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Kol Hamevaser

The Jewish Thought Magazine of the Yeshiva University Student Body

Holocaust & Catastrophe

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KOL HAMEVASER
THE JEWISH THOUGHT MAGAZINE OF THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY
HOLOCAUST & CATASTROPHE

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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 kolhamevaser.com, or on Facebook or Twitter.

Editors' Thoughts: "A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance"[1]

BY: GABRIELLE HILLER

On April 7, 1959, the Knesset of the State of Israel passed a law establishing the twenty-seventh of *Nissan* as the day on which to memorialize the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust. The concept of a memorial day is not new to the Jews. Our calendar is filled with days dedicated to remembering our past. Thus, dedicating this day "to remembrance of the catastrophe of the Jewish people caused by the Nazis and their aides"[2] is meaningful, if not particularly unexpected. It is the second half of the dedication that really catches the eye: a day to also remember "the acts of Jewish heroism and resistance in that period."[3] On *Yom ha-Zikaron la-Sho'ah ve-la-Gevurah*, we not only mourn the victims, but also honor the heroes.

What is the significance of this particular date? When remembering the Holocaust, it is natural to picture hordes of helpless Jews, like sheep being sent to slaughter. But that was not the image the Knesset wished us to envision. The twenty-seventh of *Nissan* approximates the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,[4] an event that represents an entirely different message. In the words of Mordecai Anielewicz, commander-in-chief of the underground Jewish Fighting Organization that orchestrated the Uprising, "The dream of my life has risen to become fact. Self-defense in the Ghetto will have been a reality. Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts. I have been a witness to the magnificent, heroic fighting of Jewish men and women of battle."[5] Jews are not a passive people who stand idly by in the face of injustice, proclaimed the heroes of the Uprising; rather, we are a nation that valiantly fights back, even when all hope seems lost.

In this time between *Pesah* and *Shavu'ot*, we cannot help but consider the unique nature of the way Jews respond to tragedy. We enter into a period of mourning over the loss of R. Akiva's students, and then celebrate on *Lag ba-Omer*, when the deaths ceased. On *Yom ha-Zikaron*, we remember the soldiers who gave their lives to protect and defend the State of Israel, and then transition immediately to joyful celebration of our independence on *Yom ha-Atsma'ut*. And, of course, on *Yom ha-Zikaron la-Sho'ah ve-la-Gevurah*, we memorialize the six million Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust, and yet we also pay proud tribute to the fighting martyrs.

Every morning in *tefillah* we quote David's words to God: "You have changed for me my lament into dancing; you undid my sackcloth and girded me with gladness."[6] The history of the Jewish people is full of catastrophe. But it is also marked by our transformations, by our continued ability to not only survive, but also to flourish. Despite our deep mourning, as a people, we are able to rise and rejoice, not only once, but time and time again. Please join us in this issue of *Kol Hamevaser* as we not only grapple with the depths of our history, but also fathom the heights to which we have risen.

1 *Kohelet* 3:4. Koren's translation.
2 As cited by James E. Young, "When a Day Remembers: A Performative History of 'Yom ha-Shoah,'" *History and Memory* 2,2 (Winter, 1990): 54-75, at p. 63.
3 Ibid.
4 Establishing *Yom ha-Sho'ah* on the fourteenth of *Nissan*, the date of the start of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, was rejected due to its proximity to *Pesah*. See Young for more details on the subject.
5 Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (eds.), *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 675.
6 *Tehillim* 30:12. Artscroll's translation.

Mevaser ve-Omer: Responses to Technology Issue

How Long Will You Limp Between Opinions?:[1] On the Difference Between the Academy and the *Yeshivah*

BY: SIMCHA GROSS

In his recent *Kol Hamevaser* op-ed, "Shut Down the Bible Department,"[2] Elliot Resnick argued that Yeshiva University should close its Bible department because the professors there "destroyed my core beliefs without replacing it with anything." Mr. Resnick lists amongst his dispelled beliefs Mosaic authorship of every word of the Bible, the Sinaitic origins of the Oral Torah, and the idea that (biblical) Hebrew is a divinely created language which, accordingly, contains "hidden wisdom." Mr. Resnick's objection is not so much against the academic conclusions, but against destroying the faith of impressionable "*frum* teenagers" without then providing them with "ideas for how to reorient their Judaism accordingly."

Mr. Resnick conveniently leaves out the fact that the "Intro to Bible" classes offered in YC devote a significant amount of time to accommodating exactly what he seeks, by providing traditional sources that can be used to give an imprimatur to scholarly conclusions. But my own interest is not to justify scholarship with traditional sources, something which I believe, contrary to Mr. Resnick, has no place in an academic university-level course. My key issue is with how Mr. Resnick, a PhD student in Jewish History at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, seems to (mis)understand the academic endeavor.

Mr. Resnick claims that "I am not opposed to truth. If my beliefs are naïve or based on ignorance, I am fully in favor of reconstructing my Judaism on a more solid basis." Let us leave aside, for the moment, the irony of someone not opposed to truth calling to discontinue teaching that truth, and instead try to understand Mr. Resnick's proposal. Mr. Resnick never defines precisely what he means by "reconstructing" Judaism "on a more solid basis," but from his remarks it seems he seeks new justifications for the same lifestyle he had before learning the "truth." In other words, Mr. Resnick is in full support of the truth, provided that it allows him to keep doing exactly what he did before learning it.

This betrays a total misunderstanding of the methods and purpose of academia. Academia begins not with conclusions, but with a certain methodology. Like the scientific method, this methodology should be clearly stated and understood, and its conclusions should follow from its proper application. This is necessary because it allows the readership to evaluate the results of the scholarship. They are able to apply the method themselves in order to replicate the results, thus testing whether the conclusions actually follow from the method. The methodology is not chosen at random – it comes from previous work that argues, hopefully persuasively, that this methodology is the one best employed to arrive at some sort of objective end. Of course, we should not be naïve in thinking that scholars are always able to divorce themselves from their own agendas and from historical context, but that is the beauty of a set methodology: It enables one to identify those places where the methodology is not followed for some reason or other. The benefit of a methodology, then, is that

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it ensures, to the best of our abilities, that scholarly results are not simply subjective and are consequently accessible to the larger scholarly community and beyond.

The dividends such a method yields are stated most clearly by the historian William H. McNeill, in his wonderful piece "Why Study History":[3]

> …studying alien religious beliefs, strange customs, diverse family patterns and vanished social structures shows how differently various human groups have tried to cope with the world around them. Broadening our humanity and extending our sensibilities by recognizing sameness and difference throughout the recorded past is therefore an important reason for studying history… For we can only know ourselves by knowing how we resemble and how we differ from others.

In other words, scholarship is the opposite of confirmation. It is precisely meant to highlight *both* the differences and similarities between ourselves and our forebears and by doing so we can learn about ourselves and humanity as a whole.

Thus, academia begins with a method and through it attempts to arrive at results. By contrast, faith communities begin with results – such as the belief system that Mr. Resnick embraced before taking his Intro to Bible course – and then attempt to work backwards to justify them. Their goal is not to seek objective conclusions, but rather to psychologically reinforce for the believer the community's pre-existing system of beliefs. Membership in faith communities is, therefore, not based on sustainable "proofs," but on other factors, including familiarity, community, comfort, or fear. Faith communities do not need to prove their

underlying assumptions because, unlike academia, they typically do not attempt to reach a broader audience outside of their community. Their goal is self-perpetuation, which is best achieved internally through a cyclical process of confirmation. People are, of course, free to join such communities; however, without employing a clear methodology and scientific method, their underlying system of beliefs can never be called objective "truth."

With this, I would offer a different proposal than Mr. Resnick's, one that is truly unopposed to the truth but allows the Modern Orthodox faith community to attempt to preserve its own working assumptions. The Bible courses should remain exactly the same, as their aim is to teach the academic study of the Bible, and as such, begin with a methodology, not assumptions. But the yeshivah portion of the day could offer a course for those students, like Mr. Resnick, seeking to reconcile their faith with what they learnt in the academy. This course could even be taught by a professor. The benefit of this solution would be to place the two different approaches (method first vs. results first) in their proper environments (academy vs. yeshivah). More importantly, this would allow individual students to decide for themselves what they think is right, and what they choose to believe. After all, no one fully conforms to any given community. We should be empowering students to come to their own conclusions, laying out the options and letting them decide for themselves.

The Bible department should be praised, not criticized, for teaching academically rigorous courses. I, for one, greatly benefited from the YC Intro to Bible and other courses I took as an undergraduate majoring in Jewish Studies. However, what *is* troubling is how a PhD student in Revel could so thoroughly misunderstand the difference between the academy and the yeshivah. Therefore, I would recommend that Revel create a new required course; "Critical Theories and Methods of Scholarship. That way, students will come to understand the very nature of the academic endeavor they have chosen to pursue, and, hopefully, will make a true (pun intended) contribution to the scholarly and broader communities.

Simcha Gross (YC' 10, BRGS' 11) is a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University, concentrating in Ancient Judaism, a Wexner Graduate Fellow, and a former staff writer for Kol Hamevaser.

1 Cf. I Kings 18:21.

2 Elliot Resnick, "Shut Down the Bible Department," *Kol Hamevaser*, 6,5 (2013): 4, available at: www.kolhamevaser.com. All subsequent Resnick quotes come from the same source.

3 Available on the American Historical Association's webpage at: www.historians.org.

In Defense of the "Shocking" and "Anti-Traditional": A Response to Elliot Resnick

By: Nathan Hyman

In the last issue of *Kol Hamevaser*,[1] Elliot Resnick claimed that the pedagogical approach of Yeshiva College's Bible department is seriously harmful to students. He accuses the department of destroying students' core beliefs and leaving them confused. On this basis, he argues that the department be shut down, or else radically reformed.

Mr. Resnick's conclusion rests on a series of mistaken presumptions and assumptions about the appropriate goals of Bible study. I have sought to ground my argument in the values, axioms, and priorities of the *beit midrash,* as I understand them and as I have been taught by my *rebbeim*. Others may choose to direct their criticism from an academic perspective, discuss *Torah u-Madda*, or debate the appropriateness of academic methodology in Bible study. I have opted not to do so, given that these are not the issues that Mr. Resnick invokes to justify shutting down the Bible department. I trust that he has given an honest and self-contained articulation of his concerns, and I have sought to tailor my response appropriately.

Mr. Resnick accuses the Bible Department of "injecting doubt into the heads of impressionable students," and systematically dismantling "axioms of my faith." What exactly were these axioms and how were they deconstructed? The core problem with Mr. Resnick's argument is that it establishes the body of knowledge one brings when he arrives at Yeshiva College as the absolute standard for measuring everything one is taught. Granted, in many cases, this is entirely appropriate. A student is absolutely correct in asserting the authority of previously-learned *ikkarei emunah* (tenets of faith) against a Bible professor who categorically denies *Torah mi-Sinai*, or who claims that Tanakh is full of genuine Christological references.

However, those sorts of conflicts are not the ones that Mr. Resnick faults the Bible department for creating. Instead, he directs his criticism at "Bible academics" teaching "anti-traditional ideas." I found this puzzling. The Bible curriculum I was confronted with in Yeshiva College was not based on Wellhausen or Richard Dawkins. Nor do I recall reading a single article published in an academic journal. Instead, the curriculum was comprised entirely of traditional Torah sources. Indeed, I remember spending Sunday afternoons preparing for "Intro to Bible" in the *beit midrash*, where I conveniently found all of the source texts assigned by my professor. On rare occasions, certain sources not found in the *beit midrash* were easily obtainable on the Bar Ilan database. At no point did I feel that I was engaging in "Bible academics," with all of the cold and sterile connotations that the term conjures up. At no point did I feel like I was out of place, or that that I should surreptitiously hide the material under the table like some sort of contraband.

Indeed, why would I have felt that way? The Bible curriculum I encountered at Yeshiva College drew deeply from the wells of the *mesorah*, as embodied in the Gemara, the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, and the *Sifrei.* We closely studied *rishonim* like Rashi and Ramban, and delved into *teshuvot* of Rashba. Comments of R. Akiva Eiger and the *Sha'agat Aryeh* were also given a prominent role. Are those sources insufficiently "traditional?" Is such an assertion plausible or even worth debating? How can one invoke the authority of "tradition" to condemn the Bible Department for teaching R. Akiva Eiger? Perhaps Mr. Resnick had other sources in mind when he accused the Bible department of teaching "anti-traditional" ideas. I can only speculate, given that his article is full of vague assertions, as opposed to specific references to objectionable sources.

Regardless, Mr. Resnick's criticism

***The Bible curriculum I encountered at Yeshiva College drew deeply from the wells of the mesorah as embodied in the Gemara, the* Talmud Yerushalmi, *and the* Sifrei.**

seems to rest on a flawed understanding of just what makes something "traditional" or "untraditional." In the realm of halakhic practice, *minhag* is accorded a prominent, often decisive role. Great *posekim* (halakhic decisors), although this is true of some more than others, often struggle mightily to defend customary practices from objections raised on the basis of textual sources. R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch articulate explained the importance of *minhag* when he wrote,

> Whatever had once been stamped as a religious duty could not be other than something which their ancestors had recognized as being consonant with the spirit of Judaism, and conducive to the fulfillment of the great Jewish task, and which they had, therefore, willingly incorporated in Jewish practice and transmitted to their descendants as a holy heritage to be preserved with the same constancy and self-sacrificing devotion as their fathers had shown.[2]

Mr. Resnick apparently seeks to invoke the same dynamic of in the realm of belief. He implies that whatever "the overwhelming majority of Orthodox Jews grow up believing" is a categorically valid standard against which the Bible department may be assessed. Granted, the *rishonim* and *aharonim* discuss whether *aharei rabbim* (the mitzvah of following the majority opinion in halakhic matters)[3] can be used to authoritatively resolve disputes in matters of *hashkafah* and belief. That is a complex issue, and this article cannot do it justice.[4] But, regardless, the relevance of the issue seems attenuated at best. First, one often finds communal adherence to particular positions about hashkafic issues that do *not* accord with the majority of *rishonim*. For instance, it is popularly assumed that *hashgahah peratit* is universal and all encompassing, categorically applying to all individuals and all events, despite the fact that this is certainly a minority view in the *rishonim*.[5] It would be inconsistent to appeal to *aharei rabbim* in this context simply because the issues involved make some people feel troubled or uncomfortable.

But the best reason to avoid discussion of *aharei rabbim* is that Mr. Resnick never invokes it. His objection to the Bible department is pedagogical, unconcerned with the substantive content being taught. Indeed, he criticizes the Bible department for teaching "anti-traditional ideas" inconsistent with what "the overwhelming majority of Orthodox Jews grow up believing," even as he readily admits that many of those beliefs may be "naïve" or "based on ignorance." But this simply leads us to ask, Why is what the majority of us grew up believing a valid baseline? Despite the best efforts of our educational system and often a year or more of intensive post-high school study, most students who enter Yeshiva College have simply never examined the topics covered in Bible classes. The rare exceptions can certainly benefit from exposure to additional *mekorot*, and all students can gain from the perspective, insight, and experience of God-fearing individuals who have made it their life's work to teach in the Bible department.

Yet Mr. Resnick's criticism, while well-meaning, argues for depriving students of this learning opportunity. It effectively enshrines an incomplete, immature, and often ignorant understanding of basic issues of Jewish belief as the standard by which to measure the Bible department. The fact that such misunderstandings are so widespread does not seem to be an argument for perpetuating them. On the contrary, it justifies keeping the Bible department open, not closing it, as Mr. Resnick would have us do. Indeed, Mr. Resnick effectively argues for a regrettable sort of inertia, by which students who arrive at Yeshiva University ignorant or misguided will simply continue to remain ignorant or misguided. He argues that he is open minded, and only criticizes the department for not suggesting new ideas or helping students to "rebuild" their Judaism. Is that not exactly what they already strive to do, by leading students to a fuller and more nuanced understanding of certain hashkafic issues and *ikkarei emunah*?

Granted, a simple and incorrect understanding may be more comforting, or more amenable to polemics. But our yeshivah pursues the imperative of *ameilut ba-Torah* (toiling in Torah) and *bakashat ha-emet* (truth seeking) during the first part of the day, when the focus of study is, for most *talmidim*, the Gemara. Why does that imperative end once the Gemara is closed and a Tanakh is opened?

I am particularly pained by Mr. Resnick's polemical suggestion that the Bible department be shut down because my experience with the department was so utterly different. I considered myself relatively knowledgeable before taking any classes with the department, and I was fairly confident of my grasp of the basic *ikkarei emunah*, as well as my ability to define their scope with sufficient nuance, understanding, and sophistication. After a few weeks in Intro to Bible, I quickly realized that I was burdened down by indefensible pre-conceived notions, easily refuted or counter-indicated by the most basic of sources found on the shelves of any *beit midrash*.

Unlike Mr. Resnick, I did not feel that by Bible professors "tore down my foundation and left me staring at the rubble." On the contrary, I felt that they generously demolished the rickety, tumbledown structure I had erected, and helped me start a new foundation upon which to build a sturdier edifice. I formed lasting and meaningful relationships with several of the professors whose courses I took, and I am indebted to them for leading me not only to a more profound understanding of Tanakh, but to a richer and better comprehended *yiddishkeit* in general. I never felt that my professors were "Bible academics" expressing radical views about "the nature of Judaism," as Mr. Resnick insinuates.

On the contrary, I was inspired by their *yir'at Shamayim*, their intellectual honesty, and their passion for the portion of *talmud Torah* they had dedicated themselves to teaching. I never felt any inconsistency between the values that animated them and the values I strove to implement in the *beit medrash*. After all, the Rashba on *Gittin* which occupied all of my morning *seder* was the same Rashba whose *teshuvah* regarding transmission of the Masoretic text we analyzed in Intro to Bible. The Rambam that my *rebbe* quoted in Gemara *shiur* was the same Rambam who discussed the nature of *lashon ha-kodesh* in his *Moreh Nevukhim*. The Ramban in *Milhamot ha-Shem,* at the back of the Gemara, was the same Ramban who authored a commentary on the Torah, who enlightened me on Shabbos afternoons as we worked together on analyzing when God conveyed each part of the Torah to *Moshe Rabbeinu*.

To me, Mr. Resnick's criticism bespeaks a need to re-articulate that there is and should only be confluence between the curriculum of the Bible department and the values of the *beit medrash*. Perhaps there is a need for more guidance from the *rashei yeshiva* to drive this point home. Perhaps the educators who call the Bible department home could be more sensitive in disabusing students of their incomplete or immature beliefs, given that they are so strongly held. But the idea of shutting down the Bible department seems utterly counterproductive.

In conclusion, one may be tempted to suspect that Mr. Resnick and I are talking about different Bible departments at different universities. Yet ultimately, it seems that our differences, like so much else, are a matter of perspective. From Mr. Resnick's perspective about the goals of Bible study, the standards of measuring what one is taught, and what makes a belief hashkafically acceptable, he is correct. I humbly submit that his perspective is seriously in error.

Nathan Hyman, YC '12, is currently a first year student in the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law.

1 Elliot Resnick, "Shut Down the Bible Department," *Kol Hamevaser*, 6,5 (2013): 4, available at: www.kolhamevaser.com. All subsequent Resnick quotes come from the same source.

2 *Judaism Eternal: Selected Essays from the Writings of Samson Raphael Hirsch*, Vol. 1, ed. by Dayan Dr. I. Grunfeld (Brooklyn, NY: Soncino Press, 1967), 109.

3 See *Shemot* 23:2 and *Mekhilta* ad loc.

4 See, for instance, Rambam's commentary to the Mishnah (*Sotah* 3:5, *Sanhedrin* 10:3, Shavu'ot 1:4); *Hovot ha-Levavot*, Introduction; responsa of *Hatam Sofer*, *Yoreh De'ah* 2:356; R. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Igrot ha-Re'iyyah*, 1:103, 1:302, and 3:793, and *Ma'amarei ha-Re'iyyah*, pg. 105.

5 For a discussion of this topic, see Nathan Denicoff, "Divine Providence: Godly Manifestations, and Human Uses and Misuses," *Kol Hamevaser* 6,1, available at: www.kolhamevaser.com.

Yeshiva College, Please Tolerate *Benei Torah*

By: Judah Diament

I thank Elliot Resnick for bringing to the fore the issue of academic Bible at YU. While it has been a gnawing issue for many students for decades, he is to be complimented for taking the time to raise it in a public forum. Mr. Resnick argued for shutting down the Bible department, or, minimally, eliminating the Bible requirement. I would like to separate the two issues and address only the second, i.e. academic Bible as a required course of study for all YU undergraduate students.

The Bible requirement has been a source of angst, confusion, or irritation for many YU students for decades. These students found the tone and/or content of the academic Bible classes religiously objectionable. Additionally, it is well known that many of the senior and widely respected *rashei yeshivah* at RIETS concur with these objections. It is certainly possible that some students find academic Bible enjoyable, useful, or stimulating, and it is safe to assume that the university administration will continue to dedicate resources to maintaining an academic Bible department in order to serve those students. The issue at hand, however, is requiring (or, less politely, forcing) all students, even those who find it religiously objectionable, to study academic Bible. The vociferous insistence on the part of academic Bible's advocates that it be required for all students amounts to one group dogmatically forcing its own interests on others who find it offensive. One does not have to agree with the religious objections many have to academic Bible in order to agree that these dissenters have a right to their opinion and should not be forced to do that which they find objectionable.

Some may argue that despite the aforementioned issues, the Bible requirement is needed to equip students to defend their beliefs in an outside world that is hostile to faith. While there are various responses to this argument, I will suffice with offering one. I have been living in that outside world throughout my career (starting in 1997), and have worked for four large corporations in three different industries. My current tenure of twelve years is at an industrial research lab of a multinational corporation, which maintains such labs on six continents. I work with highly educated people from around the world who adhere to various religions and whose personal and cultural backgrounds cover an extremely broad spectrum. Not once in my career, however, has anyone challenged my faith with the type of arguments or ideas that are discussed in academic Bible classes, and not once has anything I learned in those classes been remotely useful when interacting with this impressive array of highly educated people. In fact, in the modern workplace, any comment on a personal matter, whether regarding religion or any other non-work topic, that makes a coworker uncomfortable is deemed to be entirely unacceptable behavior and can be cause for disciplinary action or dismissal. On the extremely rare occasion that an anti-religious comment is made it is usually a shallow agnostic comment driven by a hedonistic system of beliefs and lifestyle, and has no connection whatsoever to any issues discussed in academic Bible studies. The assumption that the average person will be confronted with challenges based on Bible criticism is anachronistic at best.

Given the growing range of competition that YU faces (direct "*yeshivah* plus college" competitors, e.g. Lander's, the increasing number of highly respected universities offering a bachelor's degree online, e.g. Boston University, Penn State, and University of Illinois, etc.), one would think that YU would eliminate a requirement that many find objectionable. Personally, for example, I have serious misgivings about sending my children to a school where they will needlessly be exposed to such things, and plan to seriously investigate other options when the time comes to decide where they will go to *yeshivah*. However, we must be fair to the university administration and recognize that they have to deal with certain extremely vocal and intolerant personalities who feel it is their right to dogmatically force others to do that which they find religiously objectionable. Therefore, I urge all YU students and alumni to make their voices heard on this issue in order to give the administration the information they need to make a balanced decision. Specifically, if you are a YU student or alumnus and have had a negative experience in Bible, whether it was confusing or irritating, please share your experience in the comments to this article on the *Kol Hamevaser* website.

I will close by reiterating the essential point: The issue at hand is whether students who find academic Bible to be religiously objectionable will nonetheless be required/forced to pursue such studies, or whether a more tolerant approach will be adopted wherein the requirement is eliminated but the courses offered for those who want them. This more accommodating approach would allow a broader range of students to enjoy their stay at YU, and also remove a barrier that currently pushes some students to pursue their undergraduate studies elsewhere.

Judah Diament graduated SSSB in 1996 and is a RIETS musmakh.

The Presence of Narrative and the Poland Trip

By: Gavriel Brown

Deep within the quiet back rows of the Okopowa Street Cemetery in Warsaw stands a dignified monument to members of the Bund, a Jewish secular socialist movement, who died in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943.[1] The relief inside the stone shows a robust amateur soldier, a rifle in one hand, a grenade in the other. The monument seems anachronistic in this particular neighborhood of the graveyard, standing slightly taller than the tombs of learned sages and religious community members and bearing only Yiddish and Polish engravings, without any Hebrew.

However, of all the graves that I visited that cold April day in Warsaw's cemetery—perhaps in the whole of Poland—it was the Bund memorial that I remember most vividly. I believe it is seared into my memory not because it represents the only significant rebellion against the Nazis, but because it somehow captures the polyphonic voice—the sheer diversity—of Polish and, for that matter, European Jewry. The monument made me acutely aware that the narrative of European Jewry did not begin in the courts of famous rabbis, nor did it end in the final *minyan* in a Warsaw Ghetto cellar. It also made me cognizant of the presence—and limitations—of narrative.

In the spring of 2010, I boarded a Lot Airlines plane for a trip that has now become a lachrymose rite of passage for Jewish youth around the world. We arrived in Poland late at night, removed the sweaters from our bags, and embarked on a nighttime ride to a remote village deep in Poland's interior. The following eight days were a blur of bus rides, motels, films, forests, graves, memorials, museums, and concentration camps. We crisscrossed—or rather encircled—the country on a schedule familiar to many. Krakow, Katowice, Auschwitz. Lodz, Warsaw, Treblinka. Lublin, Lvov, Majdanek. The final stop was the Western Wall.

What united those locations was a centralized narrative told to me by my veteran tour guide. He weaved together stories, documents, confessions, and facts into a coherent arc. Narrative was essential; it gave the trip a backbone, it grounded me within an ever more familiar set of characters, of locations, and of events. The vignettes would lead us through the distress of witnessing the "unwitnessable" and speaking of the "unspeakable," to borrow the words of Hent De Vries.[2]

In the case of our trip, the narrative was decidedly focused on the rise and fall of Polish Orthodox Jewry. We visited the great yeshivah of Lublin, placed a stone on the grave of R. Moshe Isserles, and read stories of halakhic observance in the camps. We visited the great Orthodox synagogues of Krakow and read prayers in the open fields upon which *kohanim* could not walk. The narrative the trip adopted of course dovetailed to *our* particular religious milieu. *We* memorialize by chanting the *Kel Male* prayer. *We* visit the vestiges of Poland's rabbinic seminaries because they contain the seeds of our religious movement. The trip's itinerary and guidance seemed natural, even unquestionable.

However, sewn into our program were visits to the graves of the great Hasidic masters—R. Elimelekh of Lizhensk, R. Simhah Bunim of Peshischa, to name a few. At their graves, members of the group danced and sang, wrote small notes and gave *tsedakah*, prayed and had a shot of vodka. Visiting their graves struck me as incongruous. We were not Hasidim, we did not study the *Zohar* or believe in the saintly powers of these men to bring about good health or fortune. We were deeply rooted in Lithuanian rationalism, in the temporality of Halakhah and not the enchantment of mysticism. This was not part of our story, *or was it*?

The narrative of my trip portrayed Polish Jewish life as harmonious, religious, and united, not diverse, opinionated, and often divided. Our trip's storyline was not only historically imprecise, but it skewed and romanticized history toward one particular story.

By assimilating Hasidic history into our itinerary and discussions, the trip leaders were—intentionally or not—expanding the limited purview of our narrative. Now, the trip was not just about visiting important sites for Orthodox Jewry. It was about gaining a larger picture of Europe's heterogeneous *religious* Jewry: Hasidic, Mitnagdic, rational, mystical. Yet something seemed missing. Polish Jewish life was not just comprised of a dialectic of two Jewish practices. Rather, it included a potpourri of voices—Jewish religious communists, Jewish socialist atheists, Jewish anti-Zionist Yiddishists, Jewish religious reformers, Labor Zionists… the list goes on.

However, the historical presence of these groups went virtually undetected throughout my trip in particular and, based on many discussions with friends and peers, in most *yeshivah* and seminary trips in general. We stopped to admire the radiant sanctuary of the Krakow Reform Temple, yet spoke little about the significance of the changes that began there and transformed the face of Judaism. We paused momentarily at the Bundist memorial on our way to yet another grave of a Hasidic rabbi. The narrative of my trip portrayed Polish Jewish life as harmonious, religious, and united, not diverse, opinionated, and often divided. Our trip's storyline was not only historically imprecise, but it skewed and romanticized history toward one particular story. It omitted certain anecdotes and emphasized others. It told certain stories to the exclusion of others.

I imagine that a group of Reform rabbis visiting Eastern Europe would also choose a particular narrative, one that perhaps emphasizes the *Haskalah,* visits Warsaw's burgeoning Reform congregations, and largely ignores Orthodox and Hasidic movements. I can also envision the itinerary of a Hasidic trip, with pilgrimages to the villages of famous courts—Kotzk, Belz, Lubin, and Bobowa—and not, say, Vilna. These trips, however, surely miss out on the larger picture of Eastern European Jewry in all its political and religious heterogeneity—a diversity that became magnified and intensified in the ghettos and camps.

Yes, we need to tell our particular denomination's story. Yes, we should highlight certain stories over others. We should not, however, speak of the Bundists simply because their eye-catching memorial stood on the way to a grave of an Orthodox sage, nor visit the Reform Synagogue in Krakow simply for its aesthetic beauty.

We should recognize that among the 200,000 marked graves of the Okopowa Street Cemetery sit the graves of Solomon Anski, a prominent socialist and author of "*The Dybbuk*," Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, *rosh yeshivah* of the venerated Volozhin Yeshiva, Hayyim Soloveitchik, founder of the rabbinic dynasty and the Brisker method, and Jozef Rozanski, one of the most brutal interrogators for the Soviet Secret Police. They all reside among the cemetery's forested rows. The variety of these tombstones reflects the diversity of Jewish life in Poland. These figures are all part of a larger story- *a story we must tell.*

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1 The Bund was founded in 1897 as a union of Jewish socialist groups across the Pale of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. In Poland, they were unapologetic secularists, ardent combatants of antisemitism, and supporters of diasporism, believing that the future lay not with Jabotinsky and Palestine, but with their fellow Poles in Poland. They enjoyed widespread support among urban Jews, winning over sixty percent of the votes cast for Jewish parties in Warsaw's 1938 municipal elections. By 1943, members of the Bund founded the Jewish Fighting Organization that precipitated the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

2 Hent De Vries and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan, *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006), 558.

The Wartime Activites of R. Barukh Rabinowicz

By: Akiva Weisinger

Recently, I came across a startling paragraph in Yeshayahu Jelinek's *The Carpathian Diaspora: The Jews of Subcarpathian Rus' and Mukachevo*, a book chiefly dealing with the history of the Holocaust in the Carpathian Mountains.[1] In the midst of a paragraph describing his general impression that "most Jews who saved themselves [from the clutches of the Nazis] were from the various streams of the Zionist movement,"[2] Jelinek lodges the following severe accusation in a footnote:

> Dinur rails against the idea that the Jews of Subcarpathian Rus' served as a model of passive acceptance [of their fates in the Holocaust]. But...[I]n my view, rabbis and *admorim* [of Subcarpathian Rus'] like Rabbi [Chaim Elazar] Shapira exercised a terribly destructive influence. Even though Rabbi Shapira died in 1937, his teachings lived on and his son-in-law and successor, Rabbi Barukh Joshua Rabinowitz tried mightily to follow in his path. In my judgment, the rabbis and *admorim* were divorced from reality, and their influence was particularly harmful.[3]

Jelinek thus raises an extremely serious attack on the legacy of R. Barukh Rabinowicz. He alleges not only that the religious Jews of Munkatch served as a model of passive acceptance, choosing to accept death rather than resist or even attempt to save themselves, but also that this was mostly a result of their leadership, which at the time of the war was R. Barukh, the Hasidic Rebbe of the Munkatcher Hasidim and Chief Rabbi of Munkatch. If not for R. Barukh's "particularly harmful" influence, more Jews would have, in the manner of the Zionists, stopped relying on their Creator and saved themselves, and all the more so if R. Barukh had actively encouraged escape, which Jelinek implies he did not. Essentially, Jelinek holds R. Barukh culpable for the deaths of all those under his leadership.

But beneath the accusation's gravity, Jelinek provides no basis for his claim other than an article about R. Barukh's predecessor and the attendant assumption that R. Barukh "tried mightily to follow in his path." However, a wealth of material contradicts his accusation and shows that R. Barukh "tried mightily" to save as many Jews as he possibly could, quite unlike the model of passive acceptance described by Jelinek. This mistaken assumption cannot even be charitably blamed on a lack of available sources. R. Barukh wrote about his experiences in the Holocaust in his book *Binat Nevonim*[4] and gave two testimonies on the same subject: first to the Jewish Agency soon after his arrival in Israel in 1944,[5] and then to Yad Vashem in August 1968.[6] In addition, his sister, Peska Friedman, tells of her brother's experiences in her memoirs.[7] These sources, supported by other primary and secondary sources, paint a different picture of R. Barukh's wartime activities than Jelinek's.

Some background on the history of the Holocaust in Hungary is helpful here. Until June 1941, Hungary was not involved in World War II and its Jews were in comparatively little danger, unlike many of their European counterparts. With Hungary's entry into the war, the Axis-aligned government enacted anti-Semitic race laws. Still, most of Hungary's Jews remained out of harm's way, as there were neither concentration camps in Hungary nor deportations to concentration camps outside of Hungary until Germany invaded in 1944. However, Jews who did not present ample proof of Hungarian citizenship, among them refugees from other parts of Europe, Jewish residents of Hungary born in other countries, and genuine Jewish Hungarian citizens who could not provide their papers quickly enough, were deported to the Polish border in the summer of 1941. They were then transferred across the Soviet border and handed over to the SS, who took them to the Ukrainian town of Kamenetz-Podolsk. There, they were forced to dig their own graves before they were machine gunned en masse. Upwards of 18,000 people were killed over the course of two days.[8]

R. Barukh turned to the Jewish community of Budapest, but help was not forthcoming, as they did not want to involve themselves in illegal activity. Only R. Barukh, himself an illegal, was willing and able to help the refugees.

R. Barukh Rabinowicz and his son Tsevi Natan David, as Polish citizens, were among those deported. At the Ukrainian border, however, R. Barukh saw the small town of Jagielnica, and realized it as the burial place of his ancestor, R. Shmuel Shmelke of Sassov. They stayed there for a few weeks, and R. Barukh spoke publicly to the town, with great emotion, about his hope that the merit of his ancestors who were buried there would protect him during this trying time.[9] Soon he traveled to the larger town of Kolomyja and learned of the tragic fate of those who continued on to Kamenetz-Podolsk. He managed to send word to his family back in Munkatch that he was alive, and, through various contacts, he and his son were themselves smuggled back to Munkatch. There, he tearfully told of the destruction he had seen beyond the border.[10] Soon, however, anti-Semitic factions in Munkatch grew suspicious of how the deported Rabbi of Munkatch managed to return, and R. Barukh was forced to move to Budapest, a big city in which hiding would be easier.[11]

It is possible that his experiences in the Holocaust led R. Barukh to critically re-evaluate what the role of the Hasidic leader should be.

R. Barukh arrived in Budapest, and after about a year and a half of staying incognito, was informed by government contacts that it was safe to start appearing in public again.[12] He soon came in contact with other Polish refugees living in Budapest. With the Nazi death machine working overtime in Poland, many fled to safety in Hungary. Some of these illegal refugees would come over to R. Barukh, a fellow illegal, after *shaharit* and plead with him for help. R. Barukh would write down their specific requests, go to a nearby store that had a telephone, and spend the day raising funds for these refugees from the Budapest community. By the afternoon, the necessary funds would be in his hands, and he would distribute them at *minhah*.[13]

Because of their illegal status, these Jewish refugees were in danger of being deported at any time, and a more permanent solution was needed. Dozens of refugees lived in totally inadequate conditions, contracting serious illnesses, and could not go outside or be treated by doctors for fear of deportations, which meant probable death.[14] R. Barukh turned to the Jewish community of Budapest, but help was not forthcoming, as they did not want to involve themselves in illegal activity. Only R. Barukh, himself an illegal, was willing and able to help the refugees.[15]

This illegal refugee status, however, only applied to Jews. Owing to an understood alliance between Poland and Hungary, Christian Polish refugees were not to be deported. On the contrary, a committee was organized to accommodate these refugees, and each one of them received special identification papers and a monthly allowance of 150 pengo. At the head of this committee was Countess Erzsebet (Elizabeth) Szapary, a member of the Hungarian aristocracy with Polish roots.[16] R. Barukh was informed of her activities by his Hungarian government connections, and decided boldly to ask for her help with the Jewish refugees. He describes the meeting:

> I turned to her and I said to her, "I came to you with a request. After you listen to me, you will have a choice: to hand me over to the authorities, which would mean my death, or to fulfill my request. Know that I am supporting tens of illegal refugees, who have no one to turn to. I have to do this, and if you ask me, you have to do this as well. I am supporting them with the full awareness that they are illegal. But now I cannot continue, because we have reached the following situation..." And I described to her the situation of the refugees, their living conditions and their illnesses. I said to her that she was able to send me and the other Jews like me to death, or she could help us get licenses. The noblewoman was affected by my speech. She looked at me and said, "Come tomorrow."[17]

Soon after, with the help of Countess Szapary, the decision was made to give Jews the same certificates that the Polish Christians were receiving. At first, R. Barukh had misgivings. The certificates would identify these Jews as Roman Catholic, and while most transgressions are nullified by the preservation of life, the *Shulhan Arukh* rules that one may not claim to be a Gentile in order to escape being killed.[18] Based on that, accepting one of these certificates would be problematic. However, *Rema* ad loc. contends that one is permitted to use language that can be understood in multiple ways in order to make the non-Jew believe that the Jew is one of them, even though the Jew means something completely different. R. Barukh therefore decided that the use of these certificates was permissible, as a Jew can say he believes in the Messiah, and have a different Messiah in mind; or he can say that he is "catholic," and have in mind the Greek word meaning "universal."[19] Nevertheless, there apparently were some who refused to use these certificates, and, as a result, they perished.[20]

Emboldened by his success with the refugees already in Budapest, R. Barukh turned his attention to those still in Poland.[21] At this time, only one ghetto remained in Poland that had not been liquidated, that of

Bochnia, located near the Slovakian border. Working with R. Michael Dov Weissmandl, R. Barukh arranged for the transfer of thousands of Jews to Hungary by way of Slovakia. Once they arrived in Hungary, they would receive their identification papers and be free to stay in Hungary or eventually make their way out of Europe.[22]

The sudden influx of refugees did not go unnoticed by Hungarian authorities, and many must have wondered how Yiddish-speaking men with long *peyos* were allowed to pass themselves off as Roman Catholics. Still, others viewed the Jews' dire straits as a prime opportunity for extortion. R. Barukh found himself needing to raise more and more money to keep his life-saving scheme afloat with bribes and hush money for Hungarian officials, on top of the money needed to support the refugees' needs in Hungary.[23] He begged and pleaded with the Jewish Hungarian community to contribute to the cause, tearfully recounting the horrible destruction that had come upon the rest of European Jewry.[24]

While money did indeed trickle in, R. Barukh found himself frustrated by the complacency and lack of foresight exhibited by Hungarian Jewry. The Jews there often did not believe the tales of horror R. Barukh told of the Nazi Final Solution. He recounts that, on one occasion, he was appealing to a community for money to help save Jews still in Poland, when one person rose and accused him of trying to extort money from the community by throwing them into a false panic. R. Barukh was left speechless by the community's inability to recognize reality.[25] In his 1944 testimony, with the ruins of Hungary still smoldering, R. Barukh bemoans the fact that with more money he could have saved ten or even a hundred times more people than he already had.[26]

Even more egregious in R. Barukh's eyes was the idea that what had befallen the rest of Europe would not befall Hungary. R. Barukh recounts how he drew up a plan for physical resistance in the event of a Nazi invasion. Knowing that the Nazis would usually gather the Jews into a central location before loading them onto the trains to concentration camps, R. Barukh wanted to give every Jewish family a weapon, in order that when the Nazis called them to assemble, they would be prepared to refuse the order. Because each building housed both Jews and non-Jews, an SS officer would need to be dispatched to take in each Jewish family, rather than merely blow up the building, and the Jews could shoot the SS officer once he approached the apartment. In such a manner, the advantages of the SS would be neutralized. This plan, however, fell on deaf ears, not for any practical reason, but because the Jews did not believe and could not comprehend that human beings were capable of the atrocities the Nazis perpetrated, and thus did not see the necessity of physical resistance.[27]

Sensing the oncoming German onslaught and frustrated by the limitations placed upon his rescue work, R. Barukh resolved to leave Hungary and make his way to Palestine. It was then that he first encountered opposition from his own followers. R. Barukh recounted that his *hasidim* and members of his family insisted that no harm could befall them, recalling how, during the First World War, the Minhas Elazar, R. Barukh's predecessor, promised that the war would not reach Munkatch.[28] The Minhas Elazar's promise was fulfilled, and the Munkatcher *hasidim* evidently saw this as a guarantee that war would never harm them. R. Barukh was under no such illusion and resolved to leave anyway. R. Barukh recalls that some of his followers went so far as to steal his books in order to make him stay.[29]

R. Barukh's mother-in-law, Rachel Perel, the widow of the Minhas Elazar, was particularly opposed to his leaving, even though R. Barukh wanted to take her with them. Peska Friedman, R. Barukh's sister, recounts how Rachel Perel wanted her to convince R. Barukh not to leave, knowing the influence she had on him. Peska's response was unequivocal: "...I have come from *gehinnom*. Six souls are at stake, and I will do everything in my power to try and save them."[30] R. Barukh eventually decided to leave even without his mother-in-law, a move that necessitated secret preparations so as not to raise her ire.[31] R. Barukh left for Palestine in the spring of 1944, very shortly before the Nazi invasion of Hungary. Rachel Perel left Budapest for the town of Nierethauz over Peska's objections, preferring to be back with friends rather than alone in the big city. The last postcard Peska received from Rachel Perel before her death told of the Germans coming to Nierethauz and concluded, "Now I realize what a special son-in-law I have. He saw what was coming and was able to save his own family and so many other people. You did not listen to me – and now I want to say '*yasher koah*.'"[32]

With that, let us return to Jelinek's accusations. It should now be relatively clear that R. Barukh was no model of passive acceptance. He did not encourage anyone to stay passive during the Holocaust, neither for religious reasons nor out of complacency. He worked tirelessly to save the remnants of European Jewry, even seeking loopholes in religious law to do so. Beyond that, R. Barukh, no divorcé from reality, warned everyone he could find about the coming catastrophe of Nazi rule and did his utmost to get people out of harm's way. He went so far as to propose active physical resistance, rather than passively accept death at the hands of the Nazis. It is also abundantly clear that R. Barukh did not "try mightily" to follow in the path of his illustrious predecessor. On the contrary, he diverged from that path in a stark and courageous manner, in a way that his followers vehemently rejected. Jelinek's statement, in its clear ignorance of the details of R. Barukh's life, is not just shoddy scholarship;[33] it is slander, plain and simple.[34]

Yet there remains a kernel of truth to Jelinek's statement. As much as R. Barukh tried mightily to veer from the path laid before him, Minhas Elazar's teachings did indeed live on. Rachel Perel died because she believed that the promise of her late husband would come to pass, as did many Munkatcher *hasidim*. Furthermore, not all *admorim* saw the German threat as clearly as did R. Barukh, and some continued to insist to their followers that they would be miraculously saved, with disastrous results.[35] R. Barukh was acutely aware of this failure of leadership, and he writes in *Binat Nevonim*:

> Those who recognized their *rebbeim* as masters of divine inspiration, those for whom "the paths of heaven were as clear to them as the paths of earth," those who would do nothing without first asking their *rebbe*, those who would not close any business deal, make any match, would not allow surgery on themselves or on members of their family without the assent of their *rebbe* – they were left dumbfounded. How was it possible that their *rebbeim*, for whom asking them, was as if, in their eyes, they were asking the mouth of God, did not know what was about to occur, and did not warn the nation?[36]

This is a truly remarkable paragraph, written by a man who used to occupy the role described, asking legitimate questions about the nature of Hasidic leadership. If we assign such wide-ranging importance to the *admor*, and we know that the examples he quotes are true because he likely lived them, what happens when the *admor* is wrong? and when being wrong leads to the deaths of his own followers? R. Barukh concludes that the lack of leadership is part and parcel of the divine punishment that constituted the Holocaust, but that leaves an essential question: that of the wisdom of having human leaders who are presumed to be all-powerful and all-knowing, unanswered. Indeed, his view in this piece seems quite negative. We know that R. Barukh eventually left the Hasidic leadership, although whether it was truly his choice to do so is debatable.[37] It is possible that his experiences in the Holocaust led R. Barukh to critically re-evaluate what the role of the Hasidic leader should be. At any rate, the leader that R. Baruch was during the trying years of the Holocaust, a leader imbued with courage, foresight, ingenuity, a sense of the pragmatic as well as a sense of responsibility towards the Jewish people as a whole, should be enough of a model of leadership for anyone.

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1 Yeshayahu Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora: The Jews of Subcarpathian Rus' and Mukachevo* (New York: East European Monographs, 2008).
2 Jelinek, 305-306.
3 Jelinek, 371 n55.
4 Rabbi Barukh Rabinowicz, *Sefer Binat Nevonim* (Unpublished Manuscript). The introduction to *Binat Nevonim* has been translated by Esther Farbstein, and is found in Esther Farbstein, "Miracle By Miracle," in her *The Forgotten Memoirs* (Brooklyn: Shaar Press, 2011), 317-343.
5 Central Zionist Archive S26/1079. Found in *Pedut: Hatsalah bi-yemei ha-Sho'ah – Mekorot u-Mehkarim* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1984), 107-113.
6 Yad Vashem no. 03-3822, found in Rabinowicz, *Binat Nevonim*, 159-166.
7 Peska Friedman and Fayge Silverman, *Going Forward: A True Story of Courage, Hope, and Perseverance* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1994).
8 Randolph Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust In Hungary (Condensed Edition)* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 30-34.
9 Confirmed in personal communication with Sam Weisinger, resident of Jagielnica at the time.
10 Yosef Ben-Porat, *She'arim Ne'ulim* (Tel Aviv: Moreshet, 1987), 38.
11 Yad Vashem, 161.
12 Farbstein, 334. Yad Vashem, 162.
13 Yad Vashem, 162; Farbstein, 335.
14 Yad Vashem, 163; Farbstein, 335.
15 Katzburg, 108-109.
16 Katzburg, 109. See also Livia Rothkirchen, "Hungary – an Asylum for the Refugees of Europe," *Yad Vashem Studies* v. 7 (1968): 131-133. Erzsebet Szapary was identified by R. Barukh as "one of the righteous among the nations" as early as his 1944 testimony (Katzburg, 109), and was honored by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Gentile in 1998 (The Righteous Among the Nations Department, "Righteous Among the Nations Honored by Yad Vashem By 1 January 2013," *Yad Vashem*, available at: www.yadvashem.org).
17 Yad Vashem, 163.
18 *Yoreh Deah* 157:2.
19 Farbstein, 337.
20 Avraham Me'ir Glatsner, "More on the Matter of Changing Identification in the Instance of Threat to Life" (Hebrew), *ha-Ma'ayan* 51 (2011), available at: www.shaalvim.co.il/torah/maayan-article.asp?id=501.
21 Katzburg, 110.
22 R. Barukh, in his testimonies, does not say anything about arranging for flight from Hungary to other destinations, but his sister, in her memoirs, asserts that he did arrange for flight to other destinations, including Brazil and Australia (p. 153). Being as R. Barukh was eventually able to secure for himself a way out of Europe, it seems likely he was able to secure the same for others. At any rate, he was certainly unopposed to the idea, and definitely did not discourage people from doing so.
23 Katzburg, 110.
24 Yosef Yehuda Levi, *le-Ma'an te-Saperu le-Dor Aharon*, (Benei Brak, Self-Published, 1996), 101.
25 Rabinowicz, 64.
26 Katzburg, 111.
27 Farbstein, 340-341; Rabinowicz, 67-68.
28 See Allan Nadler, "The War on Modernity of R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz," Modern Judaism 14,3 (1994), 243.
29 Farbstein, 343.
30 Friedman, 160.
31 Friedman, 160-161.
32 Friedman, 166.
33 For other sources that mention R. Barukh's wartime rescue activities, see Ben Porat, 37; Ilana Rosen, "Interview with Chaim Farkas" in *In Auschwitz We Blew Shofar* (Hebrew) ed. by Ilana Rosen (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and the Hebrew University, 2004), 220; Abraham Fuchs, *The Holocaust In Rabbinic Sources: Responsa and Sermons* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: A Fuchs, 1995).
34 Tellingly, Jelinek does not even take the time to get R. Barukh's name right. R. Barukh's full name was Yehoshua Yerahmi'el Barukh Rabinowicz, not Barukh Yehoshua, as Jelinek has it.
35 See Lawrence Kaplan, "Daas Torah: A Modern Conception of Rabbinic Authority," in *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy*, ed. Moshe Z. Sokol (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992), 58-60 for one such example.
36 Rabinowicz, 65.
37 See my previous article, Akiva Weisinger, "Miracles in the Life and Thought of R. Barukh Rabinowicz," *Kol Hamevaser* 6,1 (2012): 16-17.

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A Late Twentieth-Century Pogrom, Made in the USA: What We Talk About When We Talk About the Crown Heights Riot

By: Chesky Kopel

The Events

On the evening of August 19, 1991, the Lubavitcher Rebbe departed Crown Heights on his weekly visit to the graves of his wife and his father-in-law, the *Frierdiker* (Previous) Rebbe, in the Old Montefiore Cemetery in Queens. The Rebbe's motorcade included, at this point in his life, three cars: an unmarked NYPD escort, the car carrying the Rebbe, and a third at the rear.[1] The NYPD escort had long been a source of local contention. The leaders of the black communities of Crown Heights saw it as a prominent manifestation of the police favoritism awarded to the Lubavitchers, along with the closure of some Crown Heights streets on Shabbat, but the Lubavitch community maintained that the Rebbe needed special protection as an international figure who received more than a few death threats during his tenure.[2] On this particular August night, the third car was driven by a Yosef Lifish, and two Lubavitch male passengers sat in the back.

On the return trip into Crown Heights, the motorcade encountered trouble. After trailing behind the other two cars, Lifish rushed through a yellow light to keep up his position. His vehicle collided with another while crossing the intersection at the corner of President St. and Utica Ave., swerved over the curb at the far end of the intersection, and ran over two children playing on the sidewalk: Gavin and Angela Cato, two seven year-old cousins from a black Guyanese family. A crowd quickly formed to come to the children's aid; Lifish and his passengers jumped out of the car to help as well and one dialed 911 on a mobile phone, but they were attacked by angry witnesses. Two police officers and an ambulance were dispatched to the scene at 8:22 PM, and they arrived after the Hatzolah ambulance, whose operators heard about the incident on their police radio.[3]

What followed at the accident scene were perhaps the most crucial moments of the riot of August 1991, the ones in which police faced the challenges of assisting injured children, protecting targeted men from an angry crowd, and preventing the outbreak of more widespread violence all at once. One policewoman quickly made a move, prudent in the immediate term and tragic at every moment thereafter, ushering the three Jewish men away from the crowd and into the Hatzolah ambulance, in order to remove them from the angry mob as quickly as possible. This decision roiled the bystanders – many of whom were already shouting "Kill the Jew!" and hurling bottles at Lifish – by confirming the popular belief that Hatzolah attended only to Jews and ignored Gentiles.[4]

What followed at the accident scene were perhaps the most crucial moments of the riot of August 1991, the ones in which police faced the challenges of assisting injured children, protecting targeted men from an angry crowd, and preventing the outbreak of more widespread violence all at once.

Gavin Cato died of his injuries, and three days of shocking violence engulfed Crown Heights. The Rev. Al Sharpton would refer back to this Hatzolah resentment in his eulogy at Gavin Cato's funeral, decrying "apartheid ambulance service." Shortly afterwards, in a rabid display of the hateful vitriol characteristic of the episode, Sharpton proceeded curiously and dangerously to link the Crown Heights Lubavitch community with "diamond merchants" who trade with apartheid South Africa for profits in Tel Aviv and Brooklyn.[5]

For more than three days, Crown Heights became a lawless warzone. Local black residents rioted against their Jewish neighbors, smashing windows, looting stores, throwing bottles and stones, and physically beating victims on the street. Israeli flags were burned and chants of "Heil Hitler!" and "Get the Jews!" were heard in the Jewish neighborhood. In some cases, blacks and Jews clashed mutually. Police officers were targeted as well, attacked in many cases by blacks who perceived them to favor the Jewish combatants exclusively.[6] The injury reports include claims from 152 police officers and 38 civilians, 27 police cars were damaged or destroyed, and 129 arrests were made. NYPD records list 21 acts of antisemitic bias, 3 of anti-black bias, and 3 of anti-white bias.[7] A conspicuously late NYPD surge sent in 1,800 officers on August 22, finally ending the violence.[8]

Many Jews did not hesitate to refer to the events as a pogrom, and a full page advertisement in *The New York Times* one month after the violence, paid for by "the Crown Heights Emergency Fund," even invoked Kristallnacht.[9] A Holocaust survivor named Bracha Estrin committed suicide when the violence began.[10]

The greatest tragedy occurred just three hours after the initial car accident and the subsequent outbreak of violence. At 11:30 PM, a group of 10 to 15 young black males chased down a Hasidic man from Australia named Yankel Rosenbaum and overtook him at the corner of President St. and Brooklyn Ave., screaming "Kill the Jew!" One of them, a sixteen year-old named Lemrick Nelson, Jr., stabbed Rosenbaum four times.[11] Nelson was found at the scene holding a bloody knife on which the word "Killer" was engraved, and Rosenbaum identified Nelson to police before even being taken by an ambulance, reportedly saying, "Why did you do this to me? … I never did anything to you."[12] Rosenbaum died in the middle of the night at Kings County Hospital, after emergency room doctors failed to recognize his fourth bleeding wound, on his back, for over an hour.[13]

A State court jury – whose racial composition was leaked by unreliable sources to be six black people, four Hispanic people, and two white people – acquitted Nelson on October 29, 1992 after finding inconsistencies in the police testimonies. Some members of the jury reportedly attended a banquet in Nelson's honor that night, along with Arthur Lewis, Jr., the victorious criminal defense attorney.[14] In 1994, the federal government charged Nelson with violation of Rosenbaum's civil rights, and the former was convicted to nineteen and a half years in prison in 1997. The ruling was then overturned by a federal appeals court in 2002, which found that the jury selection process had unfairly discriminated to ensure a balanced proportion of races. Finally, a third trial in 2003 found Nelson guilty again, and he admitted for the first time to killing Rosenbaum, though he blamed his act on drinking and not hatred. The sentence was commuted as a result of the already protracted judicial process and Nelson went free within a year.[15]

Meanwhile, a Brooklyn grand jury cleared Yosef Lifish of all charges for Gavin Cato's death on September 5, 1991.[16] The Cato family subsequently filed a wrongful-death lawsuit for $100 million, but Lifish fled the United States for fear of angry reprisals and took up residence in Kefar Habad, a Lubavitch village in Israel. Just before Yom Kippur, on September 17, 1991, Sharpton traveled to Israel with fellow activist Alton Maddox, and the two tried unsuccessfully to reach Kefar Habad and serve the civil summons in person, instead delivering it to the US Embassy in Tel Aviv. In a confrontation that further stoked Jewish-black tensions, a woman recognized Sharpton immediately upon his arrival to Ben Gurion Airport and shouted at him, "Go to hell!" Sharpton replied, in front of reporters, "I am in hell already. I am in Israel."[17]

New York City was soon implicated in the blame as well. A formal New York State report on the riot, written and compiled by Director of Criminal Justice Richard H. Girgenti, found Mayor David N. Dinkins and NYPD Chief Lee P. Brown unambiguously at fault for mismanagement, charging that they mobilized police forces slowly and failed to protect the residents of Crown Heights.[18] Unfortunately for the already-charged race politics of the City, both of these men are black, and Dinkins had won his 1989 election largely on his pledge to ease racial tensions.[19] Republican mayoral candidate Rudolph Giuliani used the reports' findings to his benefit in his 1993 victory, calling the riot a "pogrom," a term which not-so-subtly implies government complicity.[20] [21] In a separate civil lawsuit, the City settled with the Rosenbaum family in 2005, agreeing to pay $1.25 million in damages for the emergency-room negligence (in a City-run hospital) that led to Rosenbaum's death.[22]

Broadly considered, the events of August 1991 certainly deserve a place in the American Jewish historical canon of catastrophe. Assigning such a place, however, demands that the events be interpreted and that their moral meaning and their significance to our collective memory be made clear. Unfortunately, these conclusions remain elusive.

Historical Stakes and Dangerous Misconceptions

Comprehensive review of the facts surrounding the Crown Heights Riot is essential to any productive analysis of the riot's cultural and societal significance. Many elements of the story were shrouded in mystery even a decade later. Fluency in the details of this historical chapter – from the fateful week in August 1991 through political shockwaves and court rulings years later – provides the only defense against residual enmity. And from the vantage point of Yeshiva University in 2013, these same details continue to confound all the traditional perspectives from which the riot is interpreted.

I undertook the project of writing this article only when interactions with fellow students and members of the YU community revealed (unscientifically) that the Crown Heights Riot is not a ubiquitous feature of American Jewish historical consciousness.

Damaging misconceptions and blatant falsehoods plagued the press, as well as both black and Jewish communities, during and after the riots, and some persist until today. First, contrary to popular newspaper presentations, the violence implicated not just two ethnic/religious groups but three: African-American blacks; a much larger group of Caribbean-American blacks (including the Cato family) who, though also of African origin, comprised a distinct, lower-class immigrant community whose Crown Heights population had skyrocketed under less restrictive immigration standards since 1950; and Lubavitcher *Hasidim* who remained in Crown Heights under the Rebbe's strict instructions in April 1969, even as nearly all the other local whites fled to the suburbs in the decades immediately after World War II.[23]

Second, Yankel Rosenbaum was not, as representatives of the Lubavitch community and many voices in the national press originally contended, a rabbinic student. He was not a yeshiva student of any sort, nor was he even a Lubavitcher *hasid*. Rosenbaum was actually a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne in Australia, temporarily staying in New York to research 1930s Eastern European History at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, then located on Manhattan's Upper East Side. In the view of Edward S. Shapiro, professor of Psychology at Lehigh University and a prominent riot researcher, Rosenbaum's posthumous redefinition had a definitive, if perhaps unconscious, purpose: The mischaracterization effectively "heightened his Jewishness and linked his death with the long and painful history of antisemitism … for those unfamiliar with Jewish history, it was natural to equate being Jewish with being religious, being religious with being an Orthodox Jew, and being an Orthodox Jew with being a student of Judaism's holy texts."[24] Rosenbaum's role, then, was not to die as himself but to die as a symbol of the Jewish life and culture threatened by violence and hatred in Crown Heights.

Third, the Crown Heights Hatzolah never had a policy not to treat Gentiles. One member of the Hatzolah team who arrived at the corner of President St. and Utica Ave. on August 19 actually assisted City paramedics in treating Angela Cato, Gavin's cousin who survived the accident, just as the mob nearby spread the rumor that Hatzolah came only for Lifish and ignored the black children.[25]

Fourth, the Rev. Al Sharpton did not play any role in instigating the riot, as many of his detractors later claimed (though his statements and marches did explicitly encourage the rioters and defend their actions after the fact, and he has never quite apologized).[26] Sharpton only arrived in Crown Heights on the morning after the violence broke out, when Gavin Cato's father Carmel called him for assistance.[27]

Jewish-Black Relations in America

On the evening of September 20, 1989, New York State Assemblyman Herman "Denny" Farell, Jr. visited Yeshiva University's Wilf Campus to address a group of students in the Rubin Shul. Farell, then and now the State representative for a large segment of the Washington Heights neighborhood, spoke to YU students on behalf of the local black communities and the now-defunct Manhattan Black and Puerto Rican Caucus which he then led. He assessed the New York City black-Jewish relationship positively, characterizing it as "better than [the relationship] between blacks and Italians."[28] Farell also blamed Governor Mario Cuomo for lending credence to inflammatory black figures like Sharpton and Jesse Jackson and proceeded to campaign before the Yeshiva students for Mayor Dinkins, citing the incumbent's commitment to fighting antisemitism, supporting Israel, and improving New York race relations in general. After the talk, YCSC President Barry Kaye rose to ask Farell about the lack of visible black support for the popular student movement to liberate Soviet Jewry, suggesting that American blacks were failing to repay their debt to the American Jewish community which had stood side-by-side with them during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.[29]

Kaye's point was probably not lost on anyone in the room; an impressive history of participation in the Civil Rights Movement has always been a source of great pride to American Jews. Among the images ingrained in the American Jewish conscience were the faces of Andrew Goodman and Mickey Schwerner, Jewish activists lynched in Mississippi in 1964 by the Ku Klux Klan,[30] as well as the famous photographs of Abraham Joshua Heschel marching on Selma, Alabama arm-in-arm with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1965.[31] Farell chose to downplay this history in his reply, educating his YU audience instead about a popular black perception of Jewish abandonment in the more radical stage of the Civil Rights struggle, after 1965.[32]

This narrative, positively spinning the black-Jewish relationship as damaged but reemerging, clashed definitively with another popular version, one that posited the opposite. According to this alternative, the black-Jewish liberal alliance had resiliently survived the challenges of radicalization in the 1960s, including the painful effects of the 1967 Newark riot on the local Jewish community and a slew of isolated antisemitic incidents in Crown Heights in the 1970s and 1980s,[33] only to suddenly collapse in the final decade of the twentieth century.

To explain this version of history, some researchers cite two harbingers of doom from the months immediately preceding the Crown Heights Riot. First, early in 1991, the Nation of Islam published the first volume of a new treatise called *Secret Relationships Between Blacks and Jews*, arguing that Jews played a dominant role in the transatlantic slave trade. Second, this slavery claim was repeated and championed by Leonard Jeffries, a professor of Black Studies at the City College of New York in an infamous, controversial speech in Albany on July 20, 1991. Jeffries also argued that Jewish control of American media and the film industry deliberately spreads negative black stereotypes. Both incidents were roundly condemned and Jeffries was dismissed from his post as department head, but the black-Jewish dynamic in America was shaken terribly.[34]

In contrast with Farell's comments at YU, this alternative narrative took the onus for the violent collapse of Crown Heights away from mainstream trends and placed blame squarely on sudden instigation by individual radicals. Either way, the whole of 1991 demonstrated all too vividly that Jews and blacks had come a long way since Selma. As noted above, the conduct of black public figures during and after the riot did little to nothing to repair what had unraveled. Mayor Dinkins and NYPD Commissioner Brown failed to protect the Lubavitch community of Crown Heights and engendered unfortunate and widespread suspicions of their own biases and/or ambivalence. Al Sharpton, meanwhile, simultaneously positioned himself as a latter-day civil rights leader and supporter of the violent rioting.[35] Michael Meyers and Hazel Dukes of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

(NAACP) issued statements condemning the violence against Jews, but the political culture favored the radicals and gave them more press coverage.[36]

Some researchers have made a plausible case to dissociate the Crown Heights Riot from any larger questions of black-Jewish relations in America. Edward S. Shapiro and Carol B. Conaway address the claim that the Lubavitch and Caribbean-American communities of New York are both so insular and so separated from the larger spheres of Jewish and black society, respectively, as to resist placement in this traditional racial structure.[37] Lubavitchers interacted more with Caribbean-Americans than with other black communities, and the Caribbean-Americans interacted more with Lubavitchers than with any other Jews. The two groups had developed their own arguments and tensions through decades of sharing physical space, clashing on issues such as police accommodation, civilian street patrols, ambulance services, and City funding.[38] But prominent members of the Lubavitch community resisted this interpretation, expressing that since "anti-Lubavitch" is a less common and recognizable distinction than "antisemitic," it implied their own fault in bringing black violence upon themselves.[39] And considering the gruesome and absolutely unjustifiable extent of the violence they suffered, this objection is not unreasonable.

Ultimately, perhaps the clearest consequence wrought by the Crown Heights Riot upon the state of black-Jewish affairs has been the disappearance of the historic relationship – and the periodic tension – between the two communities as an identifiable feature of American society. A 2011 article in *The Jewish Daily Forward* put it quite well:

> The fact that the relationship is not a matter of concern today for blacks or Jews could be read as a sign that efforts of reconciliation after the riots were successful, or that the bond between the two groups is so insignificant that it has lost any relevance. Tellingly, when candidate Barack Obama spoke about the black-Jewish alliance on the campaign trail in 2008, he talked about needing to 'rebuild' it.[40]

Antisemitism

In its final issue before the 1992 summer break, *The Commentator* published a special first-anniversary reflective section on the Crown Heights Riot of the previous summer, titled, "Black-Jewish Relations: The Lessons of Crown Heights."[41] Revealingly, though, the editors chose to display in the center, and in a font size twice as large as all the other items printed on the page, a report identifying the riot not as an explosion of black-Jewish relations, but as evidence of an increase in American antisemitism. The report, an excerpt from the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) 1991 annual "Audit of Anti-Semitic Events," read as follows:

> In 1991, for the first time in recent memory, a mob's cries of "Kill the Jew" echoed on an American street… The Crown Heights outburst, with its dozens of assaults and acts of vandalism, was the most dramatic and disturbing eruption of anti-Semitic violence in America in many years. These attacks were among the most noteworthy of the anti-Semitic incidents reported to the ADL during 1991 – the fifth straight year of increased anti-Jewish acts nationwide.[42]

For the ADL, the history of anti-Jewish hate crimes in the United States was a more appropriate frame for the riot than the history of the Civil Rights Movement.

Initially, though, many American Jewish organizations cautiously avoided referring to the Crown Heights Riot as an act of antisemitism. Conaway's research demonstrates that *The New York Times* coverage largely followed their lead, only raising the issue of antisemitism after Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, brought it up. Instead, the *Times* applied the frame of racial conflict, simplified to black vs. white, and persisted with this interpretation for two years, until the release of the State report in 1993.[43] Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress (AJC) also applied this frame, labeling the riot as "essentially a black-white problem." Marc D. Stern, another AJC official, added that Crown Heights was "in large part an anti-white riot, directed at the nearest available white community" and expressing "the frustration of an inner-city black population."[44]

Members of the Lubavitch community voiced disappointment and mistrust in fellow American Jews, and the liberal Jewish organizations in particular, for their failure to act passionately on Crown Heights' behalf.[45] The conflict over terminology also extended far beyond the boundaries of internal Jewish dialogue. Many public figures adopted the term "pogrom" to characterize the Crown Heights Riot, including *New York Post* editorial page editor Eric Breindel and columnist Pete Hamill, *New York Times* columnist A.M. Rosenthal, former New York City mayor Ed Koch (Dinkins' predecessor who lost the 1988 election), and mayoral hopeful Rudy Giuliani (Dinkins' successor and victorious opponent in 1993).[46]

Others rejected this term as inaccurate and politically charged, including Columbia University historian Michael Stanislawski and *Times* columnist Joyce Purnick.[47] Mayor Dinkins vehemently objected to the use of "pogrom" and its implications of his culpability, continually professing his commitment to ease racial tension and his friendship with Jews and Jewish causes. Several weeks after the riot, Dinkins deliberately chose to reframe to the riot as a "bias crime" and the Rosenbaum murder as a "lynching," seeking the American historical terminology that would symbolically bring blacks and Jews closer together rather than divide them.[48]

It should not be overlooked that actual traces of traditional European antisemitism turned up in black New York in the last decade of the twentieth century. *New Yorker* writer David Remnick described finding *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Henry Ford's *International Jew* alongside works of Malcolm X at sidewalk bookstands in Manhattan soon after the riot. The Afrocentric WLIB radio station featured frequent rants on Jewish control of money, the press, and the government. Perhaps most chilling of all, though, were the references to Hitler in Crown Heights mob cries during the violence of August 1991.[49] Franklin Snitow, an attorney who represented the Crown Heights Lubavitch community in its legal action against the City, argued that extensive evidence pointed to understanding the riot as an organized assault of anti-Jewish hatred rather than a spontaneous outburst of anger. In a 1992 interview with *The Commentator* (part of the same first anniversary section), Snitow related, "[w]e have information that there were chain telephone calls made throughout the Brooklyn community saying 'Tonight take the streets – get the Jews.'"[50]

Still, some researchers have raised the consideration that Crown Heights rioters were likely not well-versed in propaganda that could be convincingly described as antisemitism. Jonathan Rieder, professor of Sociology at Barnard College, characterized the Crown Heights Riot as an outgrowth of gang culture and ghetto violence, expressed through the popular medium of "violent reprisals, collective allocation of blame, and communal vengeance." The anti-Jewish element, by contrast, seemed shallow and coincidental: "there was little evidence of coherent, formal antisemitic belief systems at work in Crown Heights."[51]

Lubavitch Riot-Based Messianism

The messianic movement surrounding the Lubavitcher Rebbe, R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, was understandably jolted by the incidents of the 1991 riot. Few Lubavitchers forgot that the trigger of all the violence came from the Rebbe's own entourage, and it was difficult for anyone to understand that as coincidental. An Australian funder of Lubavitch named Joseph Gutnick purchased a full-page advertisement in *The Jewish Week* just one week after the riots, referring to the Crown Heights Riot in light of other tumultuous events around the world, including Hurricane Bob and the downfall of the Soviet Union. Gutnick concluded:

> Any one of these phenomena by itself is enough to boggle the mind. Connect them all together, and a pattern emerges that cannot be ignored. The Era of Moshiach is upon us. Learn about it. Be a part of it. All you have to do is open your eyes. Inevitably, you'll draw your own conclusion.[52]

Undoubtedly, many Lubavitchers started to think of the riot as a tremor of the apocalypse, but just how widespread this was remains unclear. Researchers and journalists have referred vaguely to this phenomenon without providing concrete information.[53] The Rebbe himself never managed to articulate to his followers an official response to, or stance on, the riot. On March 2, 1992, just over six months after the violence, the Rebbe suffered the stroke that rendered him unable to communicate and began his final deterioration.[54]

The Rebbe did, however, leave one very valuable artifact from the period of the riot, and it is available on YouTube. On August 25, 1991, just three days after tentative peace had been restored to Crown Heights, Mayor Dinkins visited the Rebbe at the World Lubavitch Headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway. During their brief conversation, the Rebbe blessed the mayor in front of throngs of onlookers and television cameras:

> God Almighty should bless you to have good news and to use all your influence in the quiet atmosphere and to not suffer [unintelligible]… [We are] one side, one people, united by the management of New York City.[55]

Conclusion

The modern tragedy of the Crown Heights Riot surpasses even the most dismal apprehensions of American Jewish history. The fears reawakened by those three days of violence were perhaps more severe than any other in our community's history. But a project like this article is made most difficult by the absolute lack of clarity and well-defined meaning surrounding Crown Heights Riot commemoration. Many perspectives present themselves in a cursory review of journalistic and academic literature on Crown Heights, but every single one of them leaves more questions than answers.

I undertook the project of writing this article only when interactions with fellow students and members of the YU community revealed (unscientifically) that the Crown Heights Riot is not a ubiquitous feature of American Jewish historical consciousness. Confronting "Holocaust and Catastrophe" should mean engagement with this terrifying period on the part of historically conscious Jews removed from it by just twenty-two years and fifteen miles. And the definitive interpretation of the riot and its consequences, if one is ever to be found, may be up to our generation as well.

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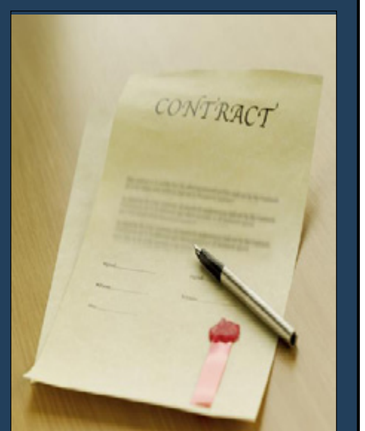


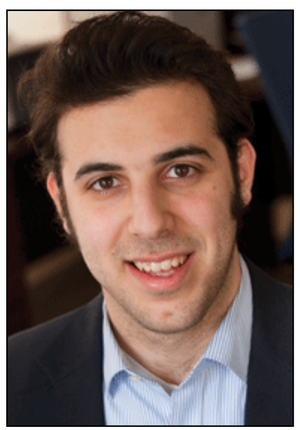
An Interview with Simon Goldberg

By: Staff

Note to Readers: Simon Goldberg graduated from YC in 2012 with a major in History. He is the founder of the Student Holocaust Education Movement (SHEM) at YU, and, for the past four years, has served as the Executive Director at Triangles of Truth, a non-profit organization that aims to honor Holocaust victims by giving charity in their names to help meet the humanitarian needs of current genocide refugees.

He is currently living in Hong Kong, where he is the Jewish Studies department head at Elsa International High School and serves on the Education Committee of the Hong Kong Holocaust and Tolerance Centre. He was named one of The Jewish Week*'s 36 Under 36 in 2012.*

To begin briefly with an issue of current relevance, President Obama visited Israel recently for the first time in his presidency. As is traditional in visits of foreign dignitaries and heads of state to Israel, the president made time in his 48-hour stay to pay respects at Yad Vashem. Do you think the automatic association of Israel with Holocaust commemoration is helpful for the national image?



I think we need to fight the perception that Israel exists as a direct result of the Holocaust. Too many people still believe this: Someone felt sorry for us and handed us a state. It's an issue because it undermines Israel's legitimacy. Other than that, the association is healthy, but we still have a ways to go in polishing our definition and expression of Holocaust commemoration: its purpose is not mourning. It has to be rooted in a reflection of the *Sho'ah*'s lessons. This transcends mourning. We're not victims. Certainly the survivors that I've met in my life don't want us to believe that we're victims. They want us to be vigilant. To use the past as a source of strength; to inspire education and to cultivate social action.

How should Eric Lichtblau's recent revelation in the The New York Times *of evidence of 42,500 Nazi ghettos and camps affect our perspective on Holocaust commemoration?*

It takes me back to an exhibit I once saw in Berlin that attempted to illustrate the number of concentration camps by flagging one yellow triangle per camp on a map of Europe. Of course, all you could see were yellow triangles. Now we know that the Holocaust took shape in many more local communities and tucked-away corners of Europe. Look, there's tremendous value in researching and publicizing these unknown histories, for two main reasons: First, as Elie Wiesel continues to teach us, when the memory of a victim's name and story is lost, it's as if they've died a second death. Our mission should be to acknowledge the lives and experiences of as many victims as we can possibly identify. But second, pedagogically, we highlight the importance of recognizing that it was not millions of "people" who died in the Holocaust, but millions of individuals. Calling these ghettos by their names and searching for their footprints enables us to underscore this message.

Do you think the generation of today's YU students will have greater trouble educating their children about the Holocaust than their parents did in educating them? How will we deal with the passing of our survivor grandparents and relatives?

Absolutely. So the responsibility on our generation will be greater. It is already. The youngest you can be today and have a first-hand recollection of the events of the Holocaust is about seventy-five. This is a dying population. Survivors—who first and foremost are our family members—are dying every day, and the implications for education are deeply concerning. There's simply no replacement for first-hand testimony. Not only that, the potency of diaries like Anne Frank's decreases when it cannot be put side by side with the living, breathing testimony of a witness. It's more difficult to grow sensitized. How do we deal? We find innovative ways to sensitize. I'm a very strong advocate of study trips to Europe. For young people to walk the grounds of former concentration and death camps—not only Auschwitz-Birkenau—and to see with their own eyes what remains of Hitler's genocidal ambitions. For them to wrestle with the contradiction of grass growing atop mass graves. Could grass really be growing here? We need young people saying: "I was there. I saw this. And this is why it matters."

If you were to change one thing about common Yom ha-Sho'ah *practice, in Israel or the United States, what would it be?*

Yom ha-Sho'ah is a day to mourn, but it's also an opportunity to educate. We're not doing this enough. The memory of the Holocaust is not something with which to "deal" one day a year. The routine of lighting six candles for six million, saying something or other about "Never Again," and walking home feeling slightly more depressed may help assuage our guilt, but it's not the point. I'd like to see communities use the week leading up to *Yom ha-Sho'ah* to showcase exhibits, arrange workshops that tackle at least one aspect of the Holocaust in-depth. A student at UC Santa Barbara, who spearheaded SHEM's first chapter on the West Coast, is organizing a full Holocaust Remembrance Week that only *begins* with *Yom ha-Sho'ah*. This adds another dimension altogether to our rationalization of why, in fact, we remember: to inform our ability to *act*. As such, the conceptualization of *Yom ha-Sho'ah* ought to be couched in an awareness that invites its attendees to get out of their chairs, not sink in them.

We're not victims. Certainly the survivors that I've met in my life don't want us to believe that we're victims. They want us to be vigilant. To use the past as a source of strength; to inspire education and to cultivate social action.

What, according to you, should be the most important focuses of Holocaust education in our day schools? Do you think current curriculums are reflective of those focuses or do you see room for change?

There's immense room for change. Before we talk about what curricula should look like, let's discuss the fact that in most states in America there are no curricula whatsoever as they're simply not mandated. We have to push for this by illustrating how critically learning about the Holocaust can inform citizenship. But in the classroom, when we teach students about the Holocaust, the great challenge is finding a way to personalize the history without diluting it. Personally, I think we must focus on other genocides in our study of the Holocaust. Those who oppose this practice argue that it detracts from students' perception of the Holocaust's uniqueness. I argue just the opposite: The only way to decipher what it is that's unique about the Holocaust is by putting it side by side with other genocides, discussing the history of genocide, and where and how the Holocaust fits into that history and in many ways shapes it. We're also experiencing a crisis of relevance, with more and more young people dissociating from the Holocaust in search of twenty-first century causes. Of course, the Holocaust remains a twenty-first century cause because the dangers it so strongly underscores are ever-threatening. We have to find ways to bring the history forward; placing it in a present-day context is one means toward that end. Another such means is through action-based learning: What actions does learning about the Holocaust inspire? Resistance to bigoted speech and to exercises of dehumanization, a proactive involvement in the strengthening of civil society, participation in activities that acknowledge and promote co-existence, co-responsibility, and so on.

What made you decide to be active in Holocaust and genocide education?

The knowledge that genocide is still being perpetrated in plain sight and we are epically failing to do much about it. I was on the National Mall with tens of thousands of people listening to harrowing accounts of survivors of the genocide in Darfur when it occurred to me that I could use my voice to help mitigate their suffering. Given what I knew about the Holocaust by the time I reached high school, this mission seemed like the most important thing in the world to me. It still does.

Can you describe what you are involved in currently, in your post-YU years? What are your goals for your work?

I'm in Hong Kong this year teaching Jewish Studies at Elsa International High School and helping to develop the Hong Kong Holocaust and Tolerance Centre as a mainstay for education and awareness of the Holocaust in East Asia. In this capacity I've worked with some incredible people to engage secondary school teachers and students from across the region in various learning opportunities. We've coordinated speaker visits, taken films and held discussions on the road, organized assemblies and Q&A sessions as well as commemora-

tive events for both the Jewish and Chinese populations. I've also continued to direct and grow Triangles of Truth, the infrastructure and vision of which are expanding in exciting ways.

What are my goals for the future? To meet the challenges you asked me about earlier. To invite young people around the world—in the untapped corners of the world—to think about what the legacy of the twentieth century means to them, ought to mean them—how we, as a generation, can apply the lessons of the Holocaust and contemporary genocide to promote acceptance of others and sacrifice on behalf of others.

In all your work related to the Holocaust and genocide, what is one memory that stands out to you as meaningful?

I remember turning on my phone after a Shabbat a few years ago and learning from one of our rock-star student volunteers that the newly-minted Triangles of Truth video had been featured on YouTube's homepage for that day. I was elated. We received tens of thousands of hits in a number of hours, and my inbox was exploding with requests from student leaders across the globe to launch their own Triangles of Truth fundraising campaigns. It was the beginning of the rest of our story, our first real breakthrough. Here's to many more.

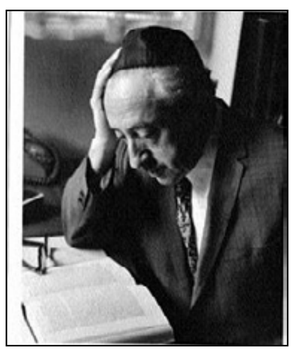
Eliezer Berkovits' Post-Holocaust Theology

By: Jonathan Zisook

Faith After the Holocaust is Orthodox rabbi and theologian Eliezer Berkovits' most comprehensive and systematic work on the Holocaust.[1] It describes both his major Jewish theological contribution to the study of God and evil and his response to the abundance of post-Holocaust literature that developed during the 1960s and 1970s. According to Berkovits, the Holocaust must be addressed through the lens of normative Jewish perspectives. The Holocaust was undoubtedly horrific, but it was not a fundamental rupture in Jewish history; rather, it was a chapter in the broader history of the Jewish people and their millennial and covenantal relationship with God. Berkovits argues for the acceptance and defense of traditional faith while remaining acutely aware of the turpitude and significance of the Holocaust.

Before addressing Berkovits' position, it is essential to first review contemporaneous trends that pervaded Jewish theological responses to the Holocaust. Berkovits attacks these positions, while not naming the scholars that he challenges.[2] During the first generation after the Holocaust, Jewish scholars primarily responded with silence. However, after the Eichmann trial (1962) and the Six Day War (1967), the floodgates of theological responses to the Holocaust were opened. These responses generally argued that the Holocaust cannot be explained through traditional Jewish perspectives because of the magnitude of destruction and cruelty of the Holocaust. The Reform thinker Emil Fackenheim was of this opinion, arguing that "no precedent exists either within Jewish history or outside of it."[3] The modern Orthodox scholar Irving Greenberg expressed a similar view arguing that "the Holocaust is obviously central for Jews" because the magnitude of destruction necessitates a "basic reorientation in light of it by the surviving Jewish community."[4] One contemporary philosopher reasons that the reorientation that Greenberg refers to involves "rethinking the meaning of the covenant and the requirements for its survival and performance… The 'magnitude of suffering' and the Nazi process of dehumanization are evils that cannot be dealt with by traditional categories and require revision and absolute opposition."[5] Similarly, novelist and theologian Arthur Cohen expressed that "we must return again and again to break our head upon the *tremendum* of the abyss…. We must create a new language in which to speak of this in order to destroy the old language which, in its decrepitude and decline, made facile and easy the demonic descent."[6] According to Cohen, traditional theological categories cannot be applied to the Holocaust because of its enormity and singularity; because of this, the classical understanding of God as omnipotent and omniscient must be revised. All of these formulations are, in part, predicated on the earlier work of Conservative rabbi and theologian Richard Rubenstein, who famously declared the "death of God" after the Holocaust. Arguably, it was Rubenstein's explication of Jewish radical theology in his *After Auschwitz* that initiated the explosion of Jewish theological responses to the Holocaust.[7] Rubenstein, more than any other Jewish theologian, is the likely recipient of Berkovits' attack in *Faith After the Holocaust*.

Post-Holocaust theology of the 1960s and 1970s delves beyond the theoretical and intellectual investigation of why God allows injustice to persist in the world. In classical theodicy, there exists a logical problem of evil, involving the seeming contradiction between the belief in an omnipotent and omniscient God and the presence of evil.



However, the literature extant on the Holocaust seems to go beyond this formulation. At stake are the betrayal of God and the notion of choseness. God, who affirmed in Deuteronomy to never forsake His chosen people, did exactly that during the Holocaust![8]

Eliezer Berkovits articulates a different position. Berkovits begins *Faith After the Holocaust* by drawing a distinction between those who experienced the Holocaust first-hand and those who did not. He writes, "Those who were not there and, yet, readily accept the holocaust as the will of God that must not be questioned, desecrate the holy disbelief of those whose faith was murdered. And those who were not there, and yet join with self-assurance the rank of disbelievers, desecrate the holy faith of the believers."[9] This is an odd way to begin a book that presumes to talk about the Holocaust and affirm traditional faith; it entirely undermines any response by those who did not experience the Holocaust. However, Berkovits has good reason for doing this. Firstly, in positing that only those who experienced the Holocaust can authentically respond to it, what he later refers to as "authentic faith" and "authentic rebellion," Berkovits distances himself from the facile rabbinic justification that the Holocaust represents divine punishment for Jewish sinfulness, *mipenei hataeinu*.[10] Secondly, Berkovits is critiquing Jewish theologians who use the Holocaust to throw off the yoke of traditional Judaism and redefine the contours of Jewish life. Berkovits subtly alludes to these theologians when he writes that "those who were not there, and yet join with self-assurance the rank of disbelievers, desecrate the holy faith of the believers."[11] Later, he explicitly refers to them, writing "the disbelief of the *sophisticated intellectual* in the midst of an affluent society—in the light of the holy disbelief of the crematoria—is obscenity."[12] Almost all of the post-Holocaust writers of the 1960s and 1970s did not personally experience the concentration camps; Berkovits himself escaped Nazi Germany in 1939.[13]

These contentious comments set up Berkovits' post-Holocaust theology. Berkovits emphasizes that Jews of the post-Holocaust era are euphemistically similar to Job's brother.[14] According to Berkovits, we must recognize that we are the victim's sibling and not the victim. The position of those who did not experience the Holocaust is by nature deprived of the authenticity of personal experience; however, at the same time, those who did not experience the Holocaust cannot lose sight of the Holocaust's significance. Job's brother today must try to make order out of the wake of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust. Job's brother represents a philosophical step away from the destruction of the Holocaust. This distance makes Job's brother fundamentally different than Job himself. Therefore, "In our generation, Job's brother, if he wishes to be true to his God-given heritage, 'reasons' with God in believing rebellion and rebellious belief."[15] In this way, Berkovits conceives of a post-Holocaust theology which affirms faith.

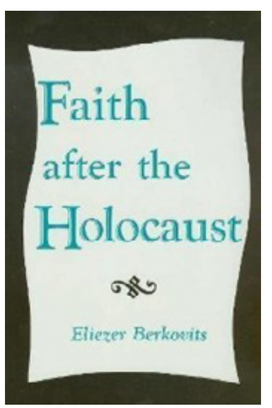
Berkovits discusses the Holocaust as a human and historical event. History, according to Berkovits, is man's responsibility. He expresses this, in part, through the story of creation; Adam is placed by God into the Garden of Eden "to work it and to guard it."[16] In his most central work of Jewish philosophy, *God, Man and History*, Berkovits first articulates the notion that God's main concern for humanity is to take responsibility for history. In line with the medieval philosophical positions of Sadiah Ga'on and Judah ha-Levi, Berkovits writes that "the foundation of religion is not the affirmation that God is, but that God is concerned with man and the world; that, having created this world, he has not abandoned it, leaving it to its own devices; that he cares about his creation."[17] The world, in this view, is created for humankind, and as the capstone of God's creation, humankind is thus responsible for the world. The greatest question for Berkovits is therefore not "Where was God?" but rather "Where was Man?"[18] According to Berkovits, the Holocaust represents humankind's moral failure before God and not God's failure before humankind. In Berkovits' words, "The Jewish experience in the ghettos and the death camps made manifest in our days the collapse of man as a moral being."[19] Berkovits thus moves culpability away from God onto humanity.[20, 21]

According to Berkovits, most post-Holocaust theologians failed to address the Holocaust through the lens of biblical and rabbinic literature. Judaism itself has always believed in the possibility of evil. This is expressed acutely in Genesis, where it states "Man's heart is evil from his youth."[22] "Great prophets of Israel did not shy from acknowledging ultimate divine responsibility for evil in the world."[23] Berkovits cites from Isaiah, where God reveals Himself with the words, "I am the Lord, and there is none else; I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and *create evil*; I am the Lord that doeth all these things."[24] Berkovits emphasizes that the theological significance of this statement is its rejection of dualistic interpretations of the universe; Manichean dualism believes that the universe is affected by two independent principles which continuously struggle with one another, good and evil. Isaiah illustrates that the belief in one God who is the only creator, excludes such a position, for God creates *both* good and evil. But, how is one to find meaning in a God who also creates evil? Berkovits first proposes and subsequently rejects the medieval position of Maimonides that evil is privation. That is, evil is the absence of good. Clearly, evil as privation does not accurately represent Isaiah for God creates both good and evil definitively. Berkovits further denies the theory of privation any validity as a legitimate position towards the Holocaust: "The evil that created the ghettos and the death camps and ruled them with an iron fist was no mere absence of good. It was real, potent, absolute."[25] How then, does a person understand the God of Isaiah, a personal God, as the same God of Auschwitz, a God of evil?

The next step in Berkovits' approach is to understand that "the problem of faith presented by the holocaust is not unique in the context of the entirety of Jewish experience."[26] "Each generation had its Auschwitz problem."[27] Horror, misery, torture, and death are not new to Jewish experience and neither is the problem of evil. There were two destructions of the Temple in Jerusalem, Crusades in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the Rhinelands, the Black Death massacres in the fourteenth century, the destruction of Spanish Jewry in the fifteenth century, and the Chmelnicki massacres in the seventeenth century. All of these historical events inspired theological questioning. Despite the quantitative enormity of evil in the Holocaust, the victims of all of these tragedies had to grapple with the same problem of evil. From a qualitative and emotional experience, it is impossible, according to Berkovits, to claim that previous Jewish catastrophes were less intense and did not inspire theological crises and questioning.[28]

This, however, does not directly answer the problem of evil; it merely sidesteps it. Let us grant that (a) as much as the Holocaust presents theological problems for belief in an all-powerful God, it is equally problematic for humanity, (b) Judaism recognizes the possibility of radical evil, and (c) the Holocaust is not unique in the sense that there have been other instances of Jewish catastrophe. Factually, the Holocaust happened in the face of a supposed omnipotent and omniscient God. Humanity may be responsible, as Berkovits holds, but God did not prevent humanity from destroying European Jewry in the 1940s.

Berkovits' answer is the concept of *hester panim*, whereby God hides His countenance from those suffering. The *hester panim* which Berkovits refers to should not be confused with the *hester panim* of Deuteronomy.[29] In Deuteronomy, *hester panim* refers to divine judgment and punishment. However, there is a second meaning to *hester panim* found in the Prophets and the Talmud, which, according to Berkovits, is seldom realized. This is the hiding of God's Face "when human suffering results, not from divine judgment, but from evil perpetrated by man."[30] Berkovits argues that God's hiding of His face is a divine attribute, which is an essential feature of His permanent involvement in the world. God's permanent involvement with humanity is realized through His silence. God is present during man's suffering. The prophet Isaiah illustrates this seeming paradox when he says to God, "'Indeed, You are a God Who conceals Himself, the God of Israel the Savior!'"[31] For Isaiah, "God's self-hiding is an attribute of divine nature. Such is God. He is a God, who hides himself. . . In some mysterious way, the God who hides himself is the God who saves."[32] Isaiah is thus able to also proclaim "And I will wait for the Lord that hideth His face from the house of Jacob and I will hope for him."[33]



Why must God silence Himself? How does God save by remaining silent to innocent suffering? Part of *hester panim* is that God must restrain and silence Himself so that humanity has freedom; human freedom only results from divine self-restraint. Thus, God is still present but must hide His face. Consequently, we face a great paradox. If God were to curtail freedom and prevent man from doing evil, then by virtue of preventing evil, He would also prevent man from doing good. As Berkovits writes:

> This is the ultimate tragedy of existence: God's very mercy and forebearance, his very love for man, necessitates the abandonment of some to a fate that they may well experience as divine indifference to justice and human suffering. It is the tragic paradox of faith that God's direct concern for the wrongdoer should be directly responsible for so much pain and sorrow on earth.[34]

Berkovits is doing more than simply describing a free will defense of evil, which is subject to certain problems.[35] Rather, within God's hiding of His face in history, Berkovits establishes humankind's responsibility for history. Berkovits reiterates this when stating, "If man is to be, God himself must respect his freedom of decision. If man is to act on his responsibility without being continually overawed by divine supremacy, God must absent himself from history. But man left to his freedom is capable of greatness in both—in creative goodness and destructive evil."[36] To question the creation of evil is to question the creation of humanity. Berkovits is thus consistent with his earlier theological emphasis on human responsibility in *God, Man and History*. The purpose of creation is for humanity to take responsibility for history. God wants humankind to do good, but only if freely chosen. Humanity can only be responsible for history if it has the ability to make free choices. Removing radical evil from the world would thus make humanity's purpose on this earth meaningless: "God himself could eliminate moral evil and the suffering caused by it only by eliminating man, by recalling the world of man into nothingness."[37]

Despite *hester panim*, Berkovits does not dismiss the Jewish theological tenet that God will not allow the Jewish people to be destroyed. Although this seems like a contradiction, it is actually part of his understanding of *hester panim*. According to Berkovits, the Jewish people are a crucial element in the call for human responsibility; only through the example of a living Jewish people can the ethical and moral standards of the Bible be transmitted to humanity. Berkovits refers to this as "faith history," and it is the task of the Jewish people to cultivate faith history and not "power history."[38] Jewish history testifies to the "supra-natural dimension jutting into history."[39] The mysterious persistence of the Jewish people to survive in power history, despite their powerlessness, testifies to God's presence in the world. The Jewish people remain while many of its persecutors are no more. This, according to Berkovits, is the reason for Jewish perseverance and continuity, despite the horrific suffering throughout Jewish history. Because of this, the Jewish people can withstand God's silence in history while still affirming belief in Him. God is thus both absent and present at once; "He is present without being indubitably manifest; he is absent without being hopelessly inaccessible."[40]

For Berkovits, there is no greater proof for God's continual presence in the world than the establishment of the State of Israel. Though the destruction of the Holocaust was unparalleled, there was a salvation. The emergence of Israel testifies to Hitler's defeat. It was the Jew who prevailed and hunted and tried the Nazi for his crimes against humanity in the Jewish State. Judaism has risen from the ashes of the Holocaust and seen a revival in Jewish learning and economic and political realities that were never possible in Europe. The State of Israel is proof for Berkovits that Jewish history did not end with the Holocaust; "statehood is the repudiation of powerlessness in exile," and refutes those theologians who contend that God is dead.[41] God was silent during the Holocaust, but in the end, he did not betray his chosen people; God reaffirmed His commitment to His people. For Berkovits, the emergence of Jewish sovereignty in the State of Israel in 1948 and its reunification in 1967 is truly an historical miracle. The State of Israel is "a smile on the face of God" after Auschwitz.[42]

In summation, Eliezer Berkovits' *Faith After the Holocaust* explicates six aspects of a post-Holocaust theology that remains faithful to Judaism: (1) Those who did not experience the Holocaust are not in a position to judge the "authentic faith" and "authentic rebellion" of those who experienced the Holocaust. We today are only Job's brother. (2) Humankind is responsible for history and thus the Holocaust represents

a colossal failure of humanity and not God. (3) Judaism through the lens of the prophets and rabbinic literature has always believed in the possibility of radical evil. (4) The Holocaust should not be viewed in singularity. The Holocaust, undoubtedly horrific, is part of a broader Jewish history of suffering. (5) God must hide His face so that human agents can act and choose freely, taking responsibility for history, for both good and bad. (6) The persistent survival of the Jewish people throughout history testifies that God will not destroy the Jewish people and that God is in fact present even when His face is hidden. For Berkovits, this has never been more true than with the establishment of the State of Israel after the Holocaust, which affirms that God did not betray the Jewish people.

As a man of faith, Eliezer Berkovits "questions God because of his faith." [43] While wrestling with the problems of evil, Berkovits provides a modern framework to approach the Holocaust with the metaphor of Job's brother; his work is thus titled *Faith After the Holocaust*, "after" being of great importance. By endorsing the biblical and rabbinic concept of *hester panim*, Berkovits takes a courageous theological position pitting him between liberal theologians and the facile theodicy of *mipenei hataeinu*. Berkovits affirms traditional Jewish faith while respecting the power of history and the horrors of the Holocaust.

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1 Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1973). Berkovits also authored an additional full length book and numerous articles pertaining to the Holocaust. See, for example, Eliezer Berkovits, "Death of God," *Judaism* 20.1 (1971): 73-86; "Crisis and Faith," *Tradition* 14.4 (1974): 5-19; and *With God in Hell: Judaism in the Ghettos and Death Camps* (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1979).

2 Perhaps because of his sensitivity to the subject material, Berkovits does not cite by name those who he attacks. This is, however, quite uncharacteristic for Berkovits because he generally attacks practically every Jewish philosopher that he believes misrepresented an authentic philosophy of Judaism. Berkovits has full length critiques of the philosophies of Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Mordecai Kaplan in his *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1974). For a defense of Heschel against the criticism of Berkovits and a response more generally to Berkovits' treatment of these philosophers, see Shalom Carmy, "Modern Jewish Philosophy: Fossil or Ferment?" *Tradition* 15.3 (1975): 140-152.

3 Emil L. Fackenheim, "Jewish Faith and the Holocaust: A Fragment," in *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination*, ed. by Michael L. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 115. Fackenheim's earlier work criticized liberalism and counseled a return to a traditional view of God. Like Berkovits, Fackenheim suggested that liberal Jewish theology was far too optimistic about humanity, and faith in God must be reasserted. However, in his later works, Fackenheim rejected supernatural theism on account of the Holocaust and supported a survivalist position of ethnocentricism, in which he abandoned his earlier and more traditional approach. This is already evident in his formulation of the 614th commandment in "The 614th Commandment," *Judaism* 16 (1967): 269-273. For elaboration, see Ellen Z. Charry, "Jewish Holocaust Theology: An Assessment," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 18.1 (1981): 128-139.

4 Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust," in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* ed. by Eva Fleischner (New York: Ktav, 1977), 8.

5 Michael L. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 126.

6 Arthur A. Cohen, "Thinking the Tremendum: Some Theological Implications of the Death Camps," in *A Holocaust Reader*, 195.

7 Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966). Rubenstein's *After Auschwitz* is considered the Jewish compatriot to radical Christian theology, which developed Nietzsche's notion of "the death of God." Berkovits refers explicitly to radical Christian theologians Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton and their *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), but does not refer explicitly to Rubenstein.

8 Deuteronomy 4:31; 31:6. This review of post-Holocaust theology is by no means comprehensive, but it suffices in contextualizing the backdrop to which Berkovits was writing. An excellent overview of post-Holocaust theology in the context of Berkovits' position which I have utilized is David Hazony, "Eliezer Berkovits on Evil and the Holocaust," Lecture, University of Chicago and the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, Chicago, Illinois, March 6, 2011. http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/eliezer-berkovits-conference/recordings/

9 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 4-5.

10 Ibid., 69. Berkovits is aware of the classical rabbinic tradition of *mipnei hataeinu* as a framework for confronting the existence of Jewish suffering. However, as a sensitive man who lived in Germany until 1939 and whose family and friends perished in the Holocaust, he refuses to believe that their death, and the death of six million others, was divine retribution for Jewish sinfulness. In this regard, Berkovits agrees with the aforementioned liberal theologians. See Hazony, "Eliezer Berkovits on Evil."

11 Ibid., 4-5.

12 Ibid., 69, my emphasis.

13 On November 11, 1938, as Berkovits was leaving his home to go to *Shaharit* at his synagogue in Berlin, he received a phone call warning him not to approach because the Nazis were desecrating thousands of synagogues in Germany. This was the morning after *Kristallnacht*. Fortunately, soon after, Berkovits was able to escape to Leeds, England, where he served as the rabbi of Leeds during the war period. See Berkovits, "Crisis and Faith," 5; Hazony, "Eliezer Berkovits on Evil."

14 Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, 69.

15 Ibid.

16 Genesis 2:15 (Artscroll translation).

17 Eliezer Berkovits, *God, Man and History: A Jewish Interpretation* (New York: Jonathan David, 1965), 14. See also Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, trans and ed. by Alexander Altmann (Oxford: East and West Library, 1946), 115-121;Judah Halevi, *Kuzari* 2:48.

18 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 7.

19 Ibid., 36; David Hazony, "Berkovits, Eliezer," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd edition (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), Vol. 3, 438-439.

20 Similarly, Maimonides shifts the onus from God onto humanity in *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:12. There, Maimonides describes three types of evil in the world. 1) Natural evil. 2) Social evil. 3) Evil that people cause to themselves. For Maimonides, and unlike Berkovits, this does not necessarily entail a full formulation of the free will defense. However, Maimonides does seem to take such an approach in *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 5:1-4, and *Shemonah Perakim*, chapter 8. But, it must be noted that freedom in *Hilkhot Teshuvah* may only be important for Maimonides as a justification for *sekhar ve-onesh* and not evil.

21 In the first chapters of *Faith After the Holocaust*, Berkovits describes the failure of Western civilization and Christian Europe for standing by while millions of Jews were murdered. He implicates the west, and specifically the Catholic Church, as "active accomplices in the greatest crime in history" (13). I have not included a full exposition of Berkovits' critical portrayal of Christian culpability for the Holocaust in this article because it would take us far afield.

22 Genesis 8:21 (Artscroll translation).

23 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 89.

24 Ibid., and 76-85. Isaiah 45:6-7, my emphasis and Berkovits' translation. Berkovits also cites rabbinic examples of *kiddush Hashem*, such as R. Akiva who died a martyr's death reciting the *shema* as the Romans scraped his flesh off with an iron comb. R. Akiva, among other Tannaim, understood the possibility of radical evil and fell victim of such evil. See *Berakhot* 61b; *Sanhedrin* 13b-14a.

25 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 89. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:10.

26 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 90.

27 Ibid., 98.

28 Ibid., 90.

29 For example, Deuteronomy 31:17-18.

30 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 95. Berkovits cites extensively from the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Job, and Psalms, and tractates *Hagigah* and *Gittin* to illustrate this second meaning of *hester panim*.

31 Ibid., 101, Isaiah 45:15 (Artscroll translation).

32 Ibid., 101.

33 Ibid., Isaiah 8:17 (Berkovits' translation).

34 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 106.

35 The free will defense may only satisfactorily address the logical problem of evil and not the evidentiary problem of evil, which is a problem of scale. For example, if there is a choice between having radical evil and not having free will, arguably it would be better to not have free will. Free will may outweigh some amount of evil but not the suffering of six million Jews! This argument was presented to me by Rabbi Shalom Carmy. See also Hazony, "Eliezer Berkovits on Evil."

36 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 107.

37 Ibid., 105-106. According to Hazony, Berkovits' ultimate theological goal is not freedom, but rather, human responsibility. Therefore, Berkovits' concept of *hester panim* is not synonymous with the classical free will defense. See Hazony, "Eliezer Berkovits on Evil."

38 According to Berkovits, "power history" represents the terror and destruction brought about through political conquest and especially European nationalism, culminating in World War II and the extermination of European Jewry. It is the task of the Jewish people, however, to cultivate "faith history," in which they are a called upon to lead by example in taking responsibility for human actions by exemplifying the ethical and moral standards of Judaism. See Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 128-143, 164; Berkovits, *God, Man and History*, 137.

39 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 111.

40 Ibid.

41 Hazony, "Eliezer Berkovits on Evil."

42 Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 156.

43 Ibid., 68.

"*Nose be-Ol Im Havero*:"[1] A Burden Worth Carrying

By: Mordechai Shichtman

I am lonely. Let me emphasize, however, that by stating "I am lonely" I do not intend to convey to you the impression that I am alone. I, thank God, do enjoy the love and friendship of many. I meet people, talk, preach, argue, reason; I am surrounded by comrades and acquaintances. And yet, companionship and friendship do not alleviate the passional experience of loneliness which trails me constantly. I am lonely because at times I feel rejected and thrust away by everybody, not excluding my most intimate friends, and the words of the Psalmist, "My father and mother have forsaken me," ring quite often in my ears…

(Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 3)[2]

All of us, at some point in our lives, have experienced this loneliness the Rav movingly describes. While one may feel such pain at a time of tragedy – God forbid – often enough one simply struggles with some sort of challenge and wants to confide in others. These feelings of isolation may serve as a catalyst for meaningful prayer to God,[3] but, nonetheless, such experiences of solitude are not pleasant. Hazal speak about the character trait of "*nose be-ol im havero*," literally "bearing a burden with one's fellow,"[4] and the *Ba'alei Mussar* understand this to primarily refer to empathy – bearing others' emotional burdens.[5] An operational definition of empathy may be that one both imagines or infers what another is thinking and feeling and responds in the appropriate cognitive, emotional, and volitional (i.e. taking action) manner.[6] The purpose of this article is to discuss this important character trait's parameters and applications and outline a few of its educational, social, and religious ramifications.[7]

While, for the most part, explaining *nose be-ol im havero* as empathy may only be an innovation of the *Ba'alei Mussar*,[8] numerous halakhic and aggadic sources attest to empathy's importance. Thus, for example, the Torah states regarding the mitsvah of *tsedakah*, "Rather, you shall open your hand to him and you shall lend him sufficiently for his needs, which he lacks" (Deuteronomy 15:18).[9] Our Sages infer from the language of "which he lacks" that one must tend to his or her own unique personal needs. Thus, if the poor individual previously was wealthy and accustomed to riding on a horse and having a servant run before him, one must attempt to provide all of this for him.[10] The Torah recognizes that individuals will value completely different things and feel lacking in diverse areas. While the one giving the *tsedakah* may not want or care for a horse or a servant, the Torah bids us to move beyond our own concerns and to enter into the other's shoes to provide him or her with what she or he feels lacking in.[11]

The Torah not only bids us to provide for others' unique and subjective material needs but to empathize with them emotionally as well. Regarding *nihum avelim* (the mitsvah of comforting mourners), Rashi writes that comforters should speak to mourners and provide explanations to comfort them.[12] It follows that one does not fulfill comforting the mourning by simply reciting a formula such as "*ha-Makom…*"[13] but rather must actually console the mourners. Similarly, Ramban explains that one component of visiting the sick is listening to the sick person's pain.[14] Finally, the *Ezer mi-Kodesh*, a commentary on *Shulhan Arukh*, assumes generally that simply attending a wedding does not fulfill the mitsvah of increasing the joy of the bride and groom (with the exception of a distinguished individual, as his or her mere presence enhances the *simhah*.) However, the *Ezer mi-Kodesh* argues that since the mitsvah is to evoke joy and happiness, there are multiple ways to fulfill this commandment, such as dancing, praising the bride or the union, or telling a joke so that the bride or groom will laugh.[15] In summation, while few commentators explain *nose be-ol im havero* as referring to empathy, empathy's significance is well established in halakhic contexts.

The aggadic literature, as well, is replete with examples of the importance of empathy. The first action of Moshe in the Torah was that he "went out to his brothers and looked at their burdens" (Exodus 2:11) and Rashi explains, "[Moshe] directed his eyes and his heart to be distressed over them." (Apparently Moshe did not automatically empathize with the Israelites but needed to actively direct his thoughts toward contemplating their suffering.) Similarly, *Ketuvot* 111a speaks about the importance of simply smiling at other individuals.[16] A third example is found in *Ta'anit* 22a, in which Eliyahu ha-Navi identifies to the *amora* Rav Beroka Hoza'ah two of the only *benei Olam ha-Ba*[17] in a marketplace. When asked what they do, they responded that they are jokesters who cheer others up and end quarrels by calming people with their jokes.

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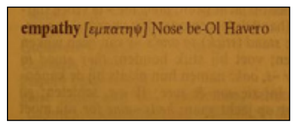
Psychologists have investigated various ways to teach empathy.[18] Dr. Norma Feshbach, for example, demonstrated the effectiveness of a program for imparting empathy. This program included asking children to think deeply about questions



such as "What would the world look like to you if you were as small as a cat?" or "What birthday present would make each member of your family happiest?," reading stories to children and having them retell the stories from the point of view of other characters, and role playing.[19] While such programs would most likely benefit adults as well,[20] Rav Shlomo Wolbe claimed empathy can be developed simply by devoting a few minutes on a regular basis to thinking about what others are feeling and what would make them happy.[21]

Two factors that may inhibit thinking about others are being in a rush and diffusion of responsibility. First, researchers demonstrated that even students studying to be ministers and thinking about the importance of helping passers-by, when rushed, would not actually notice individuals on the sidewalk who clearly needed help.[22] Second, *Social Psychology* summarizes research detailing a phenomenon known as diffusion of responsibility. Defined as "[t]he phenomenon whereby each bystander's sense of responsibility to help decreases as the number of witnesses increases," this explains why it has happened that victims have cried for help in metropolitan areas and have still been ignored. One study demonstrated this phenomenon by having a subject witness an actor experience seizures. If the subject was alone with the victim, he or she helped 85 percent of the time. However, when the subject thought others were present, even if the subject did not know they were helping, he or she was less likely to intervene.[23]

Helping others often involves costs such as possibly embarrassing ourselves if we overreact or do something wrong. It is easy to assume others will take responsibility, but, as research suggests, others are thinking the same thing and, ultimately, victims are ignored. These psychological insights should inform how we interact with others and help us develop ways to become more empathetic.

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We began this article quoting the Rav's soliloquy from the beginning of *The Lonely Man of Faith*. In his essay, "The Community," the Rav masterfully elaborates on the terrible feeling of loneliness and how to dispel it in others (any *mussar* which follows is certainly also directed toward myself):

> Quite often a man finds himself in a crowd among strangers. He feels lonely. No one knows him, no one cares for him, no one is concerned with him. It is again an existential experience. He begins to doubt his ontological worth. This leads to alienation from the crowd surrounding him. Suddenly someone taps him on the shoulder and says: 'Aren't you Mr. So-and-So? I have heard so much about you.' In a fraction of a second his awareness changes. An alien being turns into a fellow member of an existential community (the crowd). What brought about the change? The recognition by somebody, the word!
>
> To recognize a person is not just to identify him physically. It is more than that: it is an act of identifying him existentially, as a person who has a job to do, that only he can do properly. To recognize a person means to affirm that he is irreplaceable."[24]

As the Rav illustrates, one very simple, yet powerful, way to fulfill *nose be-ol im havero* is simply to reach out to others, and this is particularly relevant for students at Yeshiva University. Students come from different communities and different institutions in Israel. While many thankfully enter YU with many friends, unfortunately, YU is replete with students who begin without any close friends. Instead of exclusively sitting with our friends from yeshivah in Israel or from *shi'ur*, we can introduce ourselves to others and reach out to them. We can introduce students from "out of town" and/or who attended a small yeshivah or seminary in Israel to our own friends and bring them into our own circles.

Not limited, of course, to those attending Yeshiva University, the fellowship of the Jewish People extends to those living in the Land of Israel. Much to our sorrow, our brethren in Israel are surrounded by enemies and when these enemies attack, it is incumbent upon us to worry about our

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brethren's welfare. Five months ago, in response to increase rocket fire from Gaza, the Israeli Defense Force began Operation Pillar of Defense, and a full conflict ensued. A *talmid hakham* informed me he was disappointed as a whole at Yeshiva University's response to the clashes. Beyond reciting a few chapters of *Tehillim*, one could not tell from our behavior that entire communities of Jews' lives were at risk. To empathize with those suffering, Noah refrained from marital relations with his wife while on the Ark,[25] and Moses sat on a rock rather than

While, for the most part, explaining* nose be-ol im havero *as empathy may only be an innovation of the* Ba'alei Mussar, *numerous halakhic and aggadic sources attest to empathy's importance.

on a pillow or mattress.[26] While opinions may differ as to how far one must go, we certainly could have done more during the most recent conflict.

A final but more subtle application of *nose be-ol im havero* involves empathizing, so to speak, with God Himself. The Talmud tells us that God secretly cries for the pride of Israel that was taken and given to the other nations and/or for the concealment of God's presence in the world.[27] Though God is King of the Universe, we unfortunately live in a world where His Presence is concealed and His people are threatened, and God, so to speak, is in pain. Empathizing with God has many practical ramifications; the crux of the Ramhal's magnum opus, *Mesillat Yesharim*, is a goal he refers to as *hasidut*, which revolves around empathizing with God. A son who loves his father will infer his father's desires and anticipate his father's requests. Similarly, the *hasid*, intent on bringing God pleasure or *nahat ru'ah,* will say, "I see God values this so I will increase my efforts in this area and apply this principle to other areas where I can infer that God desires it."[28] While applications of empathizing with God abound, a few examples will suffice.

First, the *hasid*, concerned with God's Name, strives to always live a life of *kiddush ha-Shem* and will be truly horrified and aggrieved over *hillul ha-Shem*.[29] Similarly, since the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of the Davidic Dynasty will result in greater glory for God, the *hasid* will anguish over the *hurban* and long and pray for the Messiah.[30] A final example would be how the *hasid* endeavors to bring others closer to God, making God's name loved by all. While the Ramhal refers to this as *hasidut*, or extra-legal piety,[31] the examples above apply to all Jews. For example, all Jews are obligated to love God,[32] and Rambam believes this obligation includes bringing others to love God as well.[33] Similarly, all Jews are obligated to sanctify God's name and to prevent its desecration.[34] Finally, numerous *halakhot* and prayers are based on mourning the *hurban*, and we even recite, twice every week, part of Daniel's prayer imploring God to redeem Israel and rebuild Jerusalem for His name's sake.[35]

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This article raised various applications of the character trait *nose be-ol im havero* and provided a few suggestions for developing greater levels of empathy. Regardless of what happens in our lives, we all long for deep companionship which others can fulfill and which we can fulfill for others. It is my hope that this article stimulates discussions about this extremely important character trait and facilitates the strengthening of relationships between fellow humans and between humans and God.

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1 *Avot* 6:6.

2 Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2006), 3.

3 While this may be subjective, I believe many can testify that their personal experiences demonstrate this statement's veracity. Classic sources may also support this idea. First, Psalms is replete with examples where the Psalmist calls to God out of distress. For example, in Psalm 130:1 (translation mine), "…From the depths, I called to You God." This may also be implicit in the verse cited by the Rav above, "For my father and my mother have abandoned me, but God will gather me in" (Psalm 27:10, translation mine). Ramban, in his comments to *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, *Aseh* 5, argues that prayer may be only a Biblical obligation "be-et tsarah – at a time of crisis." This may indicate that times of pain are especially suitable for prayer and pouring out one's heart to God. The Rav also writes, "I also feel invigorated because this very experience of loneliness presses everything in me into the service of God" (*The Lonely Man of Faith*, 4).

4 See note i.

5 See, for example, R. Simhah Zissel of Kelm, *Hakhmah u-Mussar*, sections 1-6.

6 I believe this definition of empathy is not overly cumbersome and accurately encompasses the full range of dispositions and activities enumerated by the sources cited in this article.

7 Authorities debate if one should perform *mitsvot bein adam le-havero* primarily out of feelings of altruism for the other or out of a duty to God. See Rabbi Yitzchak Blau's *The Implication of a Jewish Virtue Ethic* (available at: www.yutorah.org) and *Divine Footsteps: Chesed and the Jewish Soul*, by Rabbi Daniel Feldman, pages 1-23. While my *rebbeim* have taught me the former, I believe this article is also relevant to the second approach.

8 Many major commentaries on the Mishnah do not comment on the last chapter of *Pirkei Avot* at all as it really is chapter 5 of *Massekhet Kallah*, a minor tractate. Briefly glancing at the major commentators who do comment, I found that only the *Me'iri* and the *Tiferet Yisra'el* explain the Baraita as including emotional burdens. (R. Moshe Hayyim Luzato, in his classic *mussar* work, *Mesilat Yesharim*, chapter 19, ironically understands *nose be-ol im havero* as referring to offering physical assistance. See page 303 of the Ofeq Institute *Mesillat Yesharim* (Euclid, OH: 1996). However, Ramhal also underscores empathy's importance. See page 304 there.)

9 All translations, unless explicitly quoted from another source, are my own.

10 *Ketuvot* 67b, see also *Ketuvot* 66b which commands us to try to help others get married. R. Shlomo Wolbe, in his *Alei Shur*, volume 2 (Jerusalem: *Beit ha-Musar al shem R. H. M. Lehman*, 1998/9), 198 notes that, presumably, spouses must be suited for each other.

11 See also the habit called "Seek First to Understand, then to Be Understood" in Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Toronto: Free Press, 2004), 236-260.

12 Sanhedrin 113a, Rashi s.v. *bei tamia*; this is not necessarily advised today.

13 Ashkenazic practice is to comfort mourners during the "*shiv'ah*" by reciting the following formula: "May the Omnipresent comfort you (plural) along with the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." The origins of this exact phrase are disputed; a similar phrase is found as a wish to the ill in *Shabbat* 12b, but this exact phrase's earliest appearance in this context is likely in a comment of the *Perishah* commentary (by the sixteenth-seventeenth century Polish rabbi, Yehoshua Katz) to *Tur*, *Orah Hayyim* 393:3. My thanks to Chesky Kopel for this reference.

14 *Torat ha-Adam*, p.17 of vol. 2 in Charles B. Chavel's translation: *Writings of the Ramban/Nachmanides: Translated and Annotated* (New York: Judaica Press, 2010).

15 *Even ha-Ezer* 65:1.

16 See also, "Australian 'Angel' Saves Lives at Suicide Spot," *CBS News*, 14 June, 2010, available at: www.cbsnews.com, which describes how an Australian man and his wife would regularly save individuals from committing suicide by smiling and offering to talk.

17 The simple meaning of this phrase is that they merit reward in the World to Come. I believe, however, that the phrase may however connote an extra level of reward.

18 See Karen E Gerdes, Elizabeth A. Segal, Kelly F. Jackson, and Jennifer L. Mullins, "Teaching Empathy: A Framework Rooted in Social Cognitive Neuroscience and Social Justice," *Journal of Social Work Education* 47,1 (Winter 2011): 109-131.. The relationship between empathy and the larger subject of self-projection is beyond the scope of this article.

19 N. D. Feshbach, "Empathy Training and Prosocial Behavior," in *Aggression and War: Their Biological and Social Bases*, ed. by Jo Groebel and Robert A. Hinde, 101-111.

20 Feshbach, ibid. documents the effectiveness of similar programs in criminals. I do not mean to imply that anyone is a criminal but rather that such techniques are effective.

21 See R. Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, volume 1 (Jerusalem: *Beit ha-Musar al shem R. H. M. Lehman*, 1985/6), 93; and vol. 2, 198-200. This citation from volume 2 is from the *Va'adim*. R. Wolbe writes in volume 2, page 12, that he only wrote the *Va'adim* which succeeded in improving his students' character traits. Thus, his advice was confirmed.

22 John M. Darley and C. Daniel Batson, "'From Jerusalem to Jericho': A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27:1 (1973): 100-108. Unbeknownst to the theology students who were the subjects in the experiment, the homeless individuals were confederates or actors.

23 Elliot Aronson, Timothy D. Wilson, and Robin M. Akert, *Social Psychology* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2010), 373.

24 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Community," *Tradition* 17,2 (Spring 1978): 6, available at: www.traditiononline.org.

25 Rashi to Genesis 7:7, s.v. *Noah u-banav*.

26 *Ta'anit* 11a and Rashi to Exodus 17:12 s.v. *Even*. See also *Shulhan Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 474 and 240: 12 and Rema ad loc. I do not mean to imply the *halakhot* dicussed in these sections of *Shulhan Arukh* relate directly to the situation under discussion. Rather, I simply want to demonstrate that joining in others' suffering has clear halakhic applications.

27 *Hagigah* 5b.

28 *Mesillat Yesharim*, Ofeq Institute edition, Chapter 18, 301-302.

29 Ibid., Chapter 19, 321..

30 See Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu Rabba, chapter 4, quoted in pages 321-322 of the Ofeq Institute edition of *Mesillat Yesharim*.

31 *Mesillat Yesharim* Ofeq Institute edition, Chapter 13, 283.

32 Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:1; *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*, mitsvah 418.

33 Rambam, *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, *Aseh* 3.

34 Rambam, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 5,1; *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*, mitsvot 295-296.

35 Daniel 9:15-19, which we recite before *tahanun* on Mondays and Thursdays.

Creative Arts

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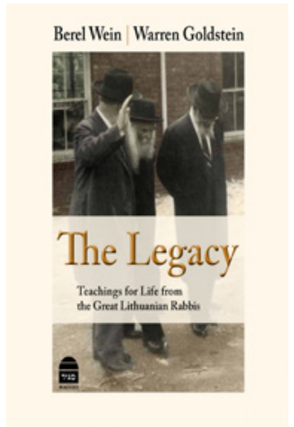
On Torah Values and the Courage to Rebuild: A Review of *The Legacy*

By: Kimberly Hay

Reviewed Book: R. Berel Wein and R. Warren Goldstein, *The Legacy: Teachings for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis* (New Milford, CT and Jerusalem, Israel: Maggid Books, 2012).

"Lithuanian Jewry is no more," writes R. Berel Wein at the conclusion of his latest publication, coauthored with R. Warren Goldstein, *The Legacy: Teachings for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis*, "but even in its death, just as it was in its life – its influence, disproportionate to its numbers and social power, remains a beacon of Torah light and instruction for all who seek it."[1] The authors, both students of *rebbeim* from the Lithuanian tradition, shed light on the values that the Torah leaders of Lithuania lived by, with the goal of inspiring readers of *The Legacy* to implement those teachings in their own lives. While the book is primarily focused on transmitting the *mussar* lessons that the great Lithuanian rabbis lived by, it also provides a glimpse into the world of Lithuanian Jewry, which despite its near total destruction during World War II, has and continues to deeply influence the lives of Jews throughout the world.[2]



Although *The Legacy* is more concerned with relaying the values of the Lithuanian rabbis than telling the history of Lithuanian Jewry, the book does contain two chapters with a heavy historical focus. The two chapters, both written by R. Wein, go through the fascinating history of the *Mussar* Movement and the Yeshiva Movement, which could be of interest to a reader looking to learn more about the historical context of pre-war Lithuania. The remaining chapters are essays, authored either by R. Wein or by R. Goldstein, which discuss specific values emphasized by the Lithuanian rabbis. While the order in which the chapters are organized seems somewhat haphazard, a reader interested in focusing on spiritual growth will gain from *The Legacy* a deeper understanding of the values by which Lithuania's Torah giants shaped their lives, and which are also highly relevant to any Jew living in the twenty-first century.

In the introduction to the novel, Rabbis Wein and Goldstein state their goal for *The Legacy* in unambiguous terms. Like the Ramban who wrote a now-famous letter to his son delineating the Torah values he felt were crucial for every Jew to live by, the authors of *The Legacy* attempt to "construct a virtual 'letter' to this generation according to the teachings and worldview of the remarkable Torah sages of Lithuanian Jewry, as [they] received these teachings from [their] own *rebbeim* and mentors, *zt"l*."[3] As Avraham Kariv, a Lithuanian born Hebrew author who later immigrated to the Land of Israel, wrote in his memoir, a visitor to Lithuania may have easily visited the country and left without understanding the true nature of a typical Lithuanian Jew. Rather, "in order to recognize and truly appreciate the character of a Lithuanian Jew," he wrote that it was necessary for one to "listen carefully and see deeply."[4] Rabbis Wein and Goldstein attempt throughout the course of their publication to elucidate for the Jews of this generation, who can no longer visit the Lithuanian Jewish community for themselves, the values that the leaders of that community emphasized throughout their lifetimes, and the impact those values had on Lithuanian Jewry and European Jewry more broadly.

The authors explore, in depth, a number of the values that were impressed upon them by their *rebbeim*, discussing those character traits using a variety of sources, including classical sources such as Tanakh, Talmud, and the works of Rambam, as well as personal anecdotes from their *rebbeim*. Some of the values that the authors discuss include being a *mensch*, avoiding *mahloket*, engaging in Torah learning, and involving oneself in the building of the Jewish community.

One chapter that I found particularly interesting, entitled "Eirlichkeit: Honesty, Integrity, and Humility," contrasts the values of *eirlichkeit* and *frumkeit*, the latter of which Goldstein defines simply as being "religious."[5] Goldstein quotes an old Lithuanian saying- "A Jew is not *frum* – a Jew is *eirlich*" – and offers the following in explanation: "the very essence of a Jew is not his level of religiosity, but his level of *eirlichkeit*, connoting honesty, integrity, and uprightness."[6]

R. Goldstein cites the Gemara in *Hullin* and R. Avraham Yitzchok Bloch's understanding of that Gemara in support of the adage. The Gemara tells the story of Mar Ukva, who described himself as "vinegar, the son of wine," because while Mar Ukva's father would wait a full twenty-four hours between eating meat and dairy, Mar Ukva himself would wait only until his next meal before eating dairy.[7] R. Bloch asks regarding this Gemara: Why did Mar Ukva not simply wait twenty-four hours like his father, if he thought so highly of his father's actions? R. Bloch answers that Mar Ukva must have felt that for him to wait the extended period of time in imitation of his father would have been a corruption of his integrity, because he felt he was on a lower spiritual level than his father, and he, therefore, should not accept upon himself extra stringencies as if they were on the same level.[8] Goldstein describes someone whose religious conduct is inconsistent with his general behavior as "not being honest with himself,"[9] and continues on in the chapter to cite examples of other Lithuanian rabbis discouraging similar behavior. The tension that exists between appearing superficially more religious than one might feel she truly is, and taking on *humrot* (stringencies) with the hope that they will stimulate spiritual growth, is a tension that exists today as much as, if not more so than, it did in Lithuania a century ago.

Rabbis Wein and Goldstein attempt throughout the course of their publication to elucidate for the Jews of this generation, who can no longer visit the Lithuanian Jewish community for themselves, the values that the leaders of that community emphasized throughout their lifetimes, and the impact those values had on Lithuanian Jewry and European Jewry more broadly.

One theme that reappears throughout the book is the resilience with which Lithuanian Jews and their leaders faced times of sorrow and tragedy. Despite the difficulties involved in living in Lithuania in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with its "chronically weak economy,"[10] harsh weather, and deeply rooted antisemitism, the Lithuanian rabbis always stressed in their communities the importance of avoiding becoming depressed. Rather, the rabbis underscored the necessity of "remain[ing] creative, cheerful, firmly idealistic, and optimistic," especially because these traits are a result of *deveikut* – the clinging to God and imitation of His ways.[11]

The leaders of Lithuanian Jewry not only preached the importance of remain-

ing optimistic, but also practiced it in their personal lives. Rabbis Wein and Goldstein bring numerous examples of the strength of character displayed by their *rebbeim* at times of both personal and national tragedy. R. Goldstein writes that in times of hardship, Lithuanian rabbis would often quote the verse from *Tehillim*: "Were it not for your Torah, which is my delight, I would have been lost in my affliction."[12] According to reports, after the death of his daughter, this *pasuk* became a "life-song" for R. Eliezer Shach, "accompanying [him] through privation and hunger, through exile and anonymity, and ultimately to the Holy Land."[13]

Yeshiva University would certainly be included in the list of yeshivot that have been heavily influenced by Lithuanian Jewry, especially considering that the Rav, whose philosophy is embedded within our institution, was the descendant of a long line of Lithuanian rebbeim.

Another example can be found in the almost inhuman strength displayed by R. Elyah Meir Bloch and R. Moredchai Katz in July of 1941, when, after having been sent to America to secure visas for the Jewish community of Telz, they learned of the total destruction of their community by the Germans. In an instant, they discovered that nearly everyone they had known had been murdered by the Nazis, including all of R. Elyah's siblings, his wife, and with the exception of one daughter, all of his children, as well as R. Katz's wife and ten children. In spite of the tremendous pain and psychological torment they must have experienced, the two rabbis did not submit to despair, and, instead, focused all of their efforts on the construction of a new Telz yeshivah in Cleveland, which opened its doors in 1942, while the Holocaust was still in its full ugly force. R. Goldstein writes that Rabbis Bloch and Katz were filled with a sense of divine mission to rebuild *kelal Yisrael*, and this enabled them to prevent submitting to a depression that would have been so easy to succumb to.[14]

While the Lithuanian Torah giants are no longer with us, they have left a lasting imprint on the Jewish world as we know it. After the war ended, R. Shlomo Kahaneman, the Ponivezher Rav, "declared that he intended to rebuild Torah in the land of Israel by reestablishing the eighteen leading yeshivas of pre-war Lithuania."[15] R. Wein writes that while he has not counted, he would venture to say that there are certainly more than just eighteen *yeshivot* in Israel today that have been influenced by the teachings of Lithuanian *rebbeim*.[16] Yeshiva University would certainly be included in the list of *yeshivot* that have been heavily influenced by Lithuanian Jewry, especially considering that the Rav, whose philosophy is embedded within our institution, was the descendant of a long line of Lithuanian *rebbeim*. For someone looking to obtain a better appreciation for some of the values that were influential in the shaping of many of the Orthodox institutions we recognize today, or would like to work on instilling those values into their own personality, *The Legacy* is certainly a worthwhile read.

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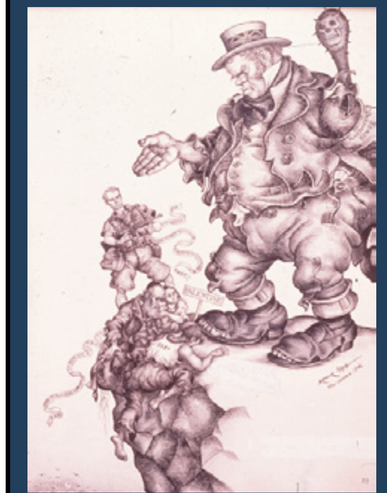
1 R. Berel Wein and R. Warren Goldstein, *The Legacy: Teachings for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis* (New Milford, CT and Jerusalem, Israel: Maggid Books, 2012), 194.
2 Ibid, 193. According to the authors, in 1939 there were slightly fewer than 300,000 Jews living in Lithuania, of whom only 2-3% survived after the onslaught of the Holocaust.
3 Ibid, xiii.
4 Ibid, 61. Avraham Kariv, *Lita Makurasi* (Tel Aviv, 1958), 48.
5 R. Berel Wein and R. Warren Goldstein, *The Legacy: Teachings for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis* (New Milford, CT and Jerusalem, Israel: Maggid Books, 2012), 63.
6 Ibid.
7 *Hullin*, 105a.
8 *Shiurei Da'as*, 174-175.
9 R. Berel Wein and R. Warren Goldstein, *The Legacy: Teachings for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis* (New Milford, CT and Jerusalem, Israel: Maggid Books, 2012), 72.
10 Ibid, 60.
11 Ibid.
12 Psalms 119:92.
13 Ibid, 97.
14 Ibid, 178-179.
15 Ibid, 193.
16 Ibid.

Unknown Victim, Samson Schames (1898-1967), London, ca. 1941, mosaic, Collection of Yeshiva University Museum, Gift of Edith Schames.

In 1939, Schames fled to London from German; there, he was interned along with other German refugees. Schames drew on his fellow refugees for subject matter and pursued his art even while interned, selling pieces to fellow refugees and to Birtish officers. In 1930, the Brook Street Gallery held an exhibition of his paintings, drawings and monotypes; Schames later exhibited at the Academy. During his time in London, he created a group of powerful anti-Nazi mosaics, using found materials which resulted from bombing raids; Unknown Victim is one of this group of mosaics. Schames' use of found materials to create art is common to a number of twentieth century art movements.

Identity card of Edith Schramm, Beuthen, Germany, 1939, Collection of Yeshiva University Museum, Gift of Anne L. Meyer. Nazis stamped the identity cards of Jews with the letter "J", and added the name "Sara" to all Jewish women's names.



Political cartoon depicting British Mandatory Power denying entrance to Palestine to a group of displaced persons, Arthur Szyk (1894-1951), Connecticut, 1946, Collection of Yeshiva University Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ludwig Jesselson

Buchenwald garment appliqué saved by Rudolf Jakobson when the camp was liberated, Collection of Yeshiva University Museum, Gift of Norbert Moelke

Cigarette card issued by Austria Tabakwerke A.G. from a group showing Hitler's triumphal progress across Austria after the Anschluss (union of Austria with Germany) in 1938, Collection of Yeshiva University Museum, Gift of Alice and John Morawetz

Manufacturers have placed a variety of series of collectible items in cigarette packages to encourage smokers to collect the entire series, and to purchase more cigarettes. There were over 200 cards in this particular series.

Babylonian Talmud Nedarim, published by Vaad Hatzala, Munich, 1946, Collection of Yeshiva University Museum

The title page shows an idealized Israeli landscape above a work camp. This was the first post-Holocaust printing of the Talmud. [See YUM catalogue Printing the Talmud p. 294 for more information]

The Children's Passover Haggadah New York, ca. 1945 Translator: Ben-Ami Scharfstein Illustrator: Siegmund Forst (b. 1904) Music arranged by G. Ephros Publisher: Shilo Publishing House. Collection of Yeshiva University Museum The Jean Sorkin Moldovan Collection Gift of the Jesselson Family

Siegmund Forst's illustration to acommpany the text "This Year Slaves" includes not only Egyptian taskmasters, but a history of anti-semitic persecution, including Romans and Cossacks, and ending with Nazi soldiers. These two pages face each other in the book. This 1945 haggadah is thus one of the first attempts to present the Holocaust in a children's book.

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