hillel* does carry halakhic weight. R. Moshe Taragin of Yeshivat Har Etzion explains that the two answers of *Tosafot* ascribe radically different degrees of halakhic authority to a *bat-kol*.[5] *Tosafot* first propose that usually a *bat-kol* has very little halakhic authority. The sages only took the *bat-kol* of the *Eruvin* story seriously because its ruling for the more numerous Beit Hillel concurred with the general rule that Halakhah is decided by majority vote. *Tosafot*'s second answer, however, claims that a *bat-kol* usually *is* taken seriously in matters of Halakhah. Although the *Hakhamim* did agree with R. Yehoshua's rejection of the *bat- kol*, the *Bava Metsia* case was exceptional. R. Eli'ezer's *bat- kol* was not as convincing as the *bat-kol* of *Beit Hillel* because he called for the declaration himself; it might be possible that his *bat-kol* came only out of respect for R. Eli'ezer, thus weakening its authority as an arbiter of Halakhah. Each of these answers resolves the contradiction between the two *aggadot*, although their opposing assumptions leave us with little clarity about the actual halakhic status of a *bat-kol*. What is consistent about *Tosafot*'s two resolutions is that the halakhic status of a *bat-kol* is more complex than the simple reading of each *aggadah* alone would imply. Reading the two *aggadot* together, we must conclude that a *bat-kol* neither has the final word in deciding Halakhah, nor is it *a priori* irrelevant to halakhic debate.

While *Tosafot* address the legal question of when a *bat-kol* carries halakhic authority and reconcile the halakhic contradiction between the *aggadot* in *Bava Metsia* and *Eruvin*, the messages of the two *aggadot* remain starkly different. Especially taken in context, the two *sugyot* paint opposing portraits of man's place in the world vis-à-vis God. The *Bava Metsia* story presents humans, the *Hakhamim*, as strong, bestowed with the awesome authority to interpret the Torah on their own, even when their interpretation is contrary to God's original intent. The tone of this *aggadah* draws on elements of Jewish tradition that view humans as partners with, and challengers of, God. The story reminds us of the sages' power to decide on the date of *Rosh Hodesh*, even when the date they come up with is not the actual date of the new moon.[6] God's anthropomorphic laughter at being "beaten" by His children in *Bava Metsia* might even convey the message that it is permitted to wrestle with God, to challenge God with hard questions about the morality of the world.

On the other hand, the entire context of the *aggadah* in *Eruvin* features stories about man's humility and failings in the face of God's power. Immediately preceding the *bat-kol* story is a discussion of certain sharp sages who would prove their wisdom by finding reasons why a *sherets* – a rodent – is ritually pure. However, all of their one hundred and fifty proofs cannot change the fact that the verse in Leviticus simply declares a *sherets* impure.[7] In the story following the discussion of the *bat-kol*, *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai* debate for two and a half years whether it was advantageous for man to be created or not. Eventually they vote and decide that man, presumably because of his many sins, would have indeed been better off having never been created. The theme of humility is also important to our story, as the Gemara attributes the *bat-kol*'s decision to side with *Beit Hillel* to the fact that *Beit Hillel's* members were humble, teaching us, in the words of the Gemara, that "Anyone who humbles himself, the Holy One, blessed is He, raises him up, and anyone who raises himself up, the Holy One, blessed is He, humbles him."[8] These *aggadot* in *Eruvin* teach that we are bound by even the incomprehensible laws of the Torah, such as those of *tum'ah* and *taharah*. We are prone to dispute and sin; our status and honor are completely in the hands of God. Our role with respect to God is to be humble, to carefully check our actions and correct our sins—all thoughts which gently lower us off the proud dais from which we sparred with God in *Bava Metsia*.

The commentary of the *Tosafot* is famous for its desire to reconcile contradictory *sugyot* in the Gemara, and indeed in order to understand the legal question of how much authority a *bat-kol* has in Halakhah, the *aggadot* of *Bava Metsia* 59b and *Eruvin* 13b have to be reconciled. But even while reconciling the legal aspects that differ between the *aggadot*, it is important to recognize that the contradictory tones and messages of the passages do not need to be reconciled. The *aggadot* do have differing views towards man's role vis-à-vis God, but these views are not mutually exclusive. We do not need to choose between feeling like a partner with God and recognizing our own smallness in the universe. As R. Joseph Soloveitchik discusses in his article, *Majesty and Humility*, man sometimes encounters God while on a spiritual high, and sometimes while feeling small and

frail. Often, the way man connects to God relates to man's situation in life: "We said before that man meets God, not only in moments of joy and triumph, but also in times of disaster and distress."[9] The *aggadot* of *Bava Metsia* and *Eruvin* teach that both attitudes are legitimate and important components of man's relationship with God, and are appropriate for different situations in people's lives.

Atara Siegel is a junior at SCW majoring in Psychology, and is a staff writer for Kol Hamevaser.

1 This is the definition given in *Kelim* 5:10. See *Bava Metsia* 59b for a more homiletical explanation of the term.

2 See *Yevamo*t 16:6.

3 Deuteronomy 30:12.

4 Alternatively, each *sugya* also proposes that the preceding discussion could have taken place before the *bat-kol*'s pronouncement, when *Beit Shammai*'s position was still viable, although currently one must follow *Beit Hillel*.

5 Rabbi Moshe Taragin, "Shiur #14: Relying On A Bat Kol or Other Non-Rational Halakhic Sources," *The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash*, available at: vbm-torah.org.

6 See *Rosh ha-Shanah* 20a where the Gemara states that it is even permissible to intimidate witnesses to change their testimony so that *Rosh Hodesh* will fall out on an advantageous date – assuring that *Shabbat* will not fall out next to *Yom Tov*.

7 Leviticus 11:29-31.

8 *Eruvin* 13b, translation mine.

9 R. Joseph Soloveitchik, "Majesty and Humility," *Tradition* 17,2 (1978): 25-37.

"I Did Not Act for My Own Honor, but, Rather, I Acted for Your Honor"[1]: Nakdimon Ben Guryon and the Miracle of Rain

By: Davida Kollmar

Most of *Masekhet Ta'anit* discusses the process that the Jews would undergo when there were droughts or other impending catastrophes. The third *perek* is filled with stories of rabbis who prayed and were thereby able to sway the course of nature by convincing Hashem to intervene and bring miracles on their behalf. The first of these stories is that of Nakdimon ben Guryon, one that could shed light on some characteristics which may be common to other stories of miracles, both later in the *perek* and in general. One of the major *parshanim* who examines this *aggadeta* is Maharsha (R. Samuel Edeles), a sixteenth century Polish rabbi who wrote *Hiddushei Maharsha*, a commentary on the Talmud that includes an explanation of the aggadic portions. Using Maharsha's commentary as a basis for a close reading of the Nakdimon ben Guryon story can highlight some points that allow for a better understanding of the circumstances in which miracles and divine intervention occur.

The story begins as follows:

Once, all of the Jews went up to Jerusalem for one of the *shalosh regalim*, and did not have enough water to drink [because of a drought]. Nakdimon ben Guryon went to a nobleman and said to him, "Lend me twelve springs of water [which you own] for the people coming for the *regel*. [In return,] I will give you twelve springs of water (i.e. the springs will be refilled), and if I do not give them to you I will give you twelve talents of silver." He then set a time [by which the loan would need to be repaid].[2]

The characters in this story are significant. Maharsha notes that this story took place close to the time of *hurban ha-Bayit* (destruction of the Temple) when the Romans were in power. The nobleman may have the upper hand and be able to control the terms of the deal because he is presumably one of the Romans.[3] Nakdimon ben Guryon, though, is also important. The Gemara in *Gittin* states that he was one of three rich men in Jerusalem who were wealthy enough to potentially help Jerusalem withstand twenty-one years of siege.[4] Although Nakdimon asks for a large loan, he has the means to repay it.

The chosen number of springs is also significant. Maharsha links this to those twelve springs in *Eilim*, one of *Benei Yisra'el*'s stops in the desert after crossing the *Yam Suf* (Sea of Reeds).[5] Rashi explains that the twelve springs correspond to the twelve *shevatim*.[6] Maharsha says that the same applies to the twelve springs in the Nakdimon ben Guryon story: Nakdimon hopes that rain would come in the merit of the twelve *shevatim*. If this merit proves insufficient, however, then the twelve talents of silver would serve as *kapparah* (atonement) for the Jews' unworthiness.[7] Even this early in the story, there is recognition of the need for divine intervention. Nakdimon realizes that it is unlikely that rain will come naturally, and he therefore needs to have symbols of the Jews' merits so that Hashem will intervene on their behalf.

Using Maharsha's commentary as a basis for a close reading of the Nakdimon ben Guryon story can highlight some points which allow for a better understanding of the circumstances in which miracles and divine intervention occur.

The story continues:

When the [day] came and it still had not rained in the morning, [the nobleman] sent a message to [Nakdimon]: "Give me either the water or the money you owe me."

[Nakdimon] replied, "I still have time; this whole day is mine.

At noon, [the nobleman] sent him a message: "Give me either the water or the money you owe me."

[Nakdimon] replied, "I still have the rest of the day."

At *minhah* time, [the nobleman] sent him a message: "Give me either the water or the money you owe me."

[Nakdimon] replied, "I still have the rest of the day."

The nobleman began to mock him, saying, "All year it has not rained, and now it will rain?!" He went into the bathhouse happily.[8]

It is strange that there is so much back-and-forth between Nakdimon and the nobleman. The nobleman should have realized which time of day was the deadline. Even if he did not, why did he continue to send messages to Nakdimon after he was already informed in the morning that the deadline would not be until the day ended?

Maharsha explains the nobleman's reasoning by describing a difference between Jewish and Gentile law concerning the part of the day that would be the deadline for loans. According to non-Jewish law, the deadline would be at sunrise. In Jewish law, however, the deadline would arrive only later, at *sheki'ah* (sunset). The nobleman, a non-Jew following Gentile law, asks for the payment in the morning, while Nakdimon, a Jew, believes that he has the whole day to wait for rain before he would need to pay the nobleman in silver.[9] Once corrected, though, the nobleman seems to accept here that the loan is being conducted according to Jewish law, which is unusual because, as noted above, the story occurred at a time of Roman power. However, when Nakdimon explains the Jewish version of the law to the nobleman he is not clear enough. As the nobleman mistakenly understands him, the deadline would be when most of the day will have passed, so he would not need to wait the whole day. It is for this reason that he sends a messenger to Nakdimon again at noon.[10] At this point in the story, the nobleman seems to have done nothing wrong. He is asking for money that he believes is rightfully his, and the back-and-forth is due to misunderstanding, not malice.

This tone of misunderstanding changes at *minhah* time. Maharsha explains that the nobleman knows that *minhah* is not the deadline. He nevertheless sends a messenger to Nakdimon because he thinks that there would be no time for it to rain, reasoning that if it has not rained all year, it would not rain now.[11] This part of the dialogue is a turning point. Previously, the nobleman was asking for the money because

he thought it was his right. Now, however, he begins to mock Nakdimon, because it is at this point that he considers Nakdimon to be simply pushing off the inevitable.

Maharsha further explains that going into the bathhouse is also a form of mockery. The Jews have such a shortage of water that they are forced to pay a large sum for it. The nobleman, meanwhile, is taunting them by showing that he even has enough water to take a bath.[12] It is this action that makes the nobleman's intentions clear: The nobleman no longer has the excuse that he acted the way he did because the payment was inevitable. Now his spiteful actions show an unwarranted lack of sensitivity to the plight of the Jews.

The story resumes:

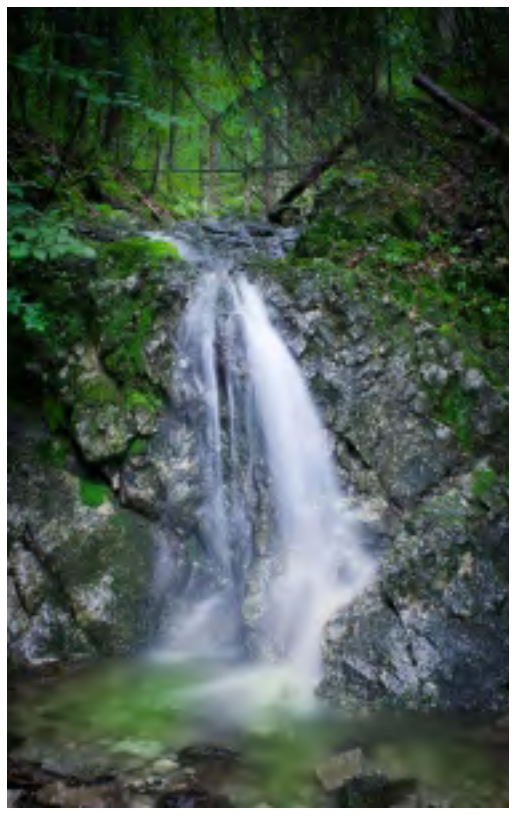
Simultaneous with the nobleman's entrance into the bathhouse in happiness, Nakdimon entered the *Beit ha-Mikdash*, upset. He wrapped himself [in a *tallit*] and stood in prayer. He said before Him (Hashem), "Master of the World, it is revealed before You that I did not act for my own honor and I did not act for my family's honor, but rather I acted for Your honor, so that there would be water for the people coming up for the *regel*." Immediately, the sky filled with clouds, and it began to rain until the twelve wells were filled and overflowing.[13]

The language of this section encourages the reader to compare and contrast Nakdimon and the nobleman. The text emphasizes that the two men entered their destinations simultaneously. Additionally, the names for their destinations share similar language; the Hebrew for bathhouse, *beit ha-merhats*, is parallel to the words *Beit ha-Mikdash*.

The introduction to Nakdimon's prayer illustrates one difference between the two men. In his prayer, Nakdimon emphasizes that his actions were not for his own honor, thus demonstrating his selflessness. The nobleman, on the other hand, is acting in a selfish manner. It is true that he does deserve some sort of payment by the time the deadline comes, and he could also contend that he agreed to lend the wells out of a desire to help those in need. However, the nobleman knows that the deadline has not yet passed, and yet he still demands payment incessantly and goes so far as to mock the Jews. These actions show that, in reality, his motivation is to make money out of the deal. He is not acting out of altruism.

Another difference between the two men concerns their faith in Hashem and His ability to perform miracles. As mentioned earlier, the nobleman thinks that there is not enough time left for it to rain, and he will therefore inevitably be repaid in money. He automatically assumes that the world will work as it always has, and that there is no room for miracles. His entrance into the bathhouse demonstrates nonchalance—an ordinary activity for an ordinary time. Nakdimon, though, recognizes the power of prayer. The story does not mention prayer until this point, suggesting that Nakdimon thinks that it is best to depend on nature; however, when there is no other option, Nakdimon has faith that a miracle will happen. He states his plight to Hashem, but neglects to request what Hashem should do about it, as if to say that he accepts Hashem's authority over the matter and does not want to tell Him what to do. However, the fact that he is praying shows his faith that Hashem will listen to his request.

It is also interesting that Nakdimon mentions that he acted for Hashem's sake, yet elaborates that he acted for the benefit of the Jews and the holiday. That the Gemara mentions this seems redundant, since both Hashem and the reader are already aware of his reasoning. One explanation could be that by referencing the Jewish people in his prayer, Nakdimon is broadening the need for the miracle from something personal to something affecting the entire Jewish people. By mentioning the holiday, he is drawing on the merits of the Jewish people who performed the *mitsvah* of undertaking the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and serving Hashem there. His mention of the Jews may also allude to the merit of the twelve *shevatim*, which is symbolized by the wells, as described earlier. Since Nakdimon is reluctant to ask for a miracle, as evident from the previous lack of prayer, he feels the need to call upon as many merits as possible so that it will be justified.



The story continues:

Simultaneous to the nobleman leaving the bathhouse, Nakdimon ben Guryon left the *Beit ha-Mikdash*. When they met each other, [Nakdimon] said, "Give me the money that you owe me for the extra water."

The nobleman replied, "I know that the only reason that Hashem changed the order of the world was for you. But I still have a claim against you that I can take my money from you: the sun had already set, and so all the rain that fell was already during my time [that the wells had reverted back to me]."[14]

Maharsha points out that Nakdimon's ability to request payment for the extra rain was not stipulated in the initial agreement. Nakdimon was mocking the nobleman in return for what the nobleman had said earlier: The nobleman had asked Nakdimon excessively for money, so he was doing the same.[15] This may also be a form of rebuke to the nobleman for not believing in Hashem's ability to perform miracles. As noted before, the nobleman was wrong for requesting the money at *minhah* time, which was also the point at which he showed that he did not believe that there was a way for rain to come. Since the two ideas of excessively requesting money and of believing in miracles seem to be tied, by mocking the nobleman's view on one, Nakdimon is in fact mocking his view on both.

Maharsha also comments on the strangeness of the nobleman's words-- that Hashem had made it rain for Nakdimon so that he would not have to repay the loan with money, and yet Nakdimon must still pay because it rained after the deadline. According to the nobleman, what would be the point of Hashem's miracle if it did not fulfill its purpose? Maharsha explains that the nobleman was saying that Nakdimon's prayers were fulfilled by the rain. However, Hashem made the rain fall after *sheki'ah* so that the nobleman would not lose the money from the water that he lent to Nakdimon. The rain did not come for Nakdimon's benefit but rather for the nobleman's, so that his wells would be full.[16] The belief that the miracle was for him demonstrates the nobleman's self-importance. At this point in the story, the nobleman has not yet done anything that would merit a miracle being performed on his behalf. Nonetheless, he is so convinced that he is correct in his demands for the money that he believes that the miracles were for his sake.

Maharsha notes that the nobleman emphasizes the deadline of sunset even though, according to the non-Jews, sunset is meaningless because nighttime is considered part of the previous day. The nobleman's point is that regardless of the contract being used, he has a right to be paid in money starting at *sheki'ah*.[17] This is interesting when contrasted with the confusion about deadlines that occurred earlier in the day. The nobleman now understands the system, and is self-assured that he would be right in any case.

The story concludes:

[Nakdimon] returned and entered the *Beit ha-Mikdash*, wrapped himself [in a *tallit*], and stood in prayer. He said to [Hashem], "Master of the World, let it be known that there are those in the world whom you love." Immediately, the clouds dispersed and the sun shone.

At that time, the nobleman said to him, "If not for the fact that the sun shone I would have had a claim against you that I would have gotten my money from you."[18]

According to Maharsha, Nakdimon is praying for a miracle to follow the one he had before. This prayer makes sense in the context of the nobleman's complaint. Hashem's first miracle did not demonstrate whom He loved, as it was not clear for whose benefit it had come. Nakdimon therefore asked for another miracle to prove once and for all that the rain was for the sake of the Jewish people: if the sun would shine again, it would be clear that it had rained before the sunset deadline and that the rain had come to help the Jews.[19] Maharsha also mentions that the miracle in the story was not that the clouds dispersed, but that the sun stood still instead of setting, thus lengthening the day. He proves his point from the comparison the Gemara later makes between Nakdimon and Moshe and Yehoshua, for whom this same miracle occurred.[20] Maharsha's reasoning is logical. The nobleman must have been aware of the time the sun was due to set to know if it had rained before or after the day was over. It started to rain while it was still day, and the rainclouds would have masked a transition between day and night. By mentioning while it was still cloudy outside that the rain fell during his time, the nobleman demonstrates that he knows that *sheki'ah* should have passed, so the miracle must have been that *sheki'ah* had been delayed rather than that the clouds had dispersed.

The comparison between Nakdimon and Moshe and Yehoshua mentioned earlier is surprising because Nakdimon did not share their stature: Despite the fact that this story centers on Nakdimon's charity, the Gemara states in *Masekhet Ketuvot* that his method of giving charity was not ideal. Nakdimon gave much charity; he had garments spread out for him to walk on when going to the *beit midrash* so that poor people could gather and keep them after he passed. However, Nakdimon eventually became impoverished, either because he gave most of his charity for his own honor, or because he should have given more because he was so rich.[21] It is ironic that one of the reasons his charity was imperfect was because he acted for himself, while in *Ta'anit*, one of the major points in his *tefillah* was that he did not act for himself.

* * *

The story of Nakdimon ben Guryon highlights several aspects of the circumstances surrounding divine intervention. One aspect is the balance the recipient should have between acknowledging that events generally happen naturally and believing that Hashem can manipulate the world. In general, there is a concept that people should not depend on miracles.[22] This story illustrates that there is a differ-

ence between depending on miracles and believing that they can happen. Nakdimon does not explicitly ask for the miracle of refilling the wells, yet he knows that Hashem is able to provide one for him.

Another lesson about divine intervention is the helpfulness of highlighting merits that one has in order that Hashem will look upon the request favorably. Nakdimon draws on merits when he mentions the twelve *shevatim* that make up the Jewish nation and the *mitsvah* of *aliyyah le-regel*. It seems that miracles will not come without justification, so if a person is unsure if he deserves a miracle it is advantageous to emphasize all of the virtues of himself and of the other recipients.

Finally, it is more likely that a miracle will come if the motivations of those asking for it are altruistic and not selfish in nature, as illustrated by Nakdimon's emphasis that he is not asking because of his own honor. Even when Nakdimon asks Hashem for a miracle at the end of the story, it is not for himself but so that Hashem can make His will clear. The altruism, however, does not have to be an ingrained characteristic of the supplicant, but can be just the motivation for a specific request. Nakdimon, in general, is not altruistic, giving charity for his own honor, as mentioned in *Ketubbot*; it is for this reason that he is impoverished at the end of his life. However, in this specific instance, since he is in fact acting for the sake of Hashem and the Jewish people, his request is granted.

Future study could trace these concepts through the rest of the third *perek* of *Ta'anit* to see when and how they play out.

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1 *Ta'anit* 30a. All translations are the author's.
2 *Ta'anit* 19b.
3 Ad loc., s.v *halakh*.
4 56a.
5 *Shemot* 15:27.
6 Ad loc., s.v. *sheteim esreh einot mayim*.
7 Maharsha to *Ta'anit* 19b, s.v. *halakh*.
8 *Ta'anit* 19b-20a.
9 Maharsha to *Ta'anit* 19b, s.v. *she-kava*.
10 Ibid., s.v. *ve-shuv*.
11 Ibid., s.v. *be-minhah*.
12 Maharsha to *Ta'anit* 20a, s.v. *she-nikhnas*.
13 *Ta'anit* 20a.
14 Ibid.
15 Maharsha, ad loc., s.v. *ten*.
16 Ibid., s.v. *ve-amar lei*.
17 Ibid.
18 *Ta'anit* 20a.
19 Maharsha, ad loc., s.v. *hoda*.
21 *Ketuvot* 66b-67a.
22 *Pesahim* 64b.

Quantum Physics as a Natural Avenue for Divine Intervention[1]

BY: Gilad Barach

About a century ago, a series of ideas and experiments developed into the theory of quantum physics and overturned many of the principles established centuries earlier by Isaac Newton. The new science also overturned prior difficulties posed by the clash between natural law and Jewish theories of divine intervention. Under classical physics, a break in nature is needed to account for even non-miraculous intervention, like God giving rain when Israel observes His commandments. Quantum physics, on the other hand, describes a world in which divine intervention need not contradict any physical laws.

The current theories of quantum physics derive from the discovery that many physical attributes of nature are quantized, meaning that they come in indivisible packets. In 1900, Max Planck conjectured that energy is quantized – a theory which resolved an outstanding problem related to blackbody radiation.[2, 3] In 1905, Albert Einstein theorized the same for light; if a beam of light were imagined to be a series of discrete particles (called photons), the well-known problem of the photoelectric effect suddenly became explainable.[4] However, earlier experiments had already demonstrated that light is a continuous wave; evidently, light can be experimentally portrayed as either a wave or a stream of distinct particles, depending on what the experimenter chooses to show.

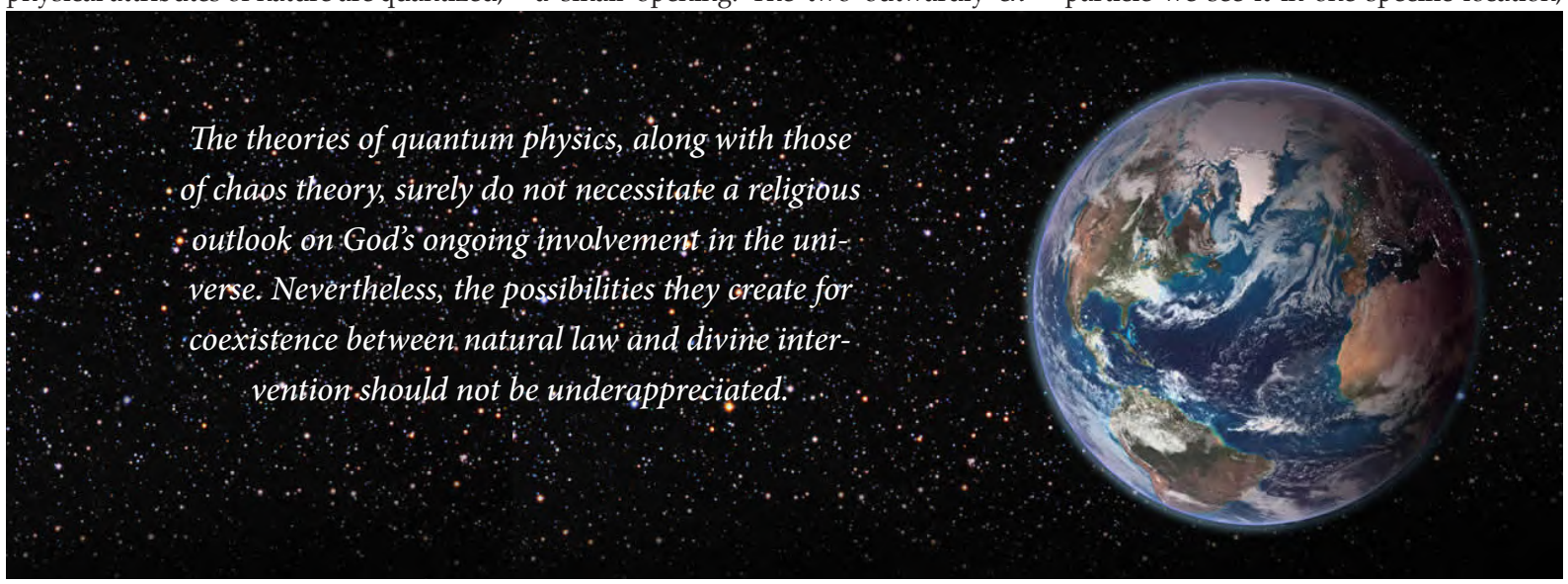
The bizarre dualism that light is both a wave and a particle was soon extended. In 1924, Louis de Broglie theorized that *all* matter has wave-like characteristics. It was previously accepted that all matter consists only of discrete particles – atoms and their subatomic components, including protons, neutrons, and electrons. However, in 1927, wave-like properties were demonstrated for electrons, using the same experiment that originally led physicists to believe that light is a wave.

The classic method for coaxing light to behave like a wave is the two-slit interference experiment: A beam of light is sent through an opaque surface containing two thin parallel slits. As the light arrives at a screen behind the slits, an interference pattern is formed, consisting of regions alternating between high and low brightness. This is explained by the wave model of light: As the wave passes through each of the slits, it spreads radially outwards from the other side of the slit, just as a wave in the ocean behaves when it hits a wall with a small opening. The two outwardly expanding ripples that emerge from the slits can constructively combine (when two crests intersect) or deconstructively cancel each other out (when a high point on one ripple meets a low point on the other ripple), depending on the geometrical point in which they meet. These equidistant high and low points of intersection create the telltale interference pattern on the screen. In this way, a stream of electrons exhibits wave-like characteristics.

To add to the strangeness of the wave-particle duality, which has by now been confirmed for both light and matter, wavelike properties have been demonstrated not just for continuous streams of particles, but even for individual particles. In a variation of the two-slit experiment, the intensity of the light beam is reduced until one photon is fired every few seconds. Still, the interference pattern emerges as if a normal light wave went through both slits and caused interference. This troubled physicists; with what can a lone photon interfere, if it only passes through one of the slits? Quantum physics' resolution is to loosen the definition of a particle's location. As long as a particle is not being directly observed, its location is not absolute, but rather probabilistic, related to a distribution known as its wavefunction.[5] For example, in the case of the two-slit experiment, the wavefunction of the single photon records a 50% probability that the photon will travel through the right slit, and a 50% probability that it will travel through the left slit. These probability "waves" are what interfere with each other on the back side of the slits, causing the interference pattern.

If unobserved particles follow wavefunctions, but every time we look at a particle we see it in one specific location, then the observation must "collapse" the wavefunction. Effectively, the probability distribution of where the particle is likely to be found – a distribution which, in theory, assigns some chance to every point in space – changes upon observation to a 100% probability that the particle will be located exactly where it is observed.

But what does this say about the nature of the wavefunction in the first place? It was appealing to many physicists, including Einstein, to refer to wavefunctions as representing our imperfect knowledge of the particle's position, though the particle was, in reality, in a single determinate location at all times.[6] On the other hand, some developers of quantum theory, such as Niels Bohr, insisted that the wavefunction results not from our lack of knowledge of the system, but of the system's innate indeterminateness. We are not overlooking some so-called "hidden variables" which would indicate precisely where the particle will be found; rather, no such hidden vari-



ables exist, and the unseen particle lacks a specific address.

For decades, this debate was believed to be impossible to settle, since it relates to the nature of unobserved particles. Remarkably, in 1964, John Stewart Bell discovered a complex experimental method to determine whether these hidden variables exist. A decade later, the results were in: Bohr was right that a particle does not have a specific location at any instant it is not being observed. Probabilistic wavefunctions are thus objective. An unobserved particle might be imagined (though not seen, of course) as a broad smear, more concentrated in areas where an observation is likely to find it, and less concentrated where it is less likely to be found.

When we actually observe a particle, its wavefunction immediately "collapses" to 100% probability of appearing exactly where it is found, and no chance of appearing anywhere else in space. Obviously, the point to which the wavefunction will collapse is impossible for physicists to foresee, but it corresponds to the probability distribution of the wavefunction. In this way, the collapse follows the mathematics of random variables. As an example, the wavefunction of a photon in the two-slit experiment represents a 50% probability that it will pass through the right slit and a 50% probability that it will pass through the left slit. If one thousand photons are used for this experiment, and a special sensor collapses the wavefunction by recording through which slit each photon passes, we expect to find 50% passing through the right slit and 50% passing through the left slit.[7] Within statistical tolerances, we will find that about half of the photons go either way, even though it is impossible to accurately predict through which slit any individual photon will go. There is no information that indicates the behavior of a given particle, so, as far as science is concerned, it is totally random.[8]

* * *

Needless to say, this quantum description of reality, which affirms that the elements underlying the universe behave on a purely random basis, is unsettling. Moreover, it seems to align with the godless worldview of the Greek philosopher Epicurus. In *Moreh Nevukhim*, Rambam records five ancient theories of divine providence; the first is that of Epicurus. "First Theory: There is no Providence at all for anything in the Universe; all parts of the Universe, the heavens and what they contain, owe their origin to accident and chance; there exists no being that rules and governs them or provides for them. This is the theory of Epicurus, who assumes also that the Universe consists of atoms, that these have combined by chance, and have received their various forms by mere accident. There have been atheists among the Israelites who have expressed the same view; it is reported of them: 'They have denied the Lord, and said He is not.'"[9, 10, 11]

This need not spell disaster for religious Jews who also subscribe to modern physics. Even if the objective randomness of wavefunction collapse is not blindly accepted, the theory of quantum physics still works. Physicists have only demonstrated that there is no physical reason why particles appear in one place instead of another. A religious person is free to believe that the process of wavefunction collapse is not totally random and baseless, but rather directed by God. This does not create any problems with the physics or statistics behind the theorem, as the randomness of any string of data is fundamentally impossible to prove. Statistical tests of randomness look for specific patterns in seemingly random data sets; any test can only suggest that a string is unlikely to be random, but it cannot directly prove its randomness.[12] Ultimately, randomness is random – anything can happen.[13] Therein lies the escape hatch from Epicurean philosophy: God has the ability to fidget with quantum physics without anybody's knowledge, so the process is not necessarily random.[14]

Needless to say, this quantum description of reality, which affirms that the elements underlying the universe behave on a purely random basis, is unsettling. Moreover, it seems to align with the godless worldview of the Greek philosopher Epicurus.

Although quantum physics allows for a theory of divine intervention, it does not promote it. The notion of God's involvement in nature through seemingly random quantum processes is a fundamentally nonscientific concept, in that it is experimentally impossible to prove or disprove.[15] Yet, this avenue to divine intervention in the world is historically unique, since, unlike earlier theological theories, it does not necessitate a break in nature. Newtonian physics, the predecessor to quantum mechanics, was totally deterministic. All future events were precisely determined by initial conditions; if scientists had exact data on all the matter in the universe at one moment, they would be able to calculate forces and interactions to perfectly predict all future states of the universe. Such a view precludes God's active and continuing involvement in the natural order, in apparent contradiction to many biblical verses which promise that God will reward Jews for observing His commandments and will punish them for their transgressions.[16] When one's religious doctrines of divine intervention clash with deterministic science, he or she must create exceptions to reconcile them, by allowing discreet loopholes in nature or the occasional violation of physical law.[17]

In quantum theory, though, determinism is displaced by intrinsic indeterminism. We only know what we cannot know – it is impossible to scientifically ascertain how subatomic particles will behave when we try to observe them. Whether the patterns forecasted by a wavefunction emerge randomly or with divine direction is a philosophical question, not a scientific one. This accommodates God's involvement in the world through a verified gap in science, without need for an interruption of nature.

But does any of this matter? If God naturally shapes the subatomic world, where the odd and unfamiliar landscape of quantum physics has been experimentally demonstrated, what of the macro scale, the world in which we live? Is there any real difference to us if some miniscule particles appear in a different location than chance alone might determine? Can that possibly add up to a fulfillment of God's promise to provide rain when His nation observes the Torah and to withhold it when they stray?[18] If not, this naturalistic approach to divine involvement might be inadequate for a religious philosophy of real divine intervention in the world.

Unfortunately, it is usually impossible to point to quantum events and track their implications in the jumbo-sized world with which we are familiar. Some direction might be found in a modern field of science called chaos theory. Certain enormously complex systems are highly dependent on their precise initial conditions, and it is virtually impossible to predict how they will develop. A famous example is the Butterfly Effect in weather. In 1972, Edward Lorenz addressed a group of meteorologists about the impossibility of knowing whether a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil may cause a tornado in Texas some time later.[19] As far as we can tell, it is just as likely that the tornado was linked to a butterfly in Peru, or the butterfly in Brazil actually averted a tornado in Kansas; not enough is known about the initial conditions to prefer one conjecture over another. In chaotic systems like weather, scientists cannot encapsulate the full results of a minor event or trace back a catastrophic event to its root causes, not because the systems are inherently indeterministic, as in quantum physics, but because of the enormous amount of information needed to make such assessments.

A similar ambiguity exists regarding the effects of God's hypothetical involvement in quantum mechanics. One cannot say with any sort of scientific certainty that a handful of changes on the quantum scale will amount to anything noticeable, like a rainstorm or a drought. But, simultaneously, neither can one rule that out on scientific grounds; though man may not know everything about the initial conditions necessary to model chaotic systems, God does. If God were really interacting through quantum randomness, He – the *Temim De'im*, One of Perfect Knowledge[20] – could certainly make it count by starting a process that culminates with great significance on the macro scale.

The theories of quantum physics, along with those of chaos theory, surely do not necessitate a religious outlook on God's ongoing involvement in the universe. Nevertheless, the possibilities they create for coexistence between natural law and divine intervention should not be underappreciated. As human comprehension of nature grew immeasurably starting in the seventeenth century, it seemed to contradict popular religious doctrine. It is remarkable that further development of the scientific theories in more recent times has reversed the trend from conflict to confluence.

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1 The science content of this article has been reviewed by Dr. Amish Khalfan, instructional assistant professor of Physics at Yeshiva College.

2 Blackbody radiation refers to how objects such as metals glow when they are heated. In what was known as "the ultraviolet catastrophe," the existing models failed to explain the radiation in the ultraviolet spectrum.

3 The theorems and experiments discussed in the next three paragraphs are described in: Paul Tipler and Ralph Llewellyn, *Modern Physics* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 2008).

4 The photoelectric effect is the name for the phenomenon that light shining on a metal excites electrons as a function of the light's frequency, not its intensity. This could not be explained under classical physics.

5 This follows Max Born's interpretation that a particle's wavefunction represents its probability of being found at different points in space. (Jim Baggott, *The Quantum Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 74.) For reasons discussed below, Born's interpretation is now agreed upon by most physicists.

6 Various theories attempt to explain the interference pattern observed in the two-slit experiment in light of Einstein's insistence that a particle is always at a definite location. For one recent explanation, see Alexey A. Kryukov, "The double-slit and the EPR experiments: A paradox-free kinematic description" (2007), Cornell University Library, available at: www.arxiv.org.

7 In statistics, the Law of Large Numbers states that, if many trials are conducted, the overall proportion of "successes" converges to the probability of "success" from a single trial. For our purposes, a success can be considered passage through the right slit. As more and more photons are fired at the

screen, the proportion of overall photons that pass through the right slit will tend to 50%, because that is the probability for any given photon. (Jim Pitman, *Probability* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1993), 101.)

8 Objective randomness is very rare in science. For example, when a computer programmer needs to generate a random number, he or she will often use what is called a "pseudorandom number generator" which yields a very unpredictable number. Still, the inherent process of generating this number involves some algorithm which pre-determines the result. According to quantum theory, though, quantum events may be used to create a truly random number generator.

9 Jeremiah 5:12.

10 *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:17. Excerpt from Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, transl. by M. Friedländer (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 282.

11 At first blush, it would seem that the halakhic category *apikores* is related to Epicurus' name, but the established definition of an *apikores* does not correspond to the Epicurean philosophy about which Rambam writes. The Talmud provides two possible definitions of an *apikores*: one who disgraces Torah scholars, and one who disgraces his friend in the presence of a Torah scholar (*Sanhedrin* 99b). R. Shimon ben Tsemah Duran (Rashbats) explains that the title *apikores* is indeed named after Epicurus, who denied God, but Hazal expanded it to include other intolerable religious transgressions (*Magen Avot* to *Avot* 2:14).

12 Donald E. Knuth, *The Art of Computer Programming, Vol. 2, Third Edition* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998), chapter 3.3.

13 If, for example, a person were to maliciously change one digit in the "random digits table" found in the back of statistics textbooks, it would be absolutely unperceivable.

14 It is possible to say that none of the apparent randomness in wavefunction collapses happens "naturally," but, rather, it is all designed and manipulated by God. Strictly speaking, this extent of intervention is not needed; Epicurus' statement that all of nature is governed by random processes can be contradicted with the minimalist admission that some of nature is governed by God.

15 In Popper's terms, the theory is not falsifiable. (Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), chapter 6.)

16 For example, see the lengthy passages of reward and punishment: Lev. 26:3-46 and Deut. 28:1-69. Based on these and other verses, Ramban famously denies the very existence of a natural order (commentary to Ex. 13:16). Rambam, while strongly subscribing to the notion of nature, still reads in these verses God's involvement in national prosperity and disaster (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Ta'anit* 1:1-3).

17 Both of these options are proposed by Rambam when he discusses the intersection of miracles and nature. One of his proposals is that all miracles were pre-programmed into nature during the world's creation (see *Avot* 5:6 and Rambam's commentary (to 5:5 in his counting)). His second idea allows for the occasional and temporary interruption of nature (*Moreh Nevukhim* 2:27).

18 Deut. 28:12, 23-24.

19 "Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?" (Edward Lorenz, *The Essence of Chaos* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), Appendix 1.)

20 Job 37:16, my translation.

An Interview with Dr. Micah Goodman

By: Chesky Kopel

Note to readers: Dr. Micah Goodman is *Rosh Midrashah* of Ein Prat- The Academy for Leadership, lectures on Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University, serves as a senior fellow in Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, and teaches on numerous Tikvah Fund programs. In recent years, Dr. Goodman has become a prominent voice in Israel on issues of Zionism, Judaism, and contemporary Israeli problems, frequently lecturing at the prime minister's residence and delivering a weekly Torah talk on Israeli channel 2. His first book, *Sodotav shel Moreh ha-Nevukhim*, on Rambam's *Moreh Nevukhim*, is an Israeli bestseller, and a second book, on *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, will be released shortly..

Do you feel that Moreh Nevukhim*'s approach to divine intervention is suited to address our modern sensibilities?*

Tragically, yes. When you say "modern sensibilities," I think what you mean is the fact that post-modern people went through a secularization in their understanding of the world. By that I mean that pre-modern people, when they wanted to understand the world, they found an explanation in the holy texts, the holy Scriptures. And for us, even as religious people, this part of life went through secularization, wherein human reason replaced the sacred texts. I think about the way secularization also swallowed other parts of our lives, our religious lives, such as our politics. Most of my religious friends and I want our politics secularized. Maybe also our psychology. For religious people, our prime motivation for doing good things comes from worrying about *olam ha-ba* — that's also secularized, for many religious people. I would say today that being religious in a modern world means that parts of your life went through secularization, and our conception of nature is the first. And since we understand nature through reason, it's very hard to understand divine intervention, as reason allows no place for divine intervention in the natural world.

That's where Maimonides comes in, attempting to make this concept palatable to rational minds. What's great about Maimonides is that he didn't offer his explanations in modern times; he offered his explanations in the Middle Ages, which means that Maimonides' explanations are not apologetics. He comes at it as a systematic theology and not as a response to the modern challenge. Tapping into his answers can help us out also because he wasn't thinking of these answers as an attempt to make sense of a religious world that went through partial secularization.

Do you think that, despite what you said, Maimonides' approach to divine intervention or concepts such as the Messiah was influenced by issues during his time?

If today Maimonides is in harmony with the issues of our time, back then he was in contrast with the issues of his time. The majority of people sitting around him in *shul* imagined God, Messiah, providence, intervention, in a radically different way than he did. So I would say, paradoxically, that if today we use Maimonides in order to make sense out of our time, he was radically in contrast with his own time, so to many people around him he didn't make any sense.

Is there any event in the history of the State of Israel that you would describe as miraculous?

Yes. The whole thing, Chesky, the whole thing. I think the Yom Kippur War wasn't miraculous, the Six Day War was our soldiers, the War of Independence was our brilliance. There isn't one event that I can say is "miraculous." What's miraculous is the entire package, the whole thing. The whole thing, which I think has a number of elements. One, the revival of the Hebrew language, something that never happened before. The awakening of national awareness, the *kibbuts galuyot* (ingathering of the exiles), and the unbelievable success of Israel – economically, militarily – the whole thing is a story that was never told before, and living in Israel and trying to be a part of the project of making Israel more interesting, more spiritual and more strong, I feel like the whole thing as a *mikhlol* (totality), not as a *perati* (particular phenomenon), is an unbelievable story, and the only reason I believe it is because it's actually happening.

What is your ultimate goal for the midrashah*? Do you hope to influence Israeli society or the larger Jewish world with your work?*

Let's first try to describe how it works. It's a kind of a *yeshivah*, but it's a *yeshivah* I've never learnt in. It's a *yeshivah* that has four pieces. One piece is Great Works of Western civilization: Homer, Shakespeare, Plato, Aristotle. The second piece, which we invest much more time and energy in, is *our* great works, specifically Bible and Talmud. A third piece is "Israeliness," trying to understand the great challenges and opportunities that Israel faces when it comes to relationships with the Israeli-Arab conflict, religion and state, and so on. The fourth piece is strengthening the body – martial arts, running, a lot of yoga. It's extremely intensive – early in the morning until late at night – strengthening your body, understanding Israel, deepening our understanding of the Great Works of the West, and finally, connecting ourselves to the greatness of Judaism. Those are the four elements of the curriculum at *Ein Prat*. *Ein Prat* started as a program for people after the army, in what David Brooks called the "Odyssey years," the years in which you have the maturity of an adult and the responsibilities of a young person. That lasts for a few years; those are great years,

and those are the most important years of a Western civilization. That's when leadership is born, that's when the best ideas are generated. In Israel, the "Odyssey years," I would say, are from the moment you finish the army to the moment you get married, find a job, and, as they say in Israel, "move to *Modi'in*."

We're here for those years, for those strategic years in your life. The brainstorm of *Ein Prat* is not only the time, but also the population. About 30% of the people that come to *Ein Prat* are religious, about 70% are secular. So what you have is a very heterogeneous curriculum for a very heterogeneous crowd. Seven years ago, six people came, and this year 315 students came. Thank God, this says something about Israeli society; it also says something of what could be Israeli society. So I would say the following, that *Ein Prat* has aspirations to change Israel in the following sense: We want to have an impact on the religious world and a stronger impact on the secular world. We want to create an option to live a much more open Orthodox world. For Americans this is trivial; for Israelis it's less trivial. But especially for secular Israelis we want to offer them an option to live a modern secular life much more connected to Judaism.

So we want to offer religious people to live a more open religious life and secular people to live a more Jewish secular life, and together, both of them together, can create a new passionate Israeli mainstream. And so that's our vision for Israel and we're very optimistic. We're optimistic because of the 1,400 graduates of *Ein Prat* who are highly active in Israeli society. They're working as a network to make a difference in Israeli society. They're building *minyanim* in communities all over Israel and they have their friends from universities joining them and being influenced and inspired by them. And in the end, one conclusion is that we'll change the society; our institutions, when they're successful, will offer a live option even for people that don't actually attend them.

I want to explain this sociological observation. There's an extremely successful institution in Israel called *Merkaz ha-Rav*. People see themselves as *'merkaznikim'* even if they've never stepped into *Merkaz ha-Rav*, because the institution already represents a whole way of life. *Yeshivat Har Etzion* is another example. People ask "are you a '*gushnik*' type?," and you can say, "Yes, I guess I am a '*gushnik*' even if I was never in Gush Etzion and never listened to Rav Aharon." An institution is successful if it offers a way of life even for people who didn't learn there. And how do they do that? Mostly because of a critical mass of charismatic graduates that represent the institution in a way that makes people want to join. The vision for *Ein Prat* is that, and I think in some way we're already there, is when I hear people asking a secular Israeli, "Are you secular?," and he starts stumbling on his words and says, "You know I'm not secular but I'm not religious, I'm *Ein Prat* type." The institution represents a way that enables secular Israelis to be connected to and inspired by their Judaism without necessarily becoming religious. And for sophisticated secular Israelis, until *Ein Prat* that wasn't that much of an option. So that's our vision to empower the Israeli mainstream.

You're not a 'gushnik,' *are you? I'm only a little bit joking.*

I'm a fan.

Why did you choose to write a book about Moreh Nevukhim*? Did you recognize a gap in the preexisting literature that you wanted to fill? And what makes your approach to* Moreh Nevukhim *different from that of other scholars?*

I chose to write about *Moreh Nevukhim* for two reasons. First, I felt that, for most people, *Moreh Nevukhim* is not accessible to them, and my first goal was to make it accessible to many, many people. And my second goal was to develop an understanding, and put some thoughts together that I don't think were never stated before, but that I packaged in a way that I think was quite new. And that is the understanding that the real purpose of *Moreh Nevukhim* is the *mevukhah* (perplexity), and Rambam is not there to solve our perplexities but to guide us in how to live with perplexities. And that point had been heard here and there, but was never quite stated in a way that would be relevant to people's way of life, so that was important for me to do: To see Rambam as inspiration for people that feel perplexed and have no guidance, and to change their paradigm. Meaning, we're not turning to Rambam to solve our perplexities, but to guide us in how to live with perplexities and how to leverage our perplexities to live a more religious and rich life. That was important for me when I was writing the book. I think that's why I was writing the book.

This is what I tried to do, but I don't know if I succeeded. I tried to write a book that's challenging academically. In other words, to write a book that tries to offer some *hiddush* academically to challenge the regular thinking about *Moreh Nevukhim*, and at the same time to make it accessible and exciting for people that have never read *Moreh Nevukhim*. That was my challenge, to deal with both. I don't know if I succeeded. There was a lot of critique about my book for good and for less good, but that's what I tried to do.

Would you like to add anything about your new book on the Kuzari*?*

Yes; it's coming out in a week or two which means that it will probably be out when this interview will be published. It's the same; I tried to do the same thing again. In other words, I tried to write a book that will make a classic Israeli book, a classic Jewish book, the *Kuzari*, exciting and accessible to many people, and also hopefully challenging to people who read the *Kuzari* in the past and are involved in the conversation about the *Kuzari*. And I decided to write a book on the *Kuzari* because I feel like Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim* is a great book that expresses only a part of Judaism. There is another side to Judaism, or there are more sides to Judaism. There's something a little bit more mystical and much more emotional with more imagination that, inasmuch as Maimonides didn't really express imagination, wasn't captured and expressed in *Moreh Nevukhim*. And I feel like the *Kuzari* is a great book that expressed that other world which is as extremely Jewish as Maimonidean rationalism is Jewish. That's why I wrote about the *Kuzari,* because I wanted to express the other side of Judaism. And also, I've got to say that my book about *Moreh Nevukhim* doesn't only express a part of Judaism; it also expresses a part of who I am, and the *Kuzari* helps me complete that. So hopefully if this book will be successful, if you read both books, with both of the classics, it's a great introduction. I hope that both books together will be of great interest in Jewish philosophy.

Divine Providence: Godly Manifestations, and Human Uses and Misuses

BY: Nathan Denicoff

The issue of how involved God is in our daily lives is both a deeply personal and a deeply philosophical question. When deciphering applications of Halakhah, one can look at the sources and come to a reasonable conclusion, but the issue of *hashgahah peratit* touches much more on faith than do questions of how to properly make tea on Shabbat. The traditional sources on *hashgahah peratit* offer a range of possibilities with few concrete answers, further complicating the picture. Nevertheless, the lack of an accepted unified conception of *hashgahah perati* allows individual preference and belief to play a role in this personal issue.

Hashgahah peratit can be divided into two categories: divine knowledge and divine governance. There is little to no dispute among Hazal about God's omniscience, but the extent that God intervenes in worldly affairs is subject to much debate, especially in the potential conflict between free will and God's will.

In *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:17, Rambam limits its *hashgahah peratit* to humans alone. He writes that when a leaf falls off a tree or when a spider eats a fly, the fact that one leaf or fly was chosen over another is purely the result of chance, not a heavenly decree. Rambam also contends that "divine providence watches only over the individuals belonging to the human species and that in this species alone all the circumstances of the individuals and the good and evil that befall them are dependent upon their actions."[1] The *Sefer ha-Hinnukh* adds that God has general providence, or *hashgahah kelalit*, over each species of animals, but has providence over each individual human, known as *hashgahah peratit*. The *Sefer ha-Hinnukh* writes this in the context of *tsara'at*,[2] explaining that one of the reasons for *tsara'at*'s existence is to instill in us an awareness of God's providence over every individual.[3]

The idea that *hashgahah peratit* does not apply to animals seems to be in conflict with *Hullin* 63a and *Bereshit Rabbah* 79:6. In *Hullin* 63a, it is recounted that when R. Yohanan would see a *shalakh* bird he would exclaim, "Your judgments are as great as the sea."[4] Rashi explains that R. Yohanan means that God sends the *shalakh* bird to swoop down into the sea and kill fish prescribed for death. While Rashi's reading is one way to understand this Gemara, one could argue that R. Yohanan was only making a statement about God's judgments of humans, using the *shalakh* bird only as a metaphor. Even according to Rashi's reading, R. Yohanan may have only been referring to *hashgahah kelalit* for the fish. God's *hashgahah* over the fish may lead Him to send the *shalakh* birds to indiscriminately eat some of the fish. God does not care which fish lives or dies – He only cares that a certain number die. Nevertheless, Rashi's reading is very plausible, pro-

viding a source for God's *hashgahah peratit* extending to animals.

Bereshit Rabbah 79:6 provides another possible source for *hashgahah peratit* over animals. The *Midrash* recounts the story of R. Shim'on ben Yohai and his son hiding in a cave for thirteen years to escape persecution. When they exited the cave they saw a person hunting birds. When a heavenly voice would say, "Free, free," the bird would escape, but when the heavenly voice would say, "Death," the bird would be captured. R. Shim'on stated based on this that if a bird is not captured without a divine decree, a person is certainly not harmed without a divine decree. This source is quoted by the Vilna Ga'on in his commentary on the *Zohar*, *Yahel Or,* as a support for the idea that God exercises *hashgahah peratit* even on animals.[5]

In his book *Hashgachah Pratis,* R. Aryeh Leibowitz quotes this *midrash* and previous sages who used it to claim that God has *hashgahah peratit* for animals, but offers two other possible readings of the *midrash.* He writes, "The supposed individual divine providence for this bird may not have been on account of the bird itself as an individual, but perhaps on account of the hunter as an individual."[6] This is the opinion of R. David Luria, the Radal (d. 1855), who R. Leibowitz quotes in support for his alternate reading. Radal also suggests that, "The heavenly decree was not on account of the bird at all but to instruct R. Shimon to leave the cave."[7] It may be that there is *hashgahah peratit* for animals, but these sources have been read both ways.

The question of whether or not God has providence over animals is more of a philosophical question than one that directly affects how people lead their lives; nevertheless, this discussion lays some of the groundwork for the question of God's providence over humans and places some of the first limitations on this idea of divine governance. Without looking closely at the sources, one might assume Hazal believed that God governs every aspect of the world, without realizing the extensive debate on the issue.

Some sages are of the opinion that *hashgahah peratit* does not even apply to all people. In his commentary to *Vayikra* 13:47, Seforno writes that *hashgahah peratit* has to be earned, and only those who walk in God's ways, those of "kindness, truth... righteousness, and justice,"[8] will merit *hashgahah peratit*. Everyone else is left to chance. Ramban arrives at a similar conclusion in his commentary to *Bereshit* 18:19.[9]

Unlike Seforno and Ramban, who argue that only the righteous merit *hashgahah peratit,* Rambam writes that the level of providence is proportional to a person's deeds, and only the completely wicked do not merit God's attention. In *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:18, after arguing that *hashgahah peratit* for the righteous is proportional to their good deeds, Rambam writes, "For the ignorant and disobedient, their state is despicable proportionately to their lack of this overflow [of divine intellect], and they have been relegated to the rank of individuals of all other species of animals."[10] Rambam quotes the verse in *Tehillim* 49:13, "He is like the beasts that speak not." Most people who sin have redeeming qualities that would merit some form of *hashgahah*, but those who are completely sinful are treated as animals and are ignored by God. They are not even worthy of punishment – they are simply ignored.

Rambam claims in *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:51, regarding a person on the opposite end of the spectrum, "If a man's thought is free from distraction, if he apprehends Him, may He be exalted, in the right way and rejoices in what he apprehends, that individual can never be afflicted with evil of any kind."[11] Considering all the terrible things that have befallen righteous people at the hands of evildoers, this is hard to accept, but perhaps no one truly has God in his mind at all times without any distractions. Perhaps Rambam is presenting an ideal to strive for, rather than an existing reality.

I prefer it that way. I am glad there is not a uniform answer to this question. No one can truly understand the ways of God, and different conceptions of God's role in the world may appeal to different people.

After addressing the issue of levels of divine providence for different types of people, the question of what constitutes an expression of God's *hashgahah* arises. Two Talmudic sources on *hashgahah peratit* imply that God's providence extends even to trivial human matters. In *Hullin* 7b it is stated that a person doesn't even stub his toe without a heavenly decree. This would seem to contradict the idea espoused by multiple *Rishonim* that only the righteous merit *hashgahah peratit*. Perhaps only the righteous merit divine intervention to save them, but all people can be punished by God in this world as an expression of His *hashgahah peratit*. Similar opinions are raised in a discussion about the extent of divinely ordained suffering in *Arakhin* 16b, such as when a person has a garment woven for him but it doesn't fit, or when a person means to take out three coins but pulls out two instead. While these minor inconveniences may be expressions of divine punishment, it is also possible that only some are, while others are mere coincidence.

There is also much discussion on the potential conflict between free will and God's providence. If God wishes to protect certain people, does that limit the free will of others to harm them? It would seem that the more *hashgahah peratit* there is, the less free will there is, and vice versa.

In the eighth chapter of his *Shemonah Perakim*, Rambam addresses an aspect of this difficulty. He discusses the importance of free will, and how there can be no reward or punishment if people are not in control of their actions. He quotes the Talmudic axiom, "All is in the hands of Heaven, except for the fear of Heaven,"[12] as a possible contradiction to the idea of free will, but claims that "all" only refers to "natural phenomena that are not influenced by the will of man, such as a person's height, the weather, [and] the environment."[13] With the exception of these external circumstances, people have control over their actions.

Rambam addresses the issue much more directly in the same eighth chapter with the following situation: If one person stole money from another, and God supposedly decreed for the robber to gain the money and the victim to lose the money, then God would be decreeing sin, which cannot possibly be the case. Rather, man has complete control over all of his actions. God may still intercede on someone's behalf, but gives man free will to act as he chooses.

There are those who dispute this idea that man can act without a divine decree. In his *Hovot ha-Levavot,* R. Bahya ben Yosef ibn Paquda writes, "No one can benefit or harm himself or another without God's consent."[14] This idea, that all human actions are decreed by God, raises the question of how there can be reward or punishment in such a system.

R. Avraham ben ha-Rambam addresses this difficulty in his comments on *Shemot* 21:13 with the example of the murderer. He writes that no one can be murdered without a divine decree. The murderer is punished because God did not force the specific murderer to kill this man – He decreed that someone would murder him. This view is also attributed to the Vilna Ga'on in a letter of R. Yosef Zundel of Salant. He argues that when God decrees that a non-human will do harm to a human, He decrees which specific creation will do the harm; however, when God decrees that a human will be harmed by another human, He does not decree which specific free-willed person will act. Furthermore, if there is no divine decree against that person, no one can do him any harm.

This view of R. Avraham ben ha-Rambam and the Vilna Ga'on, among others, is in accordance with a story in *Ta'anit* 18b. When Turyanus sought to kill brothers Lulyanus and Pappus, he said to them that their god should come and save them. They replied that God sentenced them to death and they were not worthy of redemption. He placed them in Turyanus's hands so that Turyanus could be punished for killing them. They said, "God has many executioners at His disposal, and God has many bears and lions in His world that can attack and kill us." Because God did not decree who should kill them, Turyanus is still culpable for his actions.

* * *

In his book "*The Basics of Deed and Creed*," R. Benjamin Blech observes that Judaism is much more a religion of deed than of creed, of actions more than doctrine.[15] The extensive debate among Jewish scholars about the extent of *hashgahah peratit* supports this view of the nature of Jewish creed. The question of how involved God is in the world should be central to our belief system, but it is not addressed explicitly in the Torah, leading to many divergent opinions on the issue.

I prefer it that way. I am glad there is not a uniform answer to this question. No one can truly understand the ways of God, and different conceptions of God's role in the world may appeal to different people. I am personally comfortable with the idea that God has *hashgahah peratit* over humans, *hashgahah kelalit* over non-humans, and that people can benefit or be harmed without a divine decree. God may intercede on occasion, but I do not believe each time something good or bad happens it was necessarily decreed by heaven.

Others may rightfully contend that nothing can happen without a divine decree, but this view can lead to some troubling conclusions. In *Sefer Hassidim*, attributed to R. Yehudah he-Hassid, the issue of how to respond to misfortune is addressed. It is written there that people should ascribe sickness, physical harm at the hand of others, and city-wide disaster to God.[16] These personal misfortunes can be taken as a wakeup call to repent, but it is deeply troubling when people interpret other's misfortunes as divine punishment. This has been the case after natural disasters, such as after Hurricane Katrina when a prominent rabbi stated that God sent the hurricane to punish the godless people of New Orleans, and in response to the Bush administration's decision to support the Israeli withdrawal from Gush Katif. Similar insensitive, perverse reasons have been given for tragedies as massive as the Holocaust.

These opinions may be fringe views, but when one believes that every single thing is ordained by God and that God is just, one may think it reasonable to figure out why God would orchestrate suffering on such a large scale. I believe it may be proper to look inward in times of tragedy, but to use the misfortune of others as proof of their misconduct is wrong. It is unfortunate that a legitimate view in Jewish philosophy has led to such warped and insensitive conclusions.

Ultimately, each individual's relationship with God is personal. I am more comfortable believing that my actions are known by God but are not pre-ordained. I do not believe every minor success or misfortune is ordained by God as a reward or

punishment, but the larger tragedies open up questions of theodicy for which I do not have the answers. In terms of the extent of *hashgahah peratit*, the sources support a range of possibilities, but only God knows the true answers.

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1 *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:17, trans. by Shlomo Pines (modified). (Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

2 For an explanation of *tsara'at,* see *Leviticus* 13-14.

3 *Sefer ha-Hinnukh* 169.

4 *Psalms* 36:7.

5 *Yahel Or, Shelah* 157b.

6 Aryeh Leibowitz, *Hashgachah Pratis* (Southfield, MI: Targum Press, Inc., 2009).

7 Radal on *Bereshit Rabbah* 79:6, trans. by Aryeh Leibowitz.

8 Seforno on *Vayikra* 13:47, translation mine.

9 Ramban on *Bereshit* 18:19.

10 *Moreh Nevukhim* 3: 18, trans. by Shlomo Pines. (Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

11 *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:51, trans. by Shlomo Pines (modified). (Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

12 *Berakhot* 33b.

13 *Shemonah Perakim* Chapter 8, trans. by Avraham Yaakov Finkel. (Scranton, PA: Yeshivath Beth Moshe, 1994).

14 *Hovot ha-Levavot* Chapter 3, my translation.

15 Benjamin Blech, *Understanding Judaism: The Basics of Deed and Creed* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1992).

16 *Sefer Hassidim* 751.

Postmodern Orthodox: Orthodoxy's Encounter with Postmodern Thought

BY: Michael Faleck

Reason is a most useful tool for our survival and material well-being, but on questions of God and the purpose and meaning of life, it runs up against its limits. If reason is the summit of our intelligence and it has gone as far as it can on these issues, then the most logical conclusion is that the questions unanswered are unanswerable, or perhaps meaningless,[1] and ought to be abandoned. Agnosticism acknowledges doubts where doubts necessarily exist, whereas theism and atheism entail postulates that we are, by definition, unsure of.

So goes the line of thinking prevalent for some time now, and which dominates postmodern thought. This logic, in conjunction with the absence of compelling rational arguments for religious doctrine, causes any discerning mind to be dubious of religious belief. The foundations of religion—prophecy, miracles, divine communion, etc.—seem to our present-day sentiments to be notions that were common in earlier times but are flawed and obsolete in our own. The ancients had a very different, if underdeveloped, view of the world relative to our contemporary view.

For those of us raised religious, while the difficulty, and seeming absurdity, of religious life prompts us to question its nature and our devotion to it, the feeling that in abandoning religion we are abandoning a large part of ourselves gives us pause. When outsiders to faith consider various religions, they can examine detachedly, scanning quickly for value, meaning, or truth. But no religion is so manifestly true and good that a cursory perusal will, with any frequency, persuade the examiner of that religion's truth to the exclusion of all others. One can easily reject these foreign faiths because he or she feels little accountability to them whereas, to those religions we were raised with, the ones we have lived, whose worldview we have adopted, and whose society we have been a part of, we feel a much greater sense of responsibility. Having been raised in religious environments, doctrine is already ingrained in us to varying degrees, but we fear that we may have been misled or, as the allegations against religion go, that we believe simply because we wish it were true. We are left wondering if there is any way for us to be intellectually honest and, at the same time, maintain our religious convictions.

We are left wondering if there is any way for us to be intellectually honest and, at the same time, maintain our religious convictions.

In attempting to answer this question, it would seem apparent that wherever we land in our beliefs, we should take care that none contradict reason, but this need not imply that reason is our only resource in the pursuit of truth. Devotion to reason and devotion to truth are not the same thing. Postmodernism limits itself to the isolated, unbiased lens of reason, through which we view the world as if we were its first inhabitants, disconnected from history and looking out at the world for the first time. While there is much to be gained from viewing the world in this manner, there is also much lost if we limit ourselves to it as we weigh our decision concerning faith.

In weighing our decision, we must consider the content of our religious identity and what we gain by remaining committed to our religious upbringing or what we would lose in rejecting it. The core that anchors the chain of tradition as it passes through time is the Torah, which we believe contains God's law and word. Reason may not be able to discover objective truth, and humanity may not be able to reach up to God, but our tradition attests that God reached down to humankind and revealed truth to us, showing us what we could have never discovered on our own. In Orthodox Judaism, our religious identity leads us to assume a normative view in that our Jewish identity implies ethical and/or normative obligations based upon prophetic revelations. For many, it is from this element of our identity that religiosity begins and flows. The sense of meaning and purpose as well as the moments of profound religious experience which accompany the practice and study of our religion motivate us to remain committed to our religious lifestyles. While perhaps we should hesitate to trust these experiences wholeheartedly as much of their content can be the product of our own personal projections, we also need not completely rule them out as meaningless. To dismiss experience entirely in favor of reason would be to blind one eye to better serve the other.

Rejection of our religious identity in favor of agnosticism would entail rejecting the possibility of knowing, and, in some instances, the very existence of objective truth. As a result, agnosticism also often involves a further rejection of any belief in intrinsic meaning of the world. If we were confident that this meaninglessness were the true nature of the universe, we would do well to accept that reality and make the most of the lives that we have, either creating meaning for ourselves, as the existentialists posit, or simply accepting meaninglessness and making the most of what is left to us. But when facing the abyss, and our experiences and our traditions offer us the possibility of an alternative, a lifeline still connected to truth, it is not only reasonable, but also noble, for us to explore and hold onto that connection.

We must also consider that, besides for the positive impact Judaism has on our individual lives, we are also each links in a chain that serves a much larger purpose, and we have a responsibility to our national, historical, and religious mission and identity. When each of us says, "I am a Jew," he or she identifies as a member of the Jewish people, of a communal consciousness, and recognizes that he or she is one among many. When viewing ourselves in this manner, we contextualize our lives within the history of our people, vis-à-vis those who came before us and those who will come after. Our tradition contains the wisdom and values of the Torah, which our ancestors fought to preserve for thousands of years, and so, even when we lack a sense of meaning in our personal observance, or when doctrine does not make perfect sense to us, we should fight to maintain the chain of tradition and pass down our heritage for the sake of past and future generations. Many choose to reject the traditions because they feel they cannot make sense of all of its content, but the Jewish community owes its continuity to those who grappled with these challenges while remaining loyal to the traditions and the God of our forefathers.

For those who decide to remain loyal to their religious identity, by embracing our

historical identity, we accept the tradition that is essential to it, and with that acceptance we can proceed to work out the details of individual beliefs and doctrines. In contrast to those who use reason to denounce religion, we strive to connect the forces of faith and reason, reconciling tradition with the scientific and academic world. In so doing we advance our religion and traverse the gap that lies between our inner historical identity and our contemporary realities and circumstances.

Before we rely upon tradition and our religious experiences too heavily, however, while still in the mode of doubt we are uniquely poised to address the question of faith and qualify the terms under which we would be justified in adopting faith. We intuitively sense that any doctrine that promotes hate or actions that conflict with moral sensibility and a basic sense of right and wrong is so far inferior to doubt and agnosticism that it should be rejected and opposed by all. Even if we do not accept postmodernism in its entirety, we can take from it that pure reason does not likely yield any one worldview or religion. Certain ethical conclusions and norms should follow from this recognition, namely, respect for other people and their views and beliefs. If we are to choose to adopt certain beliefs, we must acknowledge that it is indeed a choice, and be sure that making that choice will not violate this most basic and fundamental truth: that everyone is entitled to make his or her own choice as well. This rule, perhaps paradoxically, begets its own exception, that the only intolerable perspective is one of intolerance. That in itself is a very important and valuable recognition, and to move from a position of doubt and respect to one of faith and disrespect or hate is an evil and unjustifiable act. Religious faith, or any faith in absolute truth, can only be morally permissible when that "truth" does not negatively affect or harm others.

Filtering the content of our doctrine through the sifter of reason and moral common sense is what makes faith justifiable and differentiates it from blind faith wherein one accepts what he or she is told without discernment. It is essential that we filter doctrine in this manner, and that we differentiate our mechanism of belief from that of those villains whose blind faith led and leads them to hate and kill in the name of God or an ideology. If we believe blindly, even if the content of our faith is less offensive than that of others, innocence would be merely an accidental characteristic of our faith, subject to change. We must scrutinize our faith in the same manner we would hope members of other faiths, or other sects within our own faith, would scrutinize theirs, doubting inhumanities and absurdities where they occur. In this way, we remain a step removed from our beliefs in that we choose the beliefs and not they us, and they are tentative in that we can adapt or change them if later prompted to do so.

In adopting faith, just as it would be a mistake to rely solely upon reason to the exclusion of experience and tradition, so would it be a mistake to limit ourselves to doctrine while stifling reason. If we are really devoted to truth, we ought to use every resource at our disposal in pursuing it, and reason can be a very powerful asset in that objective. Undoubtedly, we will encounter issues where our reason will fail us, and it is in those areas that we can rely upon our tradition and our faith to fill in the gaps. But while faith can illuminate the shadows left by doubt, it should never overcast those areas already touched by the light of reason. Faith, as an epistemic phenomenon, is both very powerful and

very volatile, and should therefore be used carefully, methodically, and only when necessary.[2]

Reason is also valuable to faith in that we do not necessarily have the ability, nor would we think it desirable, to believe in absurdities, or, rather, to accept assertions which seem to us absurd. Belief is only possible when its content is a plausible theory, or what William James referred to as "live hypotheses"—ones which appeal as real possibilities to him or her to whom they are proposed.[3] Pruning faith with the razor of reason refines the tradition and keeps it alive and believable.

Depending on the individual concerned, what is absurd and what is reasonable will differ. For the more modern-minded, who prize science and academic research, when matters of religion are mystified, they can often seem outlandish. However, within traditional libraries and *batei midrash,* there exists a spectrum of opinions concerning miracles, the divine, and related subjects, from which the potential believer can choose what speaks most to him or her and what make most sense. Perhaps more than any other person, Maimonides worked to reconcile, and specialized in uniting, Judaism with reason, promulgating views of many of our doctrines in terms more familiar to our modern-day sensibilities.[4] When considering the more palatable opinions, even our contemporary minds will no longer be spurned by the absurdity of faith and doctrine can become for us plausible and believable. We, living in a time where more information is available and popular thinking has changed, have gone and can go further than Maimonides and earlier generations did in advancing and refining doctrine, and in maintaining it as a set of "live" hypotheses which we have the ability to believe. When we merge reason with tradition by incorporating our faith with the most up-to-date information, scholarship, and wisdom, we maintain Judaism's viability.

This ongoing process of adjusting and refining faith can be frustrating, and that frustration deters many from properly dealing with the challenges posed to their faith. We want to be complete. We want to know the nature of the world and how we ought to live so that we can be confident and happy and not have to question ourselves and our actions. But we must never let our desire for meaning exceed our devotion to truth. Doctrinal and theological questions do not lend themselves to easy answers that can be arrived at all at once, and it would be a mistake to expect otherwise.

As we grow in our study and our experience, both as individuals during our lifetimes, and as a people over the course of history, our views progress. But that fluidity need not prevent us from leading religious lives today. What Bertrand Russell, the twentieth century British philosopher and mathematician, said of philosophy is true of theology as well: "To teach how to live with uncertainty, and yet without being paralyzed by hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy in our age can still do for those who study it."[5] We do not need to answer every theological question at the outset. Once we have chosen to embrace our tradition, and our religious practice is no longer contingent upon the daily throes of deliberation, we can immediately start living a life devoted to Jewish law, ethics, and serving God. The appearance of our practice and our religion will inevitably change as we modify them to keep them honest and reasonable. But living within Halakhah's lines, with the knowledge that those lines can alter, will help in fostering and developing our faith, which in turn will bring us closer to the ultimate truth which we believe lies at the heart of our tradition.

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1 See A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: V. Gollancz, Ltd., 1936) on the meaninglessness of metaphysical concepts.

2 Maimonides in his *Treatise on Resurrection* writes, "I try to reconcile the Law and reason, and wherever possible consider all things of the natural order. Only when something is explicitly identified as a miracle, and reinterpretation of it cannot be accommodated, only then I feel forced to grant that this is a miracle." As translated by Abraham Halkin in *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 223.

3 William James, *The Will to Believe* (New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1897), 3.

4 See, generally Menachem Marc Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999). Concerning prophecy specifically see Norbert Samuelson, "Comments on Maimonides' Concept of Prophecy," CCAR Journal 18.1 (1971): 9-25, and Daniel Breslauer, "The Politics of Prophecy in the View of Moses Maimonides." The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series 70.3 (1980): 153-71.

5 Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), xiv.

Save the date!

Kol Hamevaser, in conjunction with Al Pi Darko Jewish Educators' Society, will host a shabbaton on the Beren Campus on November 30-December 1.

Stay tuned for further details.

Af Hen Hayu Be-Oto Ha-Nes: What It Means and Some of Its Halakhic Implications

BY: Miriam Khukhashvili

"Nu, girls, what does it mean?" We all stared back at him in blank-faced silence. "What does it mean?" he repeated. One girl gathered up the courage to raise her hand. "They too were part of the *nes* (miracle)?" He looked amused. "Okay. And what does *that* mean?" From there, the rabbi launched into a lengthy discussion about this concept of *af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes* and its implications. Our pens were moving a mile a minute. It was only the beginning of our Women in Jewish Law class in seminary, and most of us had already written at least ten full pages of notes filled with fascinating *sevarot* and *shitot* pertaining to women as a halakhic category.[1] This new topic – *af hen* (as we liked to call it in its abridged form) – was particularly exciting. It was a phrase that we had heard thrown around multiple times in high school, yet few of us knew what it *really* meant. We were finally uncovering the basics.

So what exactly is the meaning of the phrase, and why is it so important? It plays an essential role in determining women's involvement and obligation in certain *mitsvot*. Generally, women are exempt from *mitsvot aseh she-ha-zeman gerama* (positive time-bound *mitsvot*.)[2] There are, however, three *mitsvot de-rabbanan* from which, on the basis of one concept, women are not exempt: hearing *Megillat Ester*, drinking four cups of wine on *Pesah*, and lighting *Hanukkah* candles. These three *mitsvot* are discussed at length in *Megillah* 4a, *Pesahim* 108b, and *Shabbat* 23a, respectively. In all of these *sugyot*, R. Yehoshua ben Levi uses the phrase *af hen hayu bei-oto ha-nes* as the justification for women's unusual obligation in these positive time-bound *mitsvot*.[3]

So what does the phrase mean? To be sure, the Hebrew is fairly simple to translate: "They too were part of the miracle."[4] But what does the phrase imply? Rashi, in his commentary to *Shabbat* 23a, writes, "*al yad ishah na'asah ha-nes* – the miracle occurred through the hands of a woman."[5] Similarly, in Rashbam's commentary to *Pesahim* 108b he quotes *Sotah* 11b: "*she-be-sekhar nashim tsidkaniyot she-be-oto ha-dor nig'alu* – in the merit of the righteous women in that generation they were redeemed (from Egypt)," once again suggesting that the phrase means that the miracle was done through women.[6] In his commentary to *Megillah* 4a, however, Rashi offers a markedly different explanation: "*she-af al ha-nashim gazar Haman le-hashmid le-harog u-le-abed* – even on the women, Haman decreed annihilation and death and sought to destroy them."[7] Rather than implying that the phrase means that women instigated the miracle, Rashi here explains that women were simply involved in the miracle. *Tosafot* espouses this explanation based on its comprehensibility as well.[8]

But a question is then raised by the Tosafists based on this explanation: Why does R. Yehoshua Ben Levi limit the halakhot to which he chooses to apply *af hen*? Should it not also apply to *mitsvot* like *akhilat matsah*?[9] Why is the *sevara* of *kol she-yeshno*[10] needed to obligate women in this *mitsvah* when *af hen* could have sufficed? Furthermore, why are women exempt from the *mitsvah* of sitting in a *sukkah* if the halakhic guideline *af hen* exists? Were women not part of the miracle of the *sukkot* (huts) in the desert as well?[11]

Questions like "did the women cause the miracle?" or "were women involved?" that were asked by Rashi and Tosafot exhibit a concern for the involvement of women in Halakhah.

R. Soloveitchik, based on his own explanation of *af hen*, proposes an answer to Tosafot's question.[12] *Af hen*, R. Soloveitchik says, only applies to those *mitsvot* where the miracle constitutes part of the *mitsvah*. In other words, when there is a *mitsvah* of *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle) involved, *af hen* can be applied to obligate women. According to R. Soloveitchik, it was not that women caused or participated in the miracle. The cause or participation is irrelevant to their obligation. Rather, women play an inherent role in the *mitsvot* containing *pirsumei nisa*, which is the real basis of their obligation. That is why of all the *mitsvot aseh she-ha-zeman gerama* women are obligated in the ones that contain an element of *pirsumei nisa*.

For example, there are a myriad of *hilkhot Hanukkah* dedicated to ensuring that the lighting of the *Hanukkah* candles accomplishes *pirsumei nisa*. Additionally, for the reading of *Megillat Ester*, we recite the blessing of *she-asah nissim* (He performed miracles[13]), instituted for the purpose of publicizing the miracle prior to the reading of the *megillah*. Similarly, on *Pesah*, we find that the bulk of the *Haggadah*'s purpose is to publicize the miracle. The *seder* is meant to maximize the storytelling of *yetsiat Mitsrayim* (exodus from Egypt).[14] Children receive permission to stay up late, questions are asked, and candy is given out for the purpose of publicizing the miracles. If one does not have enough wine for the four cups, he is obligated to sell his clothes, borrow money, or hire himself out for the sake of fulfilling this *mitsvah*.

This *pirsumei nisa* aspect of R. Soloveitchik's explanation also allows for an answer to *Tosafot*'s own question on the seemingly illogical limitation on *af hen*: The three laws of *megillah*, *Hanukkah* candles, and four cups have a halakhic element of *pirsumei nisa*, and women, therefore, became obligated in them. *Mitsvot* such as *sukkah* and *matsah*, however, do not contain any element of *pirsumei nisa* and women are therefore not obligated in them on the premise of *af hen*.[15, 16]

Perhaps this is why the topic of *af hen* was an exciting topic to learn about in the Women and Jewish Law class. The sources all deal with women and their involvement in crucial points of our history as a people. Questions like "did the women cause the miracle?" or "were women involved?" that were asked by Rashi and Tosafot exhibit a concern for the involvement of women in Halakhah. Many view the category of *mitsvot aseh she-ha-zeman gerama* as a means to exclude women from performing *mitsvot* and, therefore, see it as a regres- sive concept. From an analysis of *af hen*, we see that the development of Halakhah looks to include women in areas such as *pirsumei nisa* where they are viewed as crucial characters in the purpose of the *mitsvah*. Women may not be obligated in certain *mitsvot*, but when it comes to public acknowledgments of God's generosity to us and acknowledging the miracles that occurred, women are equally obligated. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that women were traditionally involved in the role of *hinnukh* (education) in the home. *Pirsumei nisa*'s role in Halakhah is to spread God's name throughout the world. When we light our *hanukkiyot* and read the *megillah*, we do so with the hope of questions being asked and knowledge being gained. Women, like men, are obligated in this educational endeavor. "They too were part of the miracle" began to mean something more. It began to mean that women, like men, play a halakhic role in disseminating the name of God throughout the world.

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1 Slightly embellished, but more or less an accurate account of the class.

2 This is brought about by a *hekesh* (connection) between the *mitsvot* of *talmud Torah* and *tefillin* (*Kiddushin* 35b). *Devarim* 6:7, "*ve-shinantam le-vanekha* -- and you shall teach your sons" (JPS translation) teaches that women are explicitly exempt from *talmud Torah*. Since they are exempt from *talmud Torah*, they are also exempt from *tefillin*, which is considered a form of *talmud Torah* by halakhic authorities, and since *tefillin* is a positive time-bound *mitsvah*, women are generally thought to be exempt from all positive time-bound *mitsvot*.

3 It is important to note that these are not the only positive time-bound *mitsvot* in which women are obligated. These are, however, all the ones for which women are obligated based on the concept of *af hen*.

4 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

5 S.v. *hayu be-oto ha-nes*.

6 S.v. *she-af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes*.

7 S.v. *she-af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes*.

8 See *Megillah* 4a, s.v. *she-af hen*.

9 Ibid.

10 A halakhic phrase meaning "anyone who is included." Anyone included in the prohibition of eating *hamets* on *Pesah* is also included in the positive commandment of eating *matsah.* This is the reason given for women's obligation in *akhilat matsah.*

11 *Pesahim* 108b. s.v *hayu be-oto ha-nes.* (*Tosafot* actually do answer their own question by stating that "*af hen*" only applies to rabbinic *mitsvot*.)

12 Iggerot ha-Grid ha-Levi, *Hilkhot Hanukkah* 4:9-11.

13 Artscroll's translation.

14 It is written in the *Haggadah*, "*vi-kol ha-marbeh le-saper be-yetsiat Mitsrayim harei zeh meshubah* -- anyone who maximizes the storytelling of the exodus from Egypt is praiseworthy."

15 Women are, however, obligated in *matsah* for another reason. See *Pesahim* 43b.

16 R. Soloveitchik's explanation also works with Rashi's first elucidation of *af hen*: According to Rashi, the women were the cause of the miracles and it is therefore only fitting that they play a part in publicizing them.

Miracles in the Life and Thought of Rabbi Barukh Rabinowicz

BY: Akiva Weisinger

It is said that the Munkatcher *hassidim* have three Rebbes: "The Rebbe *Zatsa"l*," "The Rebbe *Shelit"a*," and "The Rebbe *ye-Mah Shemo*. Much is written about "The Rebbe *Zatsa"l*," R. Hayyim El'azar Spira, known colloquially as the Minhas Elazar (the title of his responsa),[1] and R. Moshe Leib Rabinovich, "The Rebbe *Shelit"a*," currently leads the Munkatcher *hassidim*. But of "The Rebbe *ye-Mah Shemo*," R. Barukh Rabinowicz, not much is known. This article is about "The Rebbe *ye-Mah Shemo*."

Born in 1914 to R. Natan David of Parczew, R. Barukh showed enough promise in his learning as a young man that the Minhas Elazar deemed him suitable for his daughter, and the two were married in a ceremony that was televised across the world.[2] When the Minhas Elazar died in 1937, R. Barukh took over the leadership of the Munkatcher *hassidim*. Soon afterwards, however, the Nazis came to power, and R. Barukh found himself fleeing for his life from Munkatch, eventually reaching Budapest. There he was heavily involved in efforts to rescue Jews from the clutches of the Nazis and eventually escaped to Palestine himself in 1944.[3]

During this time, R. Barukh's ideology shifted dramatically, particularly his attitude toward Zionism. Before the war, R. Barukh had been part of a tradition of Orthodox opposition to Zionism. His father was an avowed anti-Zionist, characterizing the Wicked Son of the *seder* as "the opinion that has appeared in our days, because of our many sins, of people who wish to flee to Palestine."[4] He also concluded his living will by imploring his children to not be Zionists.[5] This is to say nothing of R. Barukh's father-in-law, the Minhas Elazar, who was the unquestioned leader of Orthodox anti-Zionism in pre-war Europe.[6] R. Barukh himself, in an introduction to a *haggadah* featuring insights of the Minhas Elazar, writes that Jews can only be redeemed from exile through direct divine intervention, to the exclusion of physical intervention by human beings, an explicitly anti-Zionist idea.[7]

However, by 1946, R. Barukh had changed his outlook. At a rally that year calling to open the borders of Palestine to war refugees, R. Barukh spoke about the inseparable link between Israel and the Jewish people and the value of making *aliyyah,* adding that "each and every *aliyyah* only brings comfort to the mourning land and renews her youth with prosperity and vigor."[8] He also entered his candidacy for the position of chief rabbi of Tel Aviv, competing against R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik and R. Isser Yehuda Unterman. Such a change in ideology, from an anti-Zionist successor of the Minhas Elazar to a candidate for chief rabbi of an important Zionist city who spoke about the value of *Erets Yisra'el* and *aliyyah*, is remarkable. What caused this radical shift?

The closest R. Barukh came to answering this question was in an essay entitled "*Einei ha-Edah*," printed in 1980, decades after the establishment of the State of Israel.[9] He begins the essay by asserting that the national revival and newly won independence of the Jewish people, especially seen against the backdrop of the Holocaust, is an open and revealed miracle. He writes: "Who could have hoped for, who would have believed thirty years ago that [the nation] would return to live free, and it would be given lofty powers of strength and security! We stand and exclaim, 'Who bore me these?'[10] Is this not a miracle?" This assertion, made without any justification, raises a difficult question. If it is indeed true that the national revival of the Jewish people is an "open and revealed miracle," then why is it not recognized by all as such? Why did there remain both secular Israelis unaffected in the slightest by this alleged open and revealed miracle, as well as anti-Zionist Orthodox Jews who refused to accept this new Jewish state as legitimate?

R. Barukh continues by claiming that, nevertheless, "the miracle is revealed, but not all see it." He compares a miraculous event to a sudden flash of extremely bright light. Such a light, if one is not prepared for it, will merely cause temporary blindness, rather than any sort of illumination. It is only with the proper preparation and adjustment that such a light would provide any illumination. To illustrate this abstract concept, R. Barukh references the story of God hardening Pharaoh's heart during the ten plagues in Egypt:

"The commentators ask, how could God nullify Pharaoh's free will? Specifically difficult is the verse that states "For I have hardened his heart"[11] There are many explanations, implausible and plausible, given for this. But at its essential level, the matter is not difficult at all. The essence of God's appearance in His miracles and wonders before Pharaoh, when the latter was not ready for it, and was unable, due to his actions and upbringing, to be ready for it, ends up causing Pharaoh to not see the miracles and wonders at all, and he instead perceives them as natural or magical occurrences. The light was greater than what Pharaoh could stand. The work that God had caused hardened [Pharaoh's] heart. For this is the literal meaning of the verse "For *I* [emphasis Rabinowicz's] have hardened his heart."

In other words, God does not just swoop down into Pharaoh's brain and switch off his ability to make rational decisions. Rather, God is hardening Pharaoh's heart by way of the plagues themselves. Pharaoh, due to his upbringing and personality, does not have the ability to perceive the events transpiring in front of him as being direct divine intervention. Instead, he reinterprets them to fit his preconceived notions, which famously exclude the Israelite God he has previously never heard of. Each plague, rather than causing him to reconsider his position on Israelite theology and enslavement, actually pushes him deeper and deeper into denial as he rationalizes every single possible supernatural element, perceiving each miracle as a mere freak occurrence, so as not to disturb his previously held beliefs. The miracles of the plagues present a light that Pharaoh is unprepared for, and thus it blinds him from seeing the reality in front of him.

R. Barukh then applies this concept to his day:

In our time, we see this phenomenon in its full form. There is no doubt that a great light has been revealed to us. Things have happened to us that do not happen to other nations by the laws of nature. The speedy recovery from the Holocaust and the transition to lives of full freedom are explicit testimony to the guarantee of a higher power coming to fulfill the promise: "And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly."[12] Even so, many have not opened their eyes to see this reality that is very wondrous and very real, and in the place of ascribing all that has occurred in front of our eyes to a higher power, they ascribe it to the random chain of events.

To R. Barukh, when human beings are confronted with a miraculous event whose ramifications contradict their preexisting ideology, they can and will rationalize the event to fit with their beliefs no matter how much they have to twist logic to do so. This tendency perverts the very purpose of miracles. For R. Barukh, the fact that God intervenes in history by performing miracles lends those events significance that cannot be ignored or rationalized away. When an event occurs that seems to be miraculous, it is incumbent upon its observers to take the event seriously, and if that entails critical re-examination of long held beliefs, so be it.

It is in those lines that the key to R. Barukh's transformation lies. Despite being brought up in a culture of anti-Zionism, R. Barukh did not exhibit an extremist personality, of the sort who would rather deny reality than deny long-held beliefs. On the contrary, his opinions on miracles show him to prioritize an honest assessment of divinely engineered reality over maintaining one's particular ideology. At the most essential level, he changed his position on Zionism because he looked around at the post-Holocaust world and decided that being a Zionist merely made sense given the conditions around him. Once it appeared conclusively clear to him that the Zionist enterprise had arranged a place for Jews to escape the horrors he had seen in Europe,

that became significant as an act of God engineered specifically for such a purpose, the more so when the state was established. To continue to maintain an anti-Zionist position in the face of such reality is not only foolhardy, according to R. Barukh; it may even border on heresy.

This change in ideology did not come without a cost, however. His *hassidim* felt betrayed by this strange new direction their Rebbe had taken, and, in 1965, crowned R. Barukh's son, R. Moshe Leib, in his stead.[13] They then set about trying to whitewash the Zionist "Rebbe *ye-Mah Shemo*" from their history. In a hagiography of the Minhas Elazar printed in 1998 by the publishing house of the Munkatcher *hassidim*,[14] R. Barukh, who would presumably bear mention as the Minhas Elazar's student, son-in-law, and successor, is not mentioned once. Even in a twenty-page, detailed account of the wedding of the Minhas Elazar's only daughter, the name of the groom is conspicuously absent. *The Jewish Press,* when reporting on R. Moshe Leib, will list his genealogy and conspicuously skip over his father.[15]

Abandoned by the world that raised him, R. Barukh did not have any better luck with the Zionist world he had chosen to embrace. He dropped out of the candidacy for chief rabbi of Tel Aviv when it became clear he would not win. Evidently, some still believed him to be aligned with his famously anti-Zionist predecessor. Dr. Hayyim Kugel, former head of the Zionist Gymnasium in Munkatch, wrote a letter to the editor in the *Davar* newspaper, assailing R. Barukh's candidacy by attacking the notion that a man who had been such a prominent anti-Zionist before the war could possibly be afforded a position in the first Hebrew city.[16] Unable to find a job in Israel, he went to South America to earn a livelihood and became chief rabbi of Sao Paulo, Brazil until 1962, when he was finally appointed chief rabbi of Holon, an Israeli city north of Tel Aviv. He served in this capacity until his retirement, at which point he moved to Petah Tikvah where he founded and led a *shul* until his death in 1997.

At the end of his life, he wrote two books. One, *Divrei Nevonim,* is a collection of his thoughts on the weekly *parashah.* The other, *Binat Nevonim*, is a philosophical work on the Holocaust, which probably merits an article all its own. Those books are in the YU Gottesman Library, and as far as I can tell, I am the only person to have ever taken them out. I find it tragic that such a fascinating and great mind, a man who had the intelligence and bravery to turn his back on an ideology he felt could not respond to the world as he saw it, no matter the consequences, has been relegated to the dustbin of history. As a historical figure and as a thinker, R. Barukh Rabinowicz deserves more scholarly attention, and this article only scratches the surface of a truly fascinating personality.

At the most essential level, he changed his position on Zionism because he looked around at the post-Holocaust world and decided that being a Zionist merely made sense given the conditions around him.

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1 R. Hayyim El'azar Shapira, *She'elot u-Teshuvot Minhat El'azar* (Jerusalem: *Or Torat Munkatch*, 1995) (Hebrew), available at http://hebrewbooks.org/10155.

2 The video can still be found online, http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1622609518319953327.

3 For biographical information on R. Barukh, see Peska Friedman, *Going Forward: A True Story of Courage, Hope, and Perserverance* (Brooklyn, NY, Mesorah Publications, 1994); Esther Farbstein, "The Rabbi, The Youth, and the Refugees in Budapest, 1944," *Dapim le-Heker ha-Sho'ah* 20 (2005-2006) 85-111, available at http://holocaust2.haifa.ac.il/images/dapim20/dapim_20_3.pdf (Hebrew); Esther Farbstein, "Miracle By Miracle" in Esther Farbstein, *The Forgotten Memoirs* (Brooklyn, NY: Shaar Press, 2011), 317-343; and R. HayyimYehuda Grossman, *"ha-Admo"r mi-Munkatz: ha-Rav Barukh Yehoshua Yerahmiel Rabinowicz Zats"al", Shanah be-Shanah* 39 (1998-1999): 561-566: (Hebrew)

4 R. Natan David Rabinowicz, *Sefer ve-Eleh ha-Devarim she-Ne'emru le-David.* (Jerusalem: *Nekhdei ha-Mehaber*, 1983), 192 (Hebrew), my translation. See also Mendel Pierkaz, *ha-Hanhagah ha-Hassidit* (Jerusalem: *Mossad Bialik*, 1999), 323-332 (Hebrew).

5 R. Natan David Rabinowicz, "Will of Rabbi Natan David Rabinowicz", HebrewBooks.org http://www.hebrewbooks.org/34692 (Hebrew).

6 See Allan Nadler, "The War on Modernity of R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz", *Modern Judaism* 14:3 (1994), 239; and Aviezer Ravitzky, "Munkács and Jerusalem: Ultra-Orthodox opposition to Zionism and Agudaism," in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press in association with the Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History; University Press of New England, 1998), 67-89.

7 Hayyim El'azar Shapira, *Haggadah shel Pesah im Ma'amar Aggadata de-Piseha*, (Munkatch, 1938), 9-10, available at http://hebrewbooks.org/4717.

There is, however, reason to question the extent of R' Barukh's anti-zionism. In the passage in question, he never explicitly mentions the Zionist enterprise, something from which his father and father-in-law evidently did not shy away. Further, there is the fact that, in seeming defiance of their father's last will and testament, none of the Rabinowicz children were anti-Zionists as adults. Particularly interesting is the case of R. Barukh's sister Devorah, who made *aliyyah* in 1934 and married the man who arranged for her *aliyyah*, R. Ya'akov Landau, a staunch religious Zionist who eventually founded the Israeli political party *Po'alei Agudat Yisra'el* and was present at the Declaration of Independence of Israel. While this is not enough to completely refute the written evidence that R. Barukh was indeed an anti-Zionist, it is enough to unsettle the matter.

8 R. Barukh Rabinowicz, *Binat Nevonim* (Unpublished Manuscript), 8-9 (Hebrew), my translation.

9 R. Barukh Rabinowicz, "*Einei ha-Edah*", in *Kuntres Divrei Torah ve-Hiddushim mi-Kevod Dodi ha-Ga'on Rabbi Barukh Yehoshua Yerahmiel Rabinowicz,* (Benei Brak, Israel: *Bar Nadri*, 1980), found in Natan David Rabinowitz, *Sefer Be'erot Natan* (Bnei Brak, Israel: *Bar Nadri*, 1980) (Hebrew), my translation.

10 Isaiah 49:21, translated by Mechon Mamre, available at www.mechon-mamre.org.

11 Exodus 10:1, translated by Mechon Mamre, available at www.mechon-mamre.org.

12 Leviticus 26:44, translated by Mechon Mamre, available at www.mechon-mamre.org.

13 For the official version, see Moshe Goldstein, *Journey To Jerusalem: The Historic Visit of the Minchas Eluzar of Munkacs to the Saba Kadisha,* transl. by Malky Heimowitz, (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 2009), which, in an introduction describing the post-war renewal of Munkatcher *hassidut*, says the elders of Munkatch met and decided "the time had come for Munkatch to be born again," neglecting to mention there already was, technically, a Rebbe of Munkatch. R. Barukh is there mentioned as "ha-Rav Rabinovich," father of the brilliant prodigy Moshe Leib. Though there are few sources about the reasons for R. Baruch's removal from the leadership, it is clear that the change in ideological direction played a large part in it. What is not so clear is whether it was the only thing; other Hassidic Rebbes made a similar change in ideology with less controversy, most notably R. Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam of Sanz-Klausenberg. A contributing factor may be the fact that R. Barukh was perceived as somewhat suspiciously modern even before the war. His sister Peska Friedman, in her memoirs (cited above), writes about how she and R. Barukh's parents valued being well-educated and polished, and also writes about how R. Barukh's *hassidim*, initially, "were somewhat wary of his long pants and tie tack". That unease may have never fully gone away, and the rumors that swirl around the story generally can be reduced to the impression that R. Barukh, an avid reader and multilingualist who, after the war, studied philosophy and psychology in the University of Brazil and was comfortable enough with secular sources to quote Plato and Aristotle in some of his writings, was less "traditional" than his *hassidim* would have preferred. Additionally, the sources about R. Moshe Leib stress his close connection to the famously anti-Zionist R. Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar, and there is a possibility he was involved in the decision to dethrone R. Barukh. In sum, while R. Barukh's Zionism was a key factor in his *hassidim* disowning him, it probably was not the only one, and more likely just a part of a larger issue. For a look at some of the wild speculation that occurs, see this blog post and the comments on it http://theantitzemach.blogspot.com/2009/02/munkacser-abdication-part-ii.html.

14 David Kahana, *Toledot Rabbeinu, (*Broolyn, NY: Emet, 5758/1998*)* (Hebrew).

15 Rabbi Gershon Tannenbaum,"Grand Celebration in Munkatch, Ukraine," *The Jewish Press* online edition, 29 June 2011.

16 Dr. Hayyim Kugel, "*ha-Yitakhen?!" Davar,* 30 May, 1946, available at www.jpress.org.il.

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The Raphael Patai Collection

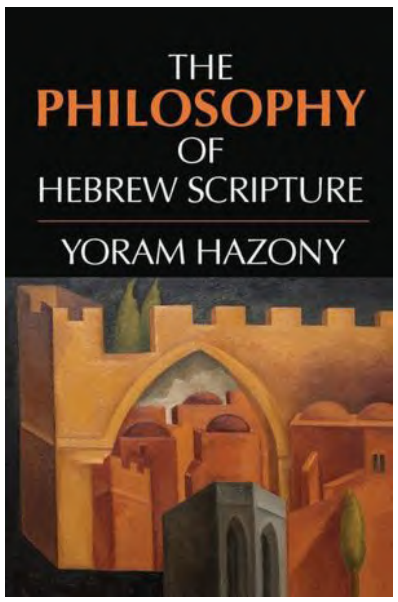
Rethinking Reason and Revelation

BY: Gavriel Brown

Reviewed Book: Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2012).

When a book garners praise from both Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, who called the work "paradigm shifting,"[1] and Harvard linguist and psychologist Steven Pinker, who called it a "great achievement,"[2] it is wise to pay attention. The book, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* by Yoram Hazony, is indeed game-changing. Hazony, the Provost of the Shalem Center in Jerusalem, boldly challenges conventional thinking about how we read and why we revere the Bible. Hazony's basic thesis? We've been reading the Bible wrong.

The Bible, insists Hazony, was not meant to be read as a book of revelation. Rather, it was meant to be read as a book of reason— concerned with the nature of the world, the political ethics, metaphysics, and the just life for humans. We should be studying the Bible alongside Tocqueville, Aristotle, and Locke not necessarily because it is a book written by God, but for its insights into the nature of government, totalitarianism, and the citizen's relationship to the state. In fact, he insists that reading the works as "revelation" will "come pretty close to destroying them," because "we accidentally delete much of what these texts were written to say."[3] We are clouded by our own cognitive biases, causing us to overlook other compelling readings of the text.



Reading the Bible as philosophy would allow us to uncover illuminating insights that have been overlooked for millennia. In order to reveal this layer of meaning, Hazony peels away what he considers to be imported readings that have crept into our modern interpretations of the text. Christian theologians, Greek philosophers, and Jewish medieval interpreters have fundamentally changed how we read what we read in Scriptures. Hazony believes that we are no longer reading the Bible as the authors of the texts wanted us to read them.

Greek wisdom continues to be touted as the only ancient wisdom worth caring about, while the Hebrew Bible remains a closed book. Hazony attempts to open up the Bible by trailblazing a new approach to investigating biblical texts.

Hazony's methodology derives from the always-popular *peshat* method. Indeed, Hazony's attempt to strip away the various foreign readings that have crept into our perceptions of the Bible get at the very definition of *peshat,* the essential message that the text is meant to impart. Hazony examines the development of a narrative holistically. By examining huge swaths of text, from Genesis to II Kings, this Gestalt approach allows Hazony to draw new conclusions by picking up on recurring themes, symbols, and tropes. Hazony's meta-analysis of Abraham, for instance, boils down five virtues that readers are to associate with the patriarch. Abraham's extraordinary generosity, sensitivity to injustice, fairness in monetary matters, piety, and safeguarding of his interests, as any reader of Tanakh knows, appear over the course of many chapters.[4] But by examining the literary arc over the total life of Abraham, we can now uncover which ideals the Bible wants to impart to us about leadership, responsibility, and interestingly, the merits of rebelliousness.

The modern-day bifurcation between secular society's handling of Scripture as irrelevant and unintellectual and the religious world's reverence for the same work, is due to what Hazony calls the "reason-revelation dichotomy." The Bible is not read in public schools or studied in the philosophy, political theory, or intellectual history departments of universities because it is seen as a work of revelation, not reason. Works of revelation are seen as particularistic, if not parochial, and unworthy of the public's intellectual scrutiny. The mere mention of "and the LORD said to Moses" frightens modern sensibilities that view theophany with suspicion of foul play by biblical authors. This, insists Hazony, is an unfair double-standard.

If all texts depicting God speaking and acting were classified as revelation, even the most philosophically respected texts would be rejected. From Parmenides and Empedocles, who describe interactions with goddesses, to Socrates, who hears a divine voice, the ability to "conduct philosophical inquiry was frequently seen as partially or wholly dependent on revelation or some other form of assistance from a god."[5] Yet, while the famous British philosopher Bertrand Russell praises and examines these Greek philosophers, he flatly denies the Hebrew Bible any significance in the canon of Western philosophy.[6] If he can look past the Greeks for their strange gods and oracles and judge them "for the content of their teachings," why "should not this same standard be applied to the writings of the Jews?"[7]

Hazony is essentially attempting to tear down the "Jerusalem versus Athens" separation championed by French philosophers and German intellectuals whose objectives were to "discredit the Bible and force it out of the rink as a force in European public life."[8] Greek wisdom continues to be touted as the only ancient wisdom worth caring about, while the Hebrew Bible remains a closed book. Hazony attempts to open up the Bible by trailblazing a new approach to investigating biblical texts.

Gleaning philosophy from narratives, prophetic discourses, and legal codes seems incongruous: The narrative tracts of the Bible do not seem to fit into our paradigmatic genre of philosophic works. However, collecting ethical material from narra-

tives is superior to abstract theoretical discourses such as Plato's dialogue, writes Hazony, because it deals with the "fine-grained, complex, and indefinitely variable situations that we encounter in real life."[9] Furthermore, the biblical authors did "develop methods for overcoming the limitations of narrative and oratory so as to be able to express themselves on general questions."[10] These methods include allusions to previous works within the Bible, examining the narrative arc of stories, and paying particular attention to nuances in language.

A particularly interesting chapter entitled "What is the Purpose of the Hebrew Bible?" delves into the possible reasons why the current "revelation" framework was adopted. Hazony argues that the Christian Bible's purpose was to bear witness to the life and events of Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospel employs "juridic character," relying on comparisons drawn from courts of law. Thus, Luke urges those who saw the resurrection to be "witnesses to all," John was to "bear witness" to the baptism of Jesus, and Peter "attests" that the Gospel as recorded by John was true.[11] Employing this juridic framework is risky. These works of testimony exist in a binary: Either the miracles reported in the Gospel are true or Luke and Peter are lying. Jews and non-Jews have been reading the Hebrew Scriptures "as though their main purpose, like that of the New Testament, is to bear witness to certain miraculous events."[12] Reading the Hebrew Bible through a juridic lens, though, is unwise. It leads us to believe that the Bible's primary purpose is to give testimony to the truth of events and not to impart philosophical truths.

Hazony's arguments seem for the most part unassailable. He validates his original arguments with a plethora of verses. Some of his arguments might be perceived as controversial. For instance, he asserts and demonstrates, as he did last year at the Shalem Conference,[13] that the God of the Hebrew Bible is far from a perfect Being. He is not omniscient (He is surprised, upset, and disappointed), He is not omnipotent, He needs humans to form a covenant with Him. The personalities of the Bible are also imperfect. In fact, the most celebrated characters are disobedient, rebellious, and *chutzpadik.*

The book is a pleasure for the advanced reader of the Bible. Hazony's conversational style avoids the high-flown language of the theorist, and we get the sense that lucidity is at the heart of his project. He is clearly attempting to reach a broad audience. He quotes Scripture often but does not get hung up on detailed analysis. At the same time, his third chapter, for example, includes 126 footnotes replete with extra references, etymological discussions, critiques of other works in the field, and other texts worth reading—satisfying the most demanding reader. There is even an appendix clarifying the terms "reason" and "philosophy"—assuaging the philological stickler.

That being said, it will be interesting to read academic reviews of *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*. Hazony ventures into many fields in this work—Christian epistemology and Greek ideas of statehood are just two of many—and scholars might be compelled to call him out when he ventures too far from his expertise. The typical reader might relish Hazony's argument that biblical history presents more wholesome and compelling guidance to lead a successful political life,[14] while a professor of Aristotelian philosophy might very well find little basis for Hazony's arguments in other parts of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Conceivably, *Philosophy* might become controversial in academic and fundamentalist circles alike.

We should be studying the Bible alongside Tocqueville, Aristotle, and Locke not necessarily because it is a book written by God, but for its insights into the nature of government, totalitarianism, and the citizen's relationship to the state.

Hazony, however, is careful to avoid the politics surrounding the Documentary Hypothesis. Like many Orthodox scholars, he sidesteps the issue by pointing to the irrefutability and lack of consensus among specialists concerning biblical criticism. He keeps the door open to those who believe in the divine nature of the text. He thus joins the ranks of Meir Sternberg and Robert Alter, the latter of whom quipped that despite efforts to unscramble the biblical authors, the Bible is a "well made omelet indeed."[15] He is less concerned with the prehistory of the text than how the text can inform and inspire.

Hazony's brilliant examination of dichotomy between farmer and shepherd from the story of Cain and Abel until Joseph will surprise even the most advanced reader of Scripture for its cogency and originality. His reading of Jeremiah's message in "Jeremiah and the Problem of Knowing"[16] will inspire a newfound respect for the prophet and the enduring nature of his words. In fact, despite Hazony's modest characterization of this work as an "introduction," it seems every story he examines yields unexpected philosophical and literary results. Yoram Hazony might very well lead the charge to restore the Bible to its rightful place among the great philosophical texts in the Western canon.

Gavi Brown is a junior at YC majoring in English, and is the design editor for Kol Hamevaser.

1 See www.yoramhazony.org.
2 Ibid.
3 Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2012), 3.
4 Ibid. 155-156.
5 Ibid. 11.
6 Ibid. 16
7 Ibid. 13.
8 Ibid. 7.
9 Ibid. 96.
10 Ibid. 94.
11 Ibid. 288, esp. notes 11 and 13.
12 Ibid. 71.
13 *Wrestling with God*, Dir. The Shalem-Center, Perf. Yoram Hazony, *YouTube*, 25 July 2012, available at: www.youtube.com.
14 Hazony 180.
15 Alter, Robert. *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1987), 25.
16 Hazony 240.
17 Ibid. 3.

Four Matriarchs Amulet
Artist: Kathlean Gahagan
Venice, California, 1994
Silver, garnets, crystal
The Mina Avrech Memorial Collection
Yeshiva University Museum
Gift of Robert Avrech

ABOVE
Military Strategy
Artist: Ira Moskowitz (1912-2001)
New York, 1968
Oil on canvas
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Gift of Diana Gordon

FROM THE FRONT PAGE:
Reclaiming the Western Wall
Artist: Ira Moskowitz (1912-2001)
New York, 1968
Oil on canvas
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