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# KOL HAMEVASER

THE JEWISH THOUGHT MAGAZINE OF THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY

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## MASHIAH

## Editors' Thoughts

*What Do We Mean When We Say "Next Year in Jerusalem?"*

BY: KIMBERLY HAY

The first figure in Jewish history to lead the Jewish people from exile to redemption is Moshe. When God tasks him with taking the Jews out of Egypt, he initially tries to shirk his mission by claiming that the Jewish people would not believe him.<sup>1</sup> When Moshe finally appears before *Bnei Yisrael* and informs them that he has been sent by God to redeem them, however, their immediate reaction is completely contrary to how Moshe expected them to respond: "And the nation believed, and when they heard that God had remembered the Sons of Israel and seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshipped."<sup>2</sup> Upon hearing the news that God had come to save them from their suffering through Moshe as His emissary, the people not only believed Moshe but were also grateful to God, bowing down in prayer.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly 2,000 years after the

destruction of the second Temple, though the Jewish people are now once again sovereign in the Land of Israel, we still await the coming of *Mashiah* and the final redemption.

The belief that God will once again redeem His people is central to Jewish thought. Rambam records the belief in the coming of the Messiah as one of Judaism's thirteen principles of faith,<sup>4</sup> and the words "*Ani ma'amin b'emunah sheleimah be-viat ha-Mashiah*" are recited daily by many Jews and have permeated Jewish song and culture.

Though believing in the arrival of the Messiah is central to Jewish thought, I wonder how we would react today upon hearing the news that *Mashiah* had come. Would we be as receptive to the news as were our forefathers in Egypt? Especially for American Jews, where we benefit from the freedom to practice our faith freely and many enjoy economic prosperity, how willing would we be as a community to drop everything and join the majority of world Jewry in Israel for a new messianic era?

And while we are expected to eagerly await the coming of *Mashiah*,

little is actually understood about how life in the messianic era will look. After two millennia of having prayer serve as our primary mode of *Avodat Hashem*, will we suddenly reinstate the practice of sacrificing animals? Or will we perhaps offer only sacrifices consisting of vegetation, as R. Kook believed?<sup>5</sup> Especially pertinent to us is the question of what will become of Diaspora Jewry when *Mashiah* arrives. There is an opinion in the Midrash which states that during the exodus from Egypt, only one fifth of Jews left Egypt to follow God and Moshe to the Land of Israel.<sup>6</sup> With the results of the Pew Survey showing an increasing percentage of American Jews choosing not to raise their children as Jewish and rising rates of assimilation,<sup>7</sup> when the call of the *shofar* blasts announcing the arrival of *Mashiah*, how many American Jews will be affiliated enough with Judaism to care?

Questions concerning the messianic era abound. While it may be impossible for us to resolve many of these questions today, we hope this issue of Kol Hamevaser will spark a conversation about what *Mashiah*

means to us and how it impacts our understanding of Judaism. With the holiday of Passover fast approaching, let us take a moment to consider what the words "*L-shana ha-ba'ah b-Yerushalayim*," or "Next Year in Jerusalem," recited at the conclusion of the *seder*, really mean to us.

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(Endnotes)

1 *Shemot* 4:1.

2 *Shemot* 4:31. Translation by Mechon Mamre, available at www.mechon-mamre.org.

3 See *Lekakh Tov ad loc.*

4 Rambam, *Perush ha-Mishnayyot, Sanhedrin* 10:1.

5 *Olat Rayah*, Vol. 1, p. 292.

6 *Mekhilta de-Rebbe Yishmael, Be-shalah. Mesekhta de-vayehi, Petikhta.*

7 "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," Pew Internet and American Life Project, available at: www.pewinternet.org.

## Oblique References to the Philistines in the Story of the Ark's Relocation to Jerusalem

BY: ALEX MAGED

In the second book of Samuel, King David capitalizes on a period of (temporary) calm by arranging for the relocation of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. There are many independent elements to this narrative, many of them puzzling, and each deserving attention in its own right. Let us begin the project of unpacking this text together by focusing on one of its features which has traditionally received little to no attention: its multiple references to the Philistines, of all people. If we pay careful attention to these allusions, we may gain a better understanding of what the Ark's relocation to Jerusalem represented, theologically speaking,

for King David. By extension, our study may also help us appreciate why it was Solomon, and not David, whom God chose to build the Temple in which that Ark would reside.

**Background: The Role of the Philistines in King David's Personal Biography**

We begin with a brief and partial review of David's interaction with the Philistine people. For our purposes, three instructive examples of this interaction will suffice.

During the reign of Saul, Israel finds itself at war with the Philistines. At that time, a mighty warrior, Goliath, challenges the Israelites to produce a soldier for a one-on-one duel. Goliath's challenge remains unanswered for forty days. Finally, David – a young

shepherd who is visiting his enlisted brothers – surprises everybody by accepting the Philistine's offer. David battles Goliath and vanquishes him, saving the Israelites and catapulting himself into an illustrious career of military accomplishment.<sup>1</sup>

Around this time, Saul's daughter, Michal, falls in love with David. Saul, wary of the boy's rising political influence, offers his daughter to David in return for "one hundred Philistine foreskins." Lest anybody misconstrue the king's motive, the text informs us explicitly that Saul hopes to send David to his death through this arrangement. Nevertheless, David delivers, earning Michal's hand in marriage and further establishing his royal credentials.<sup>2</sup>

Not only Saul's daughter, but also

his son, Jonathan, grows attached to the up-and-coming David. In fact, the relationship between Jonathan and David – which often requires the former to risk his life and set aside any personal ambition on behalf of the latter – has often been regarded as antiquity's paragon of friendship. This friendship comes to an abrupt halt, however, when the Philistines take Jonathan's life on the summit of Mount Gilboa. In that same battle, the Philistines also manage to kill Saul, leaving David bereaved over his best friend and thrusting him into the monarchy sooner than he might have hoped.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the course of our study we will encounter other examples of David's protracted interaction with

the Philistines. Suffice it to say, for now, that the members of this nation played an instrumental role in shaping the contours of David's personal life and in guiding the trajectory of his professional one.

**Setting: The Role of the Philistines in the Context of our Chapter**

In contradistinction to the three incidents mentioned above, there are several skirmishes with the Philistines in which David finds himself entangled throughout his time as king. The final verses of II Samuel 5, for instance, record David's battle with the Philistines at *Baal Peratsim*.<sup>4</sup> At this battle, we later learn,<sup>5</sup> David also commands his troops to "burn in fire" the gods of the Philistines – a point which will become significant for us later. Likewise, the opening verse of II Samuel 8 recount David's battle with the Philistines at *Meteg Ammah*.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is in the middle of these two relatively obscure battles where we find the story of the Ark's return to Jerusalem (II Samuel 6) and of David's attempt to build the Temple (II Samuel 7). In other words, the ongoing conflict with the Philistines forms a "literary envelope" around our narrative, inviting us to consider the broader influence which this enemy nation might exert within the text.

Bearing this framework in mind, let us now consult our text itself. We will look at three specific references to the Philistine people within the details of the Ark's relocation to Jerusalem. In this way we will show that for King David, the Ark's relocation to Jerusalem not only represents God's move *into* "the place which He will choose,"<sup>7</sup> as it were, but also God's move *away* from the surrounding nations, as embodied by the Philistines. Within the drama of Israelite-Philistine relations which has

so consumed David's life, the Ark's relocation is intended by him to serve as something of a turning point, after which his people should never again forfeit the upper hand. Even more broadly, this transition is supposed to communicate that the Israelite way of life is the only one countenanced from on high.

As we shall see, this plan does not pan out.

**Reference #1: "And the Ark of the Lord dwelled in the home of Oved-edom the Gittite..."<sup>8</sup>**

When David first decides to relocate the Ark to Jerusalem, everything moves along smoothly. Soon, however, disaster strikes

And they came to Goren-nachon, and Uzzah put forth [his hand] to the Ark of God, and grasped hold of it, for the oxen swayed it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him down there for his error; and there he died by the Ark of God. And David was angered, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah; and he called that place Peretz-uzzah, unto this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day; and he said: 'How can the Ark of the Lord come to me?' And David did not want to remove unto him the Ark of the Lord, into the city of David; and David took it aside to the house of Oved-edom the Gittite.<sup>9</sup>

After Uzzah's death, David halts the procession, sending the Ark of God to the house of Oved Edom, a native of Gath. To appreciate the immense irony of David's decision, we need to recall the history of the Ark's travels. During the days of Eli, the Ark is captured in battle by none other than the Philistines. The

Philistines bring the Ark back to their city, and suffer greatly as a result:

And the Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon, and set it up beside Dagon... And the hand of the Lord became heavy upon the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them, and He smote them with hemorrhoids, Ashdod and its borders. And the people of Ashdod saw that it was so, and they said, "Let not the Ark of the God of Israel dwell with us, for His hand is severe upon us and upon Dagon, our god. And they sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and they said, "What shall we do to the Ark of the God of Israel?" And they said, "Let the Ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath," and (thereupon), they brought the Ark of the God of Israel around to Gath.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the history of the Ark's travels in Philistia, along with the memory of the havoc it had wreaked over there, contributes to David's distress in our passage. The Israelites welcome the Ark to their capital under the premise that they, unlike the Philistines, can play host to God without incurring any casualties. Yet in the first opportunity to assert this distinction, the very same fate which met the Philistines meets the Israelites. David, distraught, equates himself with the Ashdodites, appropriating their anguished refrain with just a hint of acrimony; where the Philistines had declared, "Let not the Ark of the God of Israel dwell with us," David demands, rhetorically: "How can the Ark of the Lord come to me?" Then, as if to mimic the Ashdodites, David delegates the Ark to a Gittite – that is, to a native of Gath, the same city to which the Ashdodites had once banished the Ark. David will not (indeed, *cannot*) establish a terrestrial home for God so long as God does not favor the Israelites in the way the

king expects.

After the death of Uzzah, then, David symbolically exiles God's Ark to Gath. This is ironic, of course, because David had previously been exiled to Gath himself. In both I Samuel 21 and in I Samuel 27, David, fleeing from Saul, seeks refuge with Ahish, the king of Gath. Referring to these experiences, David tells Saul:

And now, let now my lord the king hear his servant's words. If the Lord has incited you against me, He will accept an offering; but if the sons of men, cursed be they before the Lord, for they have driven me today from cleaving to the Lord's heritage, saying, 'Go, worship other gods.'<sup>11</sup>

In Gath, David feels cast off from "the Lord's heritage." For many months he dreams of returning to Judea where, he imagines, he will finally have the opportunity to worship his God in peace. Shockingly, David's first attempt to nationalize this experience ends in tragedy. The death of Uzzah leaves the king no choice but to postpone the ceremony. When David exiles the Ark to a Gittite, it is as though he is saying, subconsciously: "If this is what it is like to serve God in Judea, then I might as well have remained in Gath and served Him there."

**Reference #2: "And David danced with all his might before the Lord..."<sup>12</sup>**

Of course, our story does not end on this note of disappointment. God blesses Oved-edom while the Ark remains with him, indicating that the punishment of Uzzah applies to Uzzah alone; Israel, on the whole, retains favor in the eyes of its God.<sup>13</sup> As a result, David decides to resume the ceremony of the Ark's relocation three months later.

Presumably, the musical procession which had accompanied the previous celebration<sup>14</sup> reappears this time around, too. In addition, the text records other festivities which mark the second attempt to relocate the Ark:

And it was when the bearers of the ark of God had trodden six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. And David danced with all his might before the Lord; and David was girded with a linen ephod. And David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of [the] shofar.<sup>15</sup>

David adds to a climate of general festivity by dancing ostentatiously. This is most interesting because there is only one other point in Biblical history at which the dancing of an Israelite political leader serves as the main attraction. This occurs in a Philistine temple, of all places, soon after Samson has been captured by Delilah's henchmen:

And the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice. And they said, "Our god has delivered our enemy Samson into our hands." And the people saw him and praised their god, because they said, "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy and the destroyer of our land, and who has slain many of us." And it was when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, and he will make sport for us." And they called for Samson out of the prison-house, and he made sport before them, and they stood him between the pillars... Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And upon the roof (there were) about three thousand men and women, the spectators of Samson's sport.<sup>16</sup>

In the era of the Judges the Philistines publicly humiliate Samson, the captured leader of the Israelites. During the ceremony,

which immediately conjures images of the one in our chapter – there, too, the people made merry and there, too, they offered communal sacrifices – the Philistines force Samson to pay tribute to their deity, Dagon.

Perhaps David views the Ark's return to Jerusalem as an opportunity to rectify the wrong of an earlier generation. David conducts himself quite uncharacteristically in this passage, drawing all the attention to himself and creating a public spectacle with his vigorous dancing. Not by accident, we will suggest, is the verb which he uses to describe his behavior, *sahak* a fairly rare term for "dancing" – the exact same verb used to describe Samson's merry-making centuries prior.

**Reference #3: "Michal the daughter of Saul peered through the window..."<sup>17</sup>**

If we are correct, then David (or the narrator of II Samuel) regards his dancing a sort of rectification for the humiliation of Samson and the desecration of the Hebrew God at the hands of the Philistines. Yet David's

*Perhaps because he is never persecuted by his enemies in the same way as his father David – or perhaps simply because he has been blessed with extraordinary wisdom – Solomon appreciates a truth which David, it seems, never fully internalizes: God's covenant with a particular people does not preclude His relationship with all peoples.*

wife, Michal, certainly does not share this perspective:

And [as] the ark of the Lord came [into] the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul peered through the window,

and she saw the king David hopping and dancing before the Lord; and she loathed him in her heart.... And David

returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and she said, "How honored was today the

king of Israel, who exposed himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as would expose himself one of the idlers." And David said unto Michal; "Before the Lord, who chose me above your father, and above all his house, to appoint me prince over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore I have made merry before the Lord. And if I be demeaned more than this, and be abashed in mine own eyes, [yet] of the maidservants of which you have spoken, with them will I get me honor." And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child until the day of her death.<sup>18</sup>

As Michal sees it, David has debased himself with his dancing. While Michal's criticism is fascinating in its own right, it is especially so when one considers it in its broader biblical context. Until this point in scripture, only one other character has "peered through a window *shakaf be'ad ha-halon*". Sure enough, that character was a Philistine:

And it came to pass, when he [i.e. Isaac] had been there [i.e. among the Philistines] for many days, that Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, peered out of the window, and he saw, and behold, Isaac was jesting with Rebecca his

wife. So Abimelech called Isaac, and he said, "Behold, she is your wife; so how could you have said, 'She is my

sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die because of her.'" And Abimelech said, "What have you done to

us? The most prominent of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." And Abimelech commanded all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death."<sup>19</sup>

This passage recounts Isaac's sojourns in the Phillistine city of Gerar. When Abimelech, king of the Philistines, peers through the window, he beholds Isaac jesting (*tzahak*) with Rebecca. Having previously assumed that the two were siblings, Abimelech, observing their conduct, now understands that they are actually husband and wife. As a result, the Philistine king commands his people to respect the sanctity of these Hebrews' marriage. Thus, Abimelech's act of "peering" provides him with moral clarity and prevents a situation of sexual impropriety.

Most ironically, Michal's "peering" leads to precisely the opposite outcome. Perhaps projecting her own frustrated desires,<sup>20</sup> Michal attributes lewd motivations to her husband, accusing him of inviting promiscuity by gamboling as he does before the masses. In this passage, characters' word choice is most instructive. As far as Michal is concerned, David has been "hopping, cavorting" and "exposing" himself. In David's view, however, he has been "making merry" – *sahak* – invoking,



as mentioned earlier, the memory of Samson, who had once “made merry” for the Philistine god against his will. David does not accept the charge that he has debased himself. Quite the contrary: As far as David is concerned, it is Michal who has debased him, by suspecting her husband of such sordid intentions. Yet, as the closing verse of this saga intimates, David never manages to reconcile with her as a result: “and Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child until the day of her death.”<sup>21</sup>



### Conclusion: The Role of this Narrative in Determining Who Would Build the Temple

Everything we have studied until now occurs, as mentioned, in the sixth chapter of II Samuel. In the seventh chapter, meanwhile, David requests permission to build a Temple for God. Famously, this is the reply which he receives:

When your days are finished and you shall lie with your forefathers, then I will raise up your seed that shall proceed from your body after you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.<sup>22</sup>

God rejects David’s request to build the Temple, informing him that

his son will build it instead. According to tradition, Solomon was chosen to build the Temple because, unlike his father, Solomon had not sullied his hands with the blood of his enemies. To that end, David divulges in the Bible’s penultimate book:

But the word of the LORD came to me, saying: Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give

him rest from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days.<sup>23</sup>

David recognizes that he was barred from building the Temple due to the “blood that he had shed.” In line with this theme, but from a slightly different direction, let us consider the words of David’s son, Solomon, upon consecrating the Temple described in the previous verses:

And also to the stranger, who (is) not of Your people Israel, but will come from a far country for the sake of Your Name. For they shall hear of Your great Name, and of Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm, and he will come and pray toward

this house. You shall hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calls You for, that all peoples of the earth may know Your Name, to fear You, as (do) Your people Israel, and that they may know that Your Name is called upon this house that I have built.<sup>24</sup>

At the consecration of the Temple, Solomon, the King of Israel, invites “the stranger, who is not of God’s people” to direct his or her prayers to Jerusalem, and urges God, for His part, to answer those prayers favorably. Perhaps because he is never persecuted by his enemies in the same way as his father David – or perhaps simply because he has been blessed with extraordinary wisdom<sup>25</sup> – Solomon appreciates a truth which David, it seems, never fully internalizes: God’s covenant with a particular people does not preclude His relationship with *all* peoples.

As we have seen, there are several hints in our text which suggest that for David, the relocation of the Ark represents, at least in some subconscious way, God’s choice of the Israelites at the expense of the Philistines. In fact, in the parallel version of our narrative, recorded in the book of Chronicles, David reveals his feelings explicitly, in a song which he sings following the Ark’s relocation:

Give thanks to the Lord, call out in His Name; make His exploits known among the nations... The seed of Israel His servant, the children of Jacob, His chosen ones... The covenant which He had made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac. And He set it up for Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant... And when they walked from nation to nation, and from one kingdom to another people. He let no man oppress them, and He reproved kings [of other nations] on their

[i.e. the Israelites’] account; “Do not touch My anointed ones, and do not harm My prophets... Tell of His glory among the nations, among all peoples His wonders. For the Lord is great and very much praised; He is feared over all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.”<sup>26</sup>

As part of the ceremony of relocating the Ark, David emphasizes the chosenness of Israel, and the subservience of its enemies – which, as we have seen, primarily include the Philistines. As readers, we can certainly sympathize with David for feeling this way, given his long and complicated relationship with foreign nations, and the Philistines in particular. Moreover, as Jews, we must recognize that without men like David, Israel would have forever remained at the mercy of its enemies. It is simply impossible to build a Temple under the constant threat of enemy invasion.<sup>27</sup>

But there is another side to the story. Assuming we have read this text correctly, David’s subtle, subliminal focus on the Philistines – along with the necessary division into “us” and “them” which it implies – does seem slightly out of place, in the context of a celebration chiefly centered on God’s positive relationship with the Israelites.

I think we can say this much without criticizing David unduly or interpreting the episode inaccurately. The goal here is merely to highlight a nuance between David and Solomon that has already been established in our tradition, by pointing out a series of cleverly planted intertextual references which bring it to bear.

Ultimately it is David, not Solomon, who has become eponymous with Jewish monarchy and with the Jewish messiah. On the whole, Jewish tradition probably views the father more favorably than the son. Nevertheless, Solomon’s words, cited above, serve as the eternal standard

for how we are to understand the concept of a “home for God on earth.” Solomon’s name means both “peace” and “wholeness” because, as his legacy reminds us, any philosophy or theology which excludes certain nations or creeds is necessarily lacking. Taking nothing away from the “dignity of difference,”<sup>28</sup> the Temple, as a locus of convergence, not of contention, is supposed to model a human society which places the God of all humanity at its center. This is a universal message, available to all peoples – Philistines included.

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(Endnotes)

- 1 See I Samuel 17
- 2 See I Samuel 18

- 3 See I Samuel 31 and II Samuel 1
- 4 See II Samuel 5:17-25
- 5 See I Chronicles 14:12
- 6 See II Samuel 8:1
- 7 Cf. Deuteronomy 12:5
- 8 II Samuel 6:11
- 9 II Samuel 6:6-10. All translations are from the Judaica Press, available at: [www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org).
- 10 I Samuel 5:2;6-8
- 11 I Samuel 26:19
- 12 II Samuel 6:14
- 13 Many scholars have struggled to understand why Uzzah deserved the punishment which he received. Though this is not the topic of our essay, interested readers are encouraged to download R. Allen Schwartz’s lecture, “Uzzah at the Breach: Understanding Peretz Uzzah,” available at:

[www.yctorah.org](http://www.yctorah.org)

- 14 See II Samuel 6:5
- 15 II Samuel 6:13-15
- 16 Judges 16:23-25;27
- 17 II Samuel 6:16
- 18 II Samuel 6:16; 20–23
- 19 Genesis 26:8–11. Although Judges 5 also speaks of Sisera’s mother “peering out of a window,” it is Deborah (who is conjecturing), and not the text’s narrative voice, which makes this statement.

20 Robert Alter raises this suggestion in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, “Chapter 6: Characterization and the Art of Reticence”

21 See Robert Alter, *ibid.*, for whom this verse indicates that David and Michal remained separate from one another from this point onwards.

- 22 II Samuel 7:12–13
- 23 I Chronicles 22:8-9
- 24 I Kings 8:41–43
- 25 See I Kings 3
- 26 I Chronicles 16:8-26.
- 27 See, for example, Ezra 4.
- 28 See Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London; Continuum, 2002)

## Shattering Rock: Contemporary Approaches to Midrash

BY: DANIEL GOLDBERG

The first midrash in *Bereshit Rabbah* begins somewhat unexpectedly with multiple explanations of a word in Proverbs.

R. Hoshaya began: “I was with Him as an *amon*’ a source of delight every day, rejoicing before Him at all times.”<sup>2</sup> The word *amon* means a “tutor.” *Amon* means “covered.” *Amon* means “hidden.” And some say it means “great.”... Another interpretation: *amon* means an artisan. The Torah declares: I was the instrument that the Holy One, blessed be He, used when He practiced His craft. It is customary that when a king of flesh and blood builds a palace, he doesn’t build it solely from his head, but he uses plans and blueprints in order to know how to lay the rooms and arrange the doors. So, too, the Holy One, blessed by He, looked into the Torah and created the world.

The midrash continues by reinterpreting  
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the first verse of *Bereshit* to reflect and support the explanation of *amon* as blueprint.

And so the Torah said: “By means of<sup>3</sup> the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth,”<sup>4</sup> and the word “beginning” always alludes to the Torah, as Scripture says, “The Lord created me at the beginning of His course.”<sup>5</sup><sup>6</sup>

This midrash calls attention to some important challenges that learning *midrash aggadah* typically presents. The passage offers no less than five possible interpretations of the word “*amon*,” a *hapax legomenon* from the book of Proverbs. Furthermore, only the last of these five explanations, which takes “blueprint” as the interpretation, proves relevant to the verse it is appended to. And even this marginal connection to the base text in Genesis is still something less than an interpretation of it. Indeed, it is just the opposite. The meaning of Genesis 1:1 is assumed and used as a proof text to the verse in Proverbs. Additionally, the assumed meaning of the verse in Genesis is far from its

“plain sense,” which is normally read “In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth.” The midrash, however, assumes that the word “*Bereshit*” is to be read “by means of the beginning.” It then adds that “the word ‘beginning’ always alludes to the Torah.” And therefore, the verse should be read “By means of the Torah, G-d created the heavens and the earth,” demonstrating that G-d used the Torah as a blueprint for the world and supporting the interpretation of *amon* as blueprint.

An engaged reader might wonder how we reconcile the five possible interpretations of “*amon*?” Is one correct? Are they all correct? To what extent is the midrash attempting to interpret Genesis 1:1? And why begin a commentary on the Torah with a difficulty in Proverbs?

These questions comprise the heart of much of contemporary midrashic study. Scholars of various disciplines, particularly literary criticism, have turned to Midrash over the past three decades as a potential locus for a uniquely Jewish hermeneutic. The parameters of such a hermeneutic lie in the answers to these very questions and can be simply

summed up as: how did the Rabbis read?

Polysemy was one of the first qualities of midrash which was alluring to literary academics. The idea that one verse, or even one word, as is the case in Proverbs 8:30, could simultaneously signify three, or five, or ten meanings seemed a natural point of interest to academics in the 1980’s, when the literary moment belonged to Jacques Derrida and deconstructionism.<sup>7</sup> At the center of this controversial movement stood Yale University, which (most notably through Paul de Man) led the deconstructionist charge in America. It was therefore both natural and telling that the first major work to put midrash and literary theory in conversation would be co-edited by Yale professor, Geoffrey Hartman, and published by Yale University Press. It was likewise unsurprising that many of the essays in this work, *Midrash and Literature*, equated midrashic polysemy with literary “indeterminacies,” a term taken from Derridean thought that points to textual ambiguities as the source of textual mobility and instability.

As the title, *Midrash and Literature*, subtly reflects, the book is an early inquiry into the juxtaposition

of these two fields, rather than a univocal or developed approach to their relationship. As such, the essays present a number of different perspectives and interests within midrashic study.

However, the central trend within the essays is a focus on the perceived mutual exegetic principles that underlie both midrashic polysemy and post-structural literary theory.<sup>8</sup> In her contribution, Betty Roitman explains that “the mobility and indeterminacy of midrash... explains its attractiveness to present-day theoreticians who understand midrash in a way that feeds their faith in an infinite unfolding of textual signification.”<sup>9</sup> In short, midrash was seen as provocative fodder for post-structuralists<sup>10</sup> rather than a significant study in its own right.

Susan Handelman in her much scrutinized work, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, continues the literary Midrash project, offering an ambitious rationale for the midrashic tendency towards polysemy as well as its connection to post-structural criticism. She claims that two distinct traditions of reading exist: Patristic (Greco-Christian) and Jewish. The Patristic tradition stems from Plato, Aristotle, and later the apostle Paul who favored objects (or ideas) as possessing ultimate reality rather than language. Therefore, Western culture developed a logocentric tradition which looks for meaning “behind” a text, with words being conventional rather than intrinsically meaningful. Words are a veil, and we must see through them to extract the deeper truth which they shroud. Handelman contrasts this to the Jewish tradition, which understands the words of the Torah to be primordial, to be the

blueprints of the world (as we have seen in the midrash above). If that is the case, then words enjoy a reality, an importance of their own, which surpasses any one signified concept.

Because it is with His words that G-d created the world, language contains a divine quality that lends the text an inexhaustible nature. And this understanding of language allows for the scriptural polysemy in midrash, as the text of the Torah is not limited to a simple signified/signifier (word/object) relationship. In the second part of her work, Handelman further claims that this Jewish hermeneutic resurfaces in the works of famous post-modern thinkers such as Freud, Derrida, Bloom, and Lacan who similarly view texts as mobile or unstable.

Handelman’s equation of the goals of midrash to those of certain literary critics is likewise made implicitly by the editors of *Midrash and Literature* who feature the writing of Derrida and other Post-Structuralists in a section of the book entitled “Contemporary Midrash.”

However, for all of the excitement and momentum that these early texts both reflected and generated, there is a very significant sense in which they were both missing the boat. Neither *The Slayers of Moses* nor *Midrash and Literature* gave serious treatment to actual midrashic texts or their context. These scholars were less interested in understanding midrash as they were in using midrash to better define theory. Hartman’s clarion call in his essay *Midrash as Law and Literature* is fairly representative when it says “Ask not what literature may do for midrash, ask what midrash may do for literature.”<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, in concluding his critical review of *The Slayers of Moses*, David Stern suggests that

perhaps

Before the Rabbis can instruct us, it may be necessary to study them *lishmah*, as they would say, for their own sake. Contrary to the usual rabbinic order of things, their literature may have to be studied *lishmah* before it can be used *shelo lishmah*, for a purpose other than its own, like teaching us how to do literary criticism today.<sup>12</sup>

As the field developed, increased attention was given to the study of midrash *lishmah*, with literary theory applied more judiciously, and in the service of understanding midrash rather than the other way around. In this new and refined stage of scholarship more than a few important voices emerged. However, for the purpose of this paper we will focus on the unique contributions and approaches of two authors: David Stern and Daniel Boyarin, as they represent distinct schools of thought within contemporary midrashic scholarship.

Having discussed the early stage of literary midrashic study, we can understand why it is significant that in the first chapter of his book, *Midrash and Theory*, David Stern sets out to disconnect midrashic polysemy from post-structural “indeterminacies.” Stern cites a passage found in two places in the Talmud, which he believes constitutes the “virtual ideological cornerstone of midrashic exegeses.”<sup>13</sup>

Abaye said: The verse says, “Once G-d has spoken, but twice I have heard” (Psalms 62:12). A single verse has several senses, but no two verses ever hold the same meaning.

It was taught in the School of Rabbi Ishmael: “Behold, my word is like fire—declares the Lord—and like a hammer that shatters rock” (Jeremiah 23:29). Just as this hammer produces many sparks [when

it strikes the rock], so a single verse has several meanings.<sup>14</sup>

Both of these verses point to the idea of scriptural polysemy but must be qualified by two other important Talmudic passages. One of which tells of a student who, deeply bothered by the many contradictions and disagreements in halakhah, asked Rabbi Eleazar b. Azariah

Since some pronounce unclean and some pronounce clean, some prohibit and other permit, some declare unfit and other pronounce fit—how then shall I learn Torah?

R. Eleazar responds by telling the student that

Scripture says: All of them “were given from one shepherd.” One G-d gave them, one leader (i.e. Moses) proclaimed them from the mouth of the Lord of all creation, blessed be He, as it is written, “And G-d spoke all of these words” (Exodus 20:1).<sup>15</sup>

A similar idea is expressed with respect to the Houses of Shammai and Hillel who, we are told, argued for three years “These said, the law is according to our view: and the other said, the law is according to our view. [Finally] a heavenly oracle decreed: The words of both houses are the words of the living G-d, and the law is like the House of Hillel.”<sup>16</sup>

These sources point to an exegesis that is at once open to multiplicity and yet still quite closed. The notion of post-structural “indeterminacies” renders a text open to free “play.” And though scripture can simultaneously support different, even opposite, interpretations—fit and unfit, clean and unclean—Stern is demonstrating that there is more at stake than just “play” in midrashic study. Midrashic polysemy is necessarily rooted in the divine source. G-d has “Spoke[n] all of these words.” And therein lies a world of difference. As Stern writes,

What differentiates midrash from indeterminacy is not

its style but rather the latter’s formal resistance to closure, its final revelation of a perspective that, as Hartman writes, “may be, precisely, the absence of one and only one context from which to view the flux of time or the empirical world”... In contrast, midrashic polysemy is predicated precisely upon the existence of such a perspective, the divine presence from which all contradictory interpretations derive.<sup>17</sup>

Stern’s position on midrashic polysemy is important for two reasons. Firstly, it offers a grounded approach to the question with which this essay began: How are we to understand the five interpretations of *amon*? Stern would say that they were presented as heavenly ordained and mutually correct interpretations. It is important to note that Stern is not asserting that these interpretations were in fact heavenly ordained, or even believed to be so by their authors. Rather, Stern is highlighting that midrash operates in framework far different than that of endless textual free play. It operates in a framework where textual stability and meaning is sourced in the divine. Stern’s position is also important

because it represents a turn away from engaging midrash superficially and with ulterior motives. It is a turn towards studying midrash on its own terms.

Stern’s fundamental understanding of midrash, like his view of its polysemy, stands in stark opposition to the scholarship we have seen thus far. Whereas scholars like Handelman looked to find in midrash an overarching hermeneutic principle that mediates between text and commentary, Stern denies that

any such hermeneutic exists. Midrash, for Stern, is less exegetic than it is homiletic. Midrash is a platform upon which the Rabbis could speak. Stern acknowledges that there is an exegetical component to midrash, which often grows out of a textual difficulty. However, the substance of midrash gives little attention to actually resolving those difficulties.

Take for example the verse in Lamentations. “He has cast down from heaven to earth the majesty of Israel, *tiferet Yisrael*.”<sup>18</sup> The midrash says:

R. Joshua of Sikhnin said:

It is like the inhabitants of a province who made a crown for the king. They provoked him but he bore with them; they provoked him again, but he bore with them. He said: The inhabitants of the province provoke me only because of the crown that is placed upon my head. Here, I cast down in their faces!

Similarly, the Holy one, blessed be He, said: The Israelites anger Me only because of the image of Jacob that is sculpted on My throne. Here, I cast it down. This is what is written, “He has cast down from heaven to earth the majesty of Israel.”<sup>19</sup>

In his book, *Parables in Midrash*, Stern cites and rejects several possibilities for how this midrash functions as exegesis, and concludes that the midrash is not driven by exegetic concerns. Rather, it is an “apologetic” midrash. R. Joshua interprets *tiferet Yisrael* as the icon, a pictorial representation, of Jacob<sup>20</sup> as opposed to the nation of Israel itself to offset the harsh implications of the verse. Rather than God casting down Israel in a fit of anger, he has cast down only an ornament as a warning, making the verse far more palatable.<sup>21</sup>

Stern explains the rise of such faux-exegesis in *Midrash and Theory* by citing the midrash in *Bereishit Rabbah* with which we began. Since the Torah is the blueprint that G-d used to create the world, it has a metonymic relationship with Him and is a trope or stand-in for Him. As such, in the post-temple period, the Rabbis attempted to overcome a sense of alienation from G-d by prolonging the conversation with Him through exegesis. Stern says that “Midrash became a kind of conversation the Rabbis invented in order to enable G-d to speak to them from between the lines of Scripture, in the textual fissures and discontinuities that exegesis discovers.”<sup>22</sup>

This approach significantly alters the trajectory of midrashic study from a *how* inquiry to a *why* inquiry. We no longer need to account for how the Rabbis derived an interpretation, only why it was beneficial for them to do so. Stern is therefore participating in what can be called a hermeneutic of suspicion, which Gerald Bruns defines as “interpretation as unmasking or emancipation from mental bondage... to produce... alienation where historical and cultural difference has been repressed in favor of institutionalized systems or doctrines that claim to speak all at once and once for all.”<sup>23</sup> While mainstream Jewish thinkers classically seek to defend the elusive but ever-present exegetic nature of midrash, Stern seeks to expose it as something else entirely.

Daniel Boyarin, author of *Intertextuality and Midrash*, takes issue with Stern’s approach on both intellectual and moral grounds. He explains that since the Rabbis expressly view their work as exegetic, the burden of proof is on Stern to show that Midrash is otherwise. Boyarin clarifies that he is not categorically



rejecting a hermeneutic of suspicion, agreeing that the Rabbis may not have fully understood the degree to which their interpretation was a product of their time. However, one must first and foremost approach Midrash as it was intended to be understood: a true attempt at exegesis.<sup>24</sup>

Boyarin’s approach to midrash stands in complete contrast with Stern’s, in some ways moving back towards earlier approaches and in some ways moving miles ahead. Boyarin’s main thesis is that midrashic exegesis operates with a radical form of “intertextuality,” a term coined by the post-structuralist Julia Kristeva with a rather elusive meaning. The meaning that Boyarin adopts can be summed as understanding one text through another text. Or as is the case for midrash, understanding one verse in light of another verse. Take for example the midrash with which we began. The midrash explains a word in Genesis by citing a word in Proverbs (or *visa’ versa*). Foundational to this approach is R. Yehudah’s statement “Here is a verse made rich in meaning from many places.”<sup>25</sup> Verses are given

a mobility that allows for a dynamic development of meaning through myriad juxtapositions of one verse to another.

This approach beautifully underscores the Rabbis desire to highlight Tanach's unification as a cannon of deep interconnectivity. As we saw above, even a verse in Proverbs has something to say to the very first verse in the Torah and vice-versa.



True to its form, we must conclude that midrash can and must support both Boyarin and Stern's approach's to some degree. Midrash is a highly differentiated and complex text that requires different approaches at different times. The truly successful scholar should view midrash with some mixture of Stern's suspicion and Boyarin's faith, because somewhere between the two, lies a perfect and impossible balance that we might call truth.

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(Endnotes)

- 1 JPS translates this word as "a confidant"; in the Jerusalem Bible it is rendered "a master craftsman"
- 2 Proverbs, 8:30
- 3 A play on the opening words of the Torah's creation story "be-reshit bara". The participle "be" is conventionally translated as "in", although here it is being used in the sense of "by means

- of".
- 4 Genesis, 1:1
- 5 Proverbs, 8:22
- 6 *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah*, ed. J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, 3 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Jerusalem, 1965), 1:1-2
- 7 Deconstruction is a literary theory and philosophy of language which questions language's ability to communicate and signify with the accuracy that western literature and

- philosophy ascribe to it.
- 8 David Stern and James Kugel, two significant voices in the field of academic biblical study, were notable exceptions to this rule.
- 9 Betty Roitman, "Sacred Language and Open Text" in *Midrash and Literature* ed. By Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick (Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 1986), 159
- 10 Post-structuralism refers to is a very diverse group of thinkers that came to prominence in the mid-twentieth century. As the name suggest, the movement is classified based on their rejection of structuralism. Post-structuralists were often committed to the absolute complexity and irreducibility of the human experience and generally viewed language as unstable.
- 11 Hartman, Geoffrey. "Midrash as Law and Literature" *The Journal of Religion* 74.3 (1994):355
- 12 Stern David. "Moses-cide: Midrash and Contemporary Literary Criticism." *Prooftexts* 4.2 (1984): 193-204. Print.
- 13 Stern, 18.

- 14 *Sanhedrin* 34a, Translation taken from David Stern's Midrash and Theory
- 15 *Hagig* 3b, Translation taken from David Stern's Midrash and Theory
- 16 *Eruvin* 13b, Translation taken from David Stern's Midrash and Theory
- 17 Stern, 22.
- 18 Lamentations, 2:1
- 19 *Eikvah Rabbah* 2.1 B, translation taken from David Stern's Midrash and Theory

- 20 The names Israel and Jacob are interchangeable
- 21 Stern, 109
- 22 Stern, 31
- 23 Bruns, Gerald L. "What Is Tradition?" *New Literary History* 22.1 (1991): 1-21.
- 24 Boyarin, Daniel. "Review Essay: Midrash in Parables." *AJS Review* 20.1 (1995): 123 138.
- 25 Boyarin, p.27



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# A Double Book Review: A Comparison and a Contrast

BY: RABBI YOSEF BLAU

Reviewed Books: Yossi Klein Halevi, *Like Dreamers* (HarperCollins, 2013); Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* (Spiegel & Grau, 2013).

Two books in English about the history and current issues facing Israel have recently appeared. Both Yossi Klein Halevi's "Like Dreamers" and Ari Shavit's "My Promised Land" have received enthusiastic reviews. While both books share a panoramic view of Israeli history they differ greatly in perspective. Surprisingly, despite coming from opposing political backgrounds, the authors basically agree on the need for a two-state solution for the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and on the difficulty in reaching an agreement with the Palestinian leadership. It is on the more fundamental question of a vision for Israeli society that the two disagree.

"Like Dreamers" examines Israel's history since the Six Day War through the prism of seven paratroopers who were part of the unit that cap-



tured the old city of Jerusalem in 1967, and whose unit also played a critical role in reversing Israel's fortunes during the Yom Kippur War. Four of the soldiers come from the kibbutz movement, widely considered Israel's elite; three are religious Zionists who became leaders in *Gush Emunim* and the settlers movement. They saw themselves as the successors to the fading Kibbutzim in leading the future of Israel. The conventional wisdom is that the Six Day War created the split in Israel between settlers and their opponents. In fact it was the Yom Kippur War, with the conflicting messages that were learned from the initial Israeli failures and eventual victory, that solidified the opposing visions that divided Israel. A loss of confidence in the Israeli Army's invincibility was dealt with either through

seeing Israel in Messianic terms, dependent on completing the Divine plan, or by focusing on the need to compromise with the country's Arab neighbors.

All of Klein's soldier-kibbutz members remain part of Israel's political left, though not all remain living in a kibbutz. Udi Adiv, an extreme leftist, spends twelve years in an Israeli jail as a spy for Syria and later becomes an academic. Meir Ariel becomes an Israeli under-appreciated Bob Dylan. Avital Gura remains totally loyal to kibbutz life and becomes a famous conceptual artist. Arik Achimon, though married to the daughter of the head of Mapam (The United Worker's party), leaves behind his socialist ideals and becomes a pioneer of privatization in the Israeli aviation industry. Klein Halevi's greatest sympathy is with Achimon who moves beyond his original ideology.

Similarly, in discussing Yoel Bin-Nun, Yisrael Harel and Hannan Porat,

the three founders of Gush Emunim, it is Bin Nun, who later becomes the great heretic of the settlers movement, whom Klein Halevi most appreciates. Common to both the settlers and the kibbutzniks is a vision of Israel that ex-

***A loss of confidence in the Israeli Army's invincibility was dealt with either through seeing Israel in Messianic terms, dependent on completing the Divine plan, or by focusing on the need to compromise with the country's Arab neighbors***

tends beyond a normal country where Jews are secure and control their own destiny. Klein Halevi's own sense of Israel makes him long for this deeper meaning while recognizing that neither vision is ultimately successful.

Critics of the book, while acknowledging its power and scope, are bothered by the fact that all the major characters are male Ashkenazic Jews. While this is perhaps a necessary result of exploring Israeli history through the experience of the paratroopers, the roles played by women, Sephardic Jews, Israeli Arabs, or the great Russian immigration to Israel are largely ignored.

Shavit's book is even more ambitious as he begins his coverage of Israeli history starting in 1897, when his great-grandfather Herbert Bentwitch came from England to visit what was then Palestine. Shavit traces the different *aliyot* and stages of building the land. Shavit appreciates the enormity of the achievement of the development of the state, highlighting in particular the fact that the country absorbed more immigrants in the first four years of the state than the total number of Jewish inhabitants already in the state. He admires the attempt to create a utopian society through the kibbutz movement. Yet Shavit is always

aware that these accomplishments and visions of the Zionists depended on ignoring the inconvenient fact that the land has Arab inhabitants. In particular, the description of the expulsion of the Arab residents of Lydda during the War of Independence is brutally honest. Years of effort, of two peoples trying to live together harmoniously disappear within a few days. Without any attempt at apologetics or covering up of details, Shavit points out both the cruelty and the necessity of removing Arabs from a city in central Israel in order to make the new state viable.

Shavit is a strong opponent of the Jewish settlements in the territories captured after the Six Day War. Yet he has to work hard to differentiate between the occupation of these territories and the previous expulsions of Arabs from their homes. Can one oppose living on what the partition plan designated as Arab land in the hills of the West Bank, while remaining comfortable living in what was a previously Arab neighborhood in Lydda? Shavit tries to resolve the difficulty by viewing the mistreating of the Arabs before 1967 as a tragic consequence of the noble goal of creating a Jewish state. However, the pre-1967 settlements cannot be justified since a greater Israel is not a necessity for Jewish survival and makes it impossible to come to an accommodation with the Palestinian residents.

The book also analyzes the many other challenges facing Israel internally, as well as threats stemming from external enemies like Iran. The remarkable integration of Jews from Russia, Ethiopia and the Arabic countries has changed the earlier culture. Israel's pioneering founders came from a European background but the population of the state today is mainly Mediterranean, coming from a radically different cultural background. The socialist ethos which produced all the political and military leaders before and during the early years of the state has long disappeared without a clear, unified replacement.

Shavit is sympathetic to many elements in Israeli society including the

hedonists of the club scene in Tel Aviv despite the fact that they represent the opposite extreme from the kibbutz ethos and the national identity of Ben Gurion that he admires. A striking exception is a clear distaste for anything religious. The growing movement amongst secular Israelis to connect to Jewish texts is not mentioned. Any discussion of Orthodox figures is purely political. In a chapter discussing the settlement of *Ofra*, Shavit opens with an interview with Yoel Bin-nun which captures none of his complexity. He

examines the political philosophy of settler leaders in detail, focusing on the political differences between Pinchas Wallerstein, who believes in building settlements as a means of creating facts on the ground, and Yehuda Etzion, who wants to replace Israel's democracy with the kingdom of Judea. He is fascinated by *Shas* leader Aryeh Deri and his charisma and political acumen, but needs to hear from a secular Sephardic woman to appreciate Sephardic dissatisfaction and alienation. However, Shavit does not ex-

amine the complexities of the religious motivations of the settler movement, or discuss the interesting intersection between religiosity and and Sephardic pride and identity.

The personal background of the two authors explains much of the contrasts between the books. Klein Haveli is a religious American *oleh* for whom the Six Day War is a critical event in his life, though he actual made *aliyah* much later, after the first Lebanon War. Shavit on the other hand is a fourth-generation Israeli from a family

far removed from observant ancestors. While Shavit is a major figure in Israeli journalism and political analysis and his book has been hailed as the most significant book about Israel in forty years, this disregard for Jewish tradition weakens his discussion of the meaning of Jewish identity.

I strongly recommend that anyone who wants to deepen his or her understanding of the historic accomplishments and profound challenges facing Israel read both books.

## Who Has the Last Word on God's Word? "Not in Heaven" and the Oral Law<sup>1</sup>

BY: DANIEL SHLIAN

One of the most fundamental axioms of the rabbinic tradition in Judaism is that of the preeminence of the Oral Law over its Written counterpart. The halakhic system codified in the Talmud often makes little or no effort to reconcile its conclusions with the plain meanings of the Pentateuchal origins of the laws. This phenomenon has been dealt with in a variety of sources and contexts, but, working exclusively under the assumption that the halakhic system is valid and binding, I wish to focus on one specific aspect thereof. The Written Law is the revealed word of God to mankind. How and why, then, were the Sages given the power to alter its instructions into different ones entirely?

An *aggadic* passage, in the context of the minutiae of the laws of *tsara'at*, casts this rabbinic tradition and its difficulties into sharp relief. The *aggadah* begins amidst an involved discussion of the order in which the characteristic white hair and white blotch of *tsara'at* manifest themselves:

There was a dispute in the Heavenly Academy: [We know that] if the bright spot [of *tsara'at*] preceded the white hair, [the afflicted person] is impure; if the reverse, he is pure. If [the order is] in doubt

— the Holy One, blessed be He, ruled, "He is pure"; while the entire Heavenly Academy maintained, "He is impure." "Who shall decide it?" they asked. Rabbah b. Nahmani! For he said, "I am pre-eminent in the laws of *tsara'at* and tents." A messenger was sent for him...<sup>2</sup>

The first curious aspect of this tale is the fact that a "Heavenly Academy" can exist. Apparently, within these confines, God is merely a player in the ongoing halakhic discussion, parallel to a student in a study hall on Earth. How can this be? Does the final authority to decide matters of God's word rest with anyone but God? Seemingly more problematic is the next section of the story, in which God assents to allowing a human to arbitrate the final decision of the

***Does the final authority to decide matters of God's word rest with anyone but God?***

question at hand. Not only does God deign to engage in the interpretation of His law alongside His creations, He delegates the final responsibility of decision to them as well.

In another well-known *aggadah*,

concerning the purity status of a particular oven, known as the *tanur shel Akhnai*, this particular problem is dealt with using the text of the Torah itself. In this scenario, while the majority of the Sages rule that the oven could not become impure, R. Eliezer disagrees, and God appears to side with the latter. However, as we shall soon see, the "solution" offered by the *aggadah* to our question of why the Sages possess the authority they do is highly problematic:

On that day R. Eliezer brought forward every imaginable argument, but [the rabbis] did not accept them. He said to them: "If the halakhah agrees with me, let this carob tree prove it!" "Thereupon the carob tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place... "No proof can be brought from a carob-tree," [the rabbis] retorted. Again [R. Eliezer] said to them: "If the halakhah agrees with me, let the stream of water prove it!" The stream of water flowed backwards. "No proof can be brought from a stream of water," they rejoined. Again [R. Eliezer] urged: "If the halakhah agrees with me, let the walls of the *beit midrash* prove it," whereupon the walls inclined to fall. But R.

Yehoshua rebuked [the walls], saying: "When scholars are engaged in a halakhic dispute, why do you interfere?" Hence they did not fall in honor of R. Yehoshua, nor did they right themselves in honor of R. Eliezer, and they are still standing thus inclined. Again [R. Eliezer] said to them: "If the halakhah agrees with me, let Heaven prove it!" Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out: "Why do you dispute with R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the halakhah agrees with him!" But R. Yehoshua arose and exclaimed: "It is not in Heaven."<sup>3</sup> What did he mean by this? R. Yirmiyah explained: "The Torah has already been given at Mount Sinai, so we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice, because [God has] long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, "After the majority must one decide."<sup>4</sup>

R. Natan met Eliyahu [the prophet] and asked him: "What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do [while this dispute was occurring]?" "He laughed [with joy]," [Eliyahu] replied, "saying, 'My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me.'"<sup>5</sup>

This story paints a different picture than does the *aggadah* we previously saw about *tsara'at*. The debate here is initiated by men and completed by men, whereas the discussion of *tsara'at* begins in Heaven. And while, in the *tsara'at* story, God does not interfere with man's decision, in the *tanur shel Akhnai* story, although He appears to reverse course later in the tale, God miraculously intervenes. The Sages, led by R. Yehoshua, successfully resist the Divine influence and resolve the question at hand on the ground. No credence is given to God's opinion in the discussion; matters of halakhah, we are told, are left to man and man alone. This second *aggadah*, though, offers two verses from the original revealed text that attempt to provide a basis for the phenomenon of the primacy of man over God in matters of applications of the Law. Upon further inspection, however, the proof-texts are somewhat wanting.

First, we shall examine the context of R. Yehoshua's evidence, emphasized within its surroundings. Moshe, soon before his impending death, is in the midst of one of his final speeches to the Israelites, exhorting them to action:

For this commandment (*mitsvah*) which I command you this day, it is not too hard for you, nor is it far off. It is not in Heaven that you should say: "Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, and let us hear it, so that we may perform it?" Nor is it beyond the sea that you should say: "Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, and let us hear it, so that we may perform it?" For the matter is very close to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, to perform it.<sup>6 7</sup>

The phrase R. Yehoshua cites to demonstrate the independence of the Sages from God, or at least God's expressed statements, in arbitrating matters of Halakhah refers to a "*mitsvah*," or "commandment,"

referenced in the preceding verse. But what is this *mitsvah*? Virtually no straightforward reading of the text<sup>8</sup> yields the interpretation that it refers to the Torah as a whole. Ramban<sup>9</sup> explains, based on the surrounding paragraphs, that the *mitsvah* is that of *teshuvah*, repentance. Another reading might hearken back to the *mitsvah* referenced earlier in the book of *Devarim*, which most likely refers to love and fear of God. Regardless, it appears that R. Yehoshua, a mortal man, is utilizing a verse in a context totally removed from its original revealed intention, to teach that mortal man, not God, has the final authority over the Law after revelation. Furthermore, R. Yehoshua uses this verse to make a legislative point, discussing the process of creating laws, while in context, the verse describes how the laws should be fulfilled. Especially for the goal he seeks to accomplish, R. Yehoshua's proof-text seems curiously lacking. R. Yirmiyah's text, offered as an "explanation" of R. Yehoshua's, encounters a similar problem, but to an even greater extent. This selection is taken from a description of the process of court systems:

You shall not follow a multitude to do evil; nor shall you bear witness in a dispute to turn aside after a multitude to pervert justice; nor shall you favor a poor man in his cause.<sup>10</sup>

R. Yirmiyah uses a section of a verse from the context of adjudication of civil law, not legislation of halakhah, as his proof. More difficult, though, is the fact that the portion he cites *runs completely contrary* to the actual meaning of the sentence. Of the instruction, "Do not follow the majority," R. Yirmiyah entirely omits the words "do not." Regardless of R. Yirmiyah's understanding of the nature of *peshat* and *derash*,<sup>11</sup> he utilizes the principle of rabbinic independence from the literal meaning of the text to demonstrate the validity of this selfsame principle. From a textual point of view, this is deeply

problematic.

This problem is an important theological one, one whose solution lies outside the scope of this essay. Instead, we shall examine the section of the Torah surrounding R. Yehoshua's statement, and understand that while



the question of man's final authority over the Torah remains puzzling from a philosophical perspective, on a scriptural level it is rooted deep in the text of *Sefer Devarim*.

Before embarking on an analysis of Chapters 29-32, the relevant portion of the Torah for this phenomenon, it is critical that we understand the structure of the preceding sections of *Sefer Devarim*. Chapters 1-4:40 and Chapters 5-26 comprise two long, uninterrupted speeches by Moshe to the Jews in *Arvot Moav*, across the Jordan River from the Land of Israel, in the Israelites' fortieth and final year of sojourns in the desert. The first of these speeches is a summary of the Jews' travels from Egypt to that point. The second, longer one is a set of commandments, ranging from the broad principles of love and fear of God to the specifics enumerated particularly in Chapters 12-26. Chapters 27 and 28 may be viewed as the beginning of the end of the book: the former sees Moshe instructing the Jews to perform covenant-affirming ceremonies once they enter the Land, while the latter contains Moshe's blessings and curses to the people, to

be administered in the events of their upholding commandments and their failure to do so, respectively.

It is with this background that Moshe begins what appears to be his final substantive speech to the Jews. In Chapters 29 and 30, the leader gathers

his people and warns them again about the dire consequences that await them if they fail to observe God's commandments. Yet he includes the possibility of repentance, of the exiled nation returning to God, and, in return, God returning them to their Land. Blessings await the people upon their return. However, Moshe continues to stress one central message to the Israelites. Beginning with the above-cited verses in Chapter 30, which contain the key phrase of "not in Heaven," he informs *Bnei Yisrael* that they have the option of fulfilling God's commandments. Again and again in verses 15-20, Moshe impresses upon the people that they have a choice: the commandments and life on the one hand, transgression and death on the other. "Therefore choose life," he exhorts, "that you may live, you and your offspring."<sup>12</sup> Moshe, who will soon pass away, begs his flock to follow the path God has laid out for them, and promises them that they will be richly rewarded for doing so.

By this point, Moshe believes he has concluded his task of imparting the commandments to the Jews. In his next speech, in Chapter 31, he intends

to bid the people farewell before they resume their journey without him: “I am a hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in; and the Lord hath said unto me: ‘Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.’”<sup>13</sup> He tells the people to be strong, and then begins the final, formal investiture of leadership in Yehoshua, his disciple. Among his final acts is this:

And Moshe wrote this law (*torah*), and delivered it to the priests the sons of Levi, who bore the Ark of the Covenant of God, and to all the elders of Israel.<sup>14</sup>

Moshe writes the *torah*, a term which is subject to enormous debate amongst the classical commentators and will be critical for our analysis of this section, and safeguards it. Meanwhile, God has other plans for Moshe’s final message to the people. He intends for it to solve theological questions that may arise later. When the Israelites wonder why evil befalls them, God preemptively responds that when the Jews transgress His commandments, He will “hide His face” and not grant them special favor. God instructs Moshe:

Now therefore write this song (*shirah*) for you, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, so that this song may be a witness (*ed*) for Me against the children of Israel.<sup>15</sup>

This message is transmitted in *Devarim* 32:1-43, in the format commonly referred to as “*Shirat Ha’azinu*.” Note, however, that God’s instruction on how to transmit the song is tripartite: Moshe is to write it, teach it to the Israelites, and “put it in their mouths.” Also significantly, God here refers to the song as an “*ed*,” a “witness.” The placement, immediately after Moshe delivers what could have well served as his last speech, indicates that God intends this to be essentially the final message the Jews hear from their leader.

Moshe does indeed teach the Israelites *Shirat Ha’azinu*. However, critically, he takes a number of steps

which imply a subtle disagreement with God over the form his final message to the people should take. While God, of course, could have chosen to dictate this final speech, He apparently chooses to leave the decision in Moshe’s hands, and Moshe does not seem to fully follow suit with God’s instructions for how *Shirat Ha’azinu* should be rendered.

First, we shall examine Moshe’s immediate response to God’s command: “So Moshe wrote this song (*shirah*) the same day, and taught it to the children of Israel.”<sup>16</sup> While God’s instruction contained three steps, Moshe’s action only has two. Notably, he neglects to fulfill the third stage, to “put [the song] in their mouths.” Evidently, Moshe is reluctant to follow the command exactly as ordered. The next few verses are also striking:

And it came to pass, when Moshe had completed writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moshe commanded the Levites, who bore the Ark of the Covenant of God, saying: “Take this book of the law (*torah*), and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of God, so it may be there for a witness (*ed*) against you.” For I know your rebellion, and your stiff neck; behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, you have been rebellious against God; and how much more after my death? Assemble unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, so I may speak these words in their ears, and call Heaven and Earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will deal corruptly, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the end

**R. Yehoshua’s selection of the verse “not in Heaven” as the source for man having the final word on God’s word is hardly an accident.**

of days; because you will do that which is evil in the sight of God, to provoke Him through the work of your hands.” And Moshe spoke in the ears of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song, until they were finished.<sup>17</sup>

Moshe, in rather harsh tones, conveys God’s message to the people: When they sin, they will be duly punished. Yet it is notable that the *torah* Moshe had written down earlier becomes the *ed*, the witness, instead of the *shirah*. Moshe, apparently, would rather have the *torah* be the final testimony. When discussing the *shirah* itself, Moshe transforms God’s directive of “putting it in their mouths” into “speaking it in their ears,” which implies a far less intense transmission. Instead of the Jews repeating it constantly, they merely are called upon to listen to the song. Additionally, while Heaven and Earth are called to witness—“*ve-a’idah bam*”—the song itself still is not, and the sole item identified with the title of “*ed*” is the *torah*. The *torah*, we may suggest, refers to Moshe’s selected messages to the Jews, either from the beginning of the book of *Devarim* or the concluding section beginning with Chapter 29. Moshe is uncomfortable leaving God’s harsh message of *hester panim*, hiding of His face, as the final message the Jews hear from their leader, so he takes steps to ensure a less-than-complete delivery of the song.

After he concludes *Shirat Ha’azinu*, though, Moshe—with God’s tacit approval—makes one last subtle alteration to the final speech. And Moshe came and spoke all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he, and Hoshea the son of Nun. And when Moshe had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, “Set your heart to all the words

which I testify against you this day; that you may charge your children to observe to do all the words of this law (*torah*). For it is no vain thing for you; because it is your life, and through this matter you shall prolong your days upon the land which you go over the Jordan to possess.”<sup>18</sup>

Again, Moshe chooses to speak the song into “the ears of the people,” not their mouths. At his conclusion, though, he insists that the people observe the words of the *torah*—not the *shirah*. A new term is used for this transmission: no mention of mouths or ears is made, but Moshe instructs the people to “set your heart.” The *torah* of choosing life, not the *shirah* of punishment for evil, is Moshe’s preferred final speech to the people, and the most internal and fundamental one of all.

God, it appears, acquiesces to Moshe’s insistence on ending the Torah on human terms. At this point, Moshe is told to ascend to Mount Nevo, where he will die. After following in his forefather Yaakov’s footsteps and blessing the tribes, Moshe indeed passes away. But it is he, not God, who has dictated what the final, revealed word of the Five Books will be. The Pentateuch does not end on a note of *hester panim*, but of *u-vaharta ba-hayyim*, the exhortation to choose life. One can almost hear the echoes of “My sons have defeated Me” from the conclusion of the above *aggadah* as Moshe, similar to the Sages, triumphs in the decision to select the conclusion of the Torah. As in the *tanur shel Akhnai* story, although God explicitly expresses his desire to have His word interpreted in a different way, He defers to mankind in the final expression of His Law, and is evidently pleased with the result.

R. Yehoshua’s selection of the verse “not in Heaven” as the source for man having the final word on God’s word is hardly an accident. It is taken from the section of the Torah that is subject to a subtle struggle between man and God about who will complete

God’s revealed word. R. Yirmiyah’s proof-text of “follow the majority” is then a concretization of R. Yehoshua’s principle—now that R. Yehoshua has established that the Torah itself is subject to human interpretation and teaching, R.



Yirmiyah explains that Halakha follows the same modus operandi. He does so in the most emphatic fashion possible: by selecting a *derashah* that completely opposes the literal meaning of the original text, he demonstrates not an indifference to the straightforward reading, but the total authority of the Sages to determine interpretation of Scripture.

I do not, of course, intend to suggest that the current form of the Written Law is subject to drastic

alterations. Nor do I claim that the power to decide halakhic matters rests in the common man. On the contrary: only those who have learned and firmly understand the rabbinic precedent are qualified in that regard. The interpretation of halakha is certainly not a free-for-all. Nonetheless, part of the uniqueness of Torah is that it is an eternal book. The Oral Law is not static, but open to debate and discussion. Twice a day, in the second paragraph of *keri’at Shema*, we recall God’s promises to reward us if we

observe his precepts, which the verses describe as “My commandments which I command you this day.”<sup>19</sup> Rashi, citing the Sifre, famously explains that the term “this day” means that the Jews should strive to perceive the Torah as though it were given on that day, every single day.<sup>20</sup> When

we view the Torah as the “*hayyei olam*,” “eternal life,” that our tradition insists it is, we understand how the revelatory experience, through the medium of the Oral Law, continues its timeless progression through the generations, as reflected by the end of *Sefer Devarim*.

*Daniel Shlian is a first year student at Yeshiva College, majoring in Chemistry and Judaic Studies.*

(Endnotes)

- 1 Based on a lecture originally delivered at Congregation Agudath Sholom in Stamford, CT, on *Shemini Atzeret/Simhat Torah* 5774/2013, by the author.
- 2 *Bava Metsia* 86a. This and subsequent translations of *Gemara* are those of Soncino Press, with some slight technical modifications.
- 3 *Devarim* 30, 12
- 4 *Shemot* 23, 2
- 5 *Bava Metsia* 59b
- 6 *Devarim* 30, 11-14
- 7 Translations of Biblical verses are those of JPS 1917.
- 8 Many commentators (such as Rashi and R. Bahya) do indeed assume that the phrase “*lo ba-shamayim hi*” refers to the entire set of the Torah’s commandments. However, it appears

likely that this is primarily motivated by this *aggadah*, as well as a related *derashah* in *Eruvin* 55a.

- 9 *Devarim* 30, 11
- 10 *Shemot* 23, 2-3
- 11 Stephen Garfinkel (in “Clearing Peshat and Derash,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, 1/2, ed. by Magne Sæbø [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000], 132) writes that while the *Gemara* on several occasions notes “*ein mikra yotsei mi-yedei peshuto*,” “the verse does not leave the hands of its *peshat*,” it is unclear how much Hazal utilized *peshat* exegetically. However, he also cites Menahem Haran, who claims that Hazal did not employ contextual analysis at all.
- 12 *Devarim* 30, 19
- 13 *Ibid*, 31, 2
- 14 *Ibid*, v. 9
- 15 *Ibid*, v. 19. In our analysis, I have omitted certain verses in the relevant sections. These primarily deal with Moshe’s appointment of Yehoshua, which unfortunately lies outside the scope of this essay.
- 16 *Ibid*, v. 22
- 17 *Ibid*, v. 24-30
- 18 *Ibid*, 32, 44-47
- 19 *Ibid*, 11, 13
- 20 Rashi, ad loc.

## Mashiah in Judaism and Christianity: First Base vs. Home Plate<sup>1</sup>

BY: CHAIM GOLDBERG

Imagine a handsome teenager traveling home for a well-deserved vacation. After rushing through the airport, being hassled by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) about his *tefillin*, and making it to the gate just in time, he finally settles into his seat. Looking forward to a few quiet hours after a hectic finals week, he pulls out a pocket-sized Humash. Instead of learning, though, he is soon treated to some inquisitive questioning by his seatmate. “What is that book you have?” she asks. “What language is it written in?”

The answer, of course, is the Torah;

however, to assist her understanding, he responds, “the Old Testament.” She soon confirms her affiliation as a Christian and she professes a limited knowledge of Judaism. Thus begins a conversation about some elementary

***What are Judaism’s beliefs regarding the Messiah?” she queries. “Who is he? And what will happen when he finally does come?”***

aspects of Judaism and the experience of having a dual-curriculum in high

school. Soon, this seemingly mild dialogue about two of the Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and Christianity, evolves into a more intense discussion. “What are Judaism’s beliefs regarding the Messiah?” she queries. “Who is he? And what will happen when he finally does come?” are some additional questions she poses as the conversation progresses.

As some readers of Kol Hamevaser may have guessed by now, that young man was I, and the questions posed by this inquisitive Christian are some of the questions that this article intends to address. With my high school a two-hour flight from home, I had occasion to fly regularly, and numerous other

comparable conversations occurred as well, all with varying characteristics. Sometimes they began because of a question about my *kippah*; other times because of my Humash. Some were cursory in nature; others more in-depth. Sometimes the people were genuinely curious; other times they carried a thinly veiled agenda to relieve me of my beliefs. However, one item has always been consistent. With each exchange, I have become gradually less surprised by the questions.

After I was originally exposed to this topic, I turned to rabbis and teachers for guidance, as well as conducted some independent research, all of which had a threefold beneficial



effect. First, I found myself equipped with more knowledge and facts with which to answer pertinent questions. Second, I developed a greater confidence that even if I did not know the answer to a particular question, it was likely that one of my mentors did. Therefore, I concluded that my present ignorance was no reason to falter in the face of questioning. When said from a place of strength, “I do not know,” can be just as strong a reply as the accurate answer itself. Third, I began to cultivate the trust that even if there is no apparent answer to a given question, that does not necessitate a wavering in one’s own faith, and certainly does not necessitate an acceptance of the other’s answer. As I once heard Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein say, “Orthodox Judaism is not about finding the answers to every question. Rather, it is about developing shoulders broad enough to bear those questions.”

***The Messiah will establish the groundwork necessary to build the ideal Jewish society, but it will remain up to human endeavor to complete and sustain that building.***

While the first time I was engaged in such a conversation I found myself taken aback and quite shocked, that feeling has steadily been diminished. However, similar scenarios await many students at Yeshiva University. In the spirit of the Talmudic dictum, “Know what to respond,”<sup>2</sup> it behooves us to acquire a basic understanding of at least some of the differences that distinguish our beliefs from Christian beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

A central characteristic of the Jewish Messiah and the Messianic era is the ingathering of the Jewish exiles to the Land of Israel. First expressed in the Tanakh itself,<sup>4</sup> this element is of such significance that the Amoraic scholar Shmuel classified it as being the sole difference between the world’s current state and the Messianic era.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Christian theology does not envision the ideal Messianic state as involving the unification of the Jewish nation in the Land of Israel. At best, Christianity concurs that this

will occur, but only to be halted at the time of Jesus’ resurrection.

Though Shmuel’s statement appears to be quite limiting, he was simply asserting a position that, generally speaking, there will be no changes in the laws of nature when the Messiah comes. However, he did not mean to exclude the possibility of other changes in the Messianic era. In fact, Shmuel is preceded by the Prophet Ezekiel who prophesies that the coming of Messiah will result in the renewal of Jewish sovereignty and the Davidic dynasty in the Land of Israel.<sup>6</sup> Given that a king cannot exist without a nation, the restoration of the kingship is of course intimately intertwined with the return of the Jewish nation to Israel.

Both are affirmed by Maimonides in his authoritative *Mishneh Torah*.<sup>7</sup> Christianity, simply put, sees Jesus as the Messiah and their savior,<sup>8</sup> and consequently does not believe in the enduring reign of the Davidic dynasty, or, for that matter, any other Jewish representative.

The beliefs of Jewish reunification and renewal of Jewish sovereignty in Israel function as the prelude to another major feature of the Messianic era, namely, the building of the Third Temple. With this, all the laws relevant to the Temple era will be restored, such as those regarding sacrificial offerings,<sup>9</sup> the thrice-yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and the bringing of the first fruits. Additionally, the Messiah will verify the ancestry of each Jew, thereby reestablishing the Priestly families, who will then serve in the third Temple<sup>10</sup>. Consequently, laws related to the priesthood—tithes and *tzara’at*, for example—will be effectively reinstated.

Christianity conceives of a “New Jerusalem” as well; however, it is quite different from Judaism’s conception. Among the many differences between Christian

beliefs and Judaism’s regarding this issue, one is particularly worthy of mention. According to Christianity, Jerusalem’s future contains no Temple; rather, its temple is “the Lord...and the lamb,”<sup>11</sup> a statement whose presumed meaning is that due to God’s vast presence, a temple is no longer necessary. Aside from the reference to Jesus’ presence—“the lamb”—such a belief has no place in Jewish theology. Though this topic is worthy of an independent article, we will briefly note that although the *Shekhinah* (G-d’s presence) is found everywhere, the Torah enables Jews to apprehend G-d’s holiness in “concentrated spaces,” so to speak, such as Jerusalem, then, in a further concentration, in the Temple, and ultimately in the utmost concentration, the Holy of Holies, the *Kodesh ha-Kadoshim*. This is the essence of the verse, “And they shall make me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell amongst them.”<sup>12</sup> The accentuation of God’s holiness in the First and Second Temples is found today—albeit in reduced intensity—in the synagogue, and will be found once again in full with the building of the Third Temple.

The aforementioned precepts of Jewish reunification, Jewish sovereignty in Israel, and the building of the Third Temple together serve as the foundation for the fourth, and perhaps chief, component of the Messianic era: the reinstatement of the



Torah as the arbiter of Jewish law on a national level.<sup>13</sup> This will be enabled by the reinstatement of the Sanhedrin—an action only the Messiah can take—who would henceforth head the Jewish court system. Christians, however, have a different perception of the Torah’s relevance. Just as the Christians viewed themselves as relieved of the Torah laws after Jesus’ original appearance, they certainly do not anticipate being bound to those laws after his “second coming.”<sup>14</sup>

After taking the important step of highlighting what Judaism does believe, it is equally important to outline what Judaism does not believe. While Christianity believes in Jesus as the redeemer, Judaism—in brief and simple terms—never accepted this. An underlying reason for this rejection is that Jesus’ existence did not lead to the manifestation of the aforementioned four Messianic objectives. As a matter of fact, not a single one was realized. This reality underscores another fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity regarding the Messiah. Judaism believes that if an alleged Messiah does not guide the Jewish nation to the realization of the four goals of Jewish reunification, Jewish sovereignty, the third Temple, and Torah law, he is not the Messiah.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Christianity sees Jesus as the Messiah even in the aftermath of his death, and believes that he will

have a “second coming”. Judaism, in contrast, believes the Messiah will help achieve these goals prior to his death, and if his death precedes this achievement, he is, once again, not the



Messiah.<sup>16</sup> Judaism does not believe in “second comings.”

A further crucial distinction lies in how the role of the Messiah is defined. A common perception is that the status of the Messiah in Christianity and Judaism is analogous. Meaning, Jesus is to Christianity what Mashiah ben David is to Judaism. As the late Professor Frank Talmage noted, this is mistaken.. Jesus has been elevated to the role of the divine in Christian belief. He is on equal footing with God—his word is God’s word. Thus, Jesus is to Christianity what the Torah—God’s spoken word to the Jewish people—is to Judaism. This is a function Judaism does not see in the Messiah. The Messiah will have no divine status and consequently no capacity to modify the Torah’s directives as we know them. Rather, as stated previously, his role is to bring about the fulfillment of the four objectives as God’s *human* messenger.

Another key difference lies in how Jesus is meant to relate to the individual Christian. According to Christian doctrine, Jesus has the ability to effectuate forgiveness and salvation for any individual who professes belief in his function as Messiah and savior. This is a power Judaism does not

invest in the Messiah, and in fact, the notion is entirely foreign to the Jewish religion. Even G-d Himself does not grant forgiveness simply on the basis that a Jew believes in Him. Without

active repentance by the sinner—and in the event of interpersonal offenses, appeasement of one’s friend in addition—forgiveness is not granted.<sup>17</sup>

With the above theological and philosophical concepts in mind, one notices a divergence on the practical level between Judaism and Christianity as to the Messiah’s ultimate purpose. Broadly

speaking, Christianity sees its Messiah—Jesus—nearly as an end unto itself, a walk-off homerun. The very notion, or promise, of his existence is of supreme consequence. For example, with his revelation there apparently will no longer remain a need for the Temple, since all that one would hope to achieve through Temple services can simply be done by acknowledging Jesus’ position. Accordingly, the ideas of the individual serving God through his actions, as well as the need for a communal approach to God, lose significance. Ostensibly, even if one isolates himself and does nothing all day aside from taking a minute to profess his belief in Jesus, he has served God in an optimal fashion. The meaning of introspection, self-improvement, and behavioral change are also devalued, for no amount of growth in those areas can surpass the salvation one attains with belief in Jesus. On the national level, too, the existence of Jesus is

an end unto itself. There is no concept of an ideal national society or national institutions; only a collective belief in Jesus, a belief which Christians believe will ultimately become the possession of every human.

Judaism’s belief system could hardly paint a starker contrast. As Rabbi Menachem Leibtag points out, Jews, with the coming of Messiah, will find themselves only at first base.<sup>18</sup> The Messiah will establish the groundwork necessary to build the ideal Jewish society, but it will remain up to human endeavor to complete and sustain that building. As described above, the arrival of the Messiah will enable the rebuilding of the Temple and the reinstatement of Jewish sovereignty and Jewish law. Beyond these steps, though, he will restore respect to the poor, judging them with righteousness.<sup>19</sup>

For practicing religious Jews, whose primary service of G-d is through action, it is the concrete results the Messiah will bring that are most important, practically speaking. Unlike Christians, our service of G-d in the Messianic era will continue to be primarily through actions, the *mitsvot*. The superiority of the Messianic era lies not in the glory of the Messiah himself, but in his enabling the Jewish nation to establish a society grounded in Torah ideals and his enabling individual Jews to fulfill all the *mitsvot*, especially those dependent on living in the Land of Israel and on the Temple’s existence. With this blueprint, the Jewish nation will finally have all the tools it needs to be “a light unto the nations,”<sup>20</sup> and to at last carry out the ideal “way of G-d,” one of “doing charity and justice.”<sup>21</sup> This aspect of the redemption is left in



the hands of every Jew—as well as the Jewish collective—to execute. They will bring the ultimate fulfillment of a redeemed world.<sup>22</sup> *Chaim Goldberg is currently a sophomore in YC.*

(Endnotes)

- 1 I would like to extend a personal thanks to Dr. David Berger who helped solidify my thoughts on this issue.
- 2 Avot 2:14

- 3 “Christian beliefs” in this article refers to classical Catholic doctrine.
- 4 Isaiah 11:12, Ezekiel 37:21
- 5 Sanhedrin 91b
- 6 Ezekiel 37:22, 24
- 7 Laws of Kings 11:1
- 8 <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=7919>
- 9 ibid
- 10 Ibid 12:3
- 11 [catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible\\_chapter=21](http://catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible_chapter=21)

- 12 Exodus 25:8
- 13 Isaiah 2:3, Maimonides—Laws of Kings 11:1
- 14 <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2103.htm#3>
- 15 Maimonides 12:4
- 16 Ibid
- 17 Yoma 85b
- 18 Personal Communication
- 19 Isaiah 11:4
- 20 Isaiah 49:6
- 21 Genesis 18:19

22 All information about Christian eschatology was culled from the official Catholic encyclopedia found at [www.catholic.org/encyclopedia](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia) and an article, “Christian Eschatology,” on [www.princeton.edu](http://www.princeton.edu).

## A Closer Look at the Legacy of Shabbetai Tzvi

BY: MICHAL SCHECHTER

On September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1666, a man named Shabbetai Tzvi was arrested and subsequently thrown into prison by the Turkish Sultan. The most infamous false Messiah of the middle ages, and possibly in all of Jewish history, Shabbetai Tzvi was widely believed by many Jews to be the chosen

Messiah. Several months later, Shabbetai Tzvi was given two choices by the Sultan: torture followed by execution or conversion to Islam. He chose the latter, causing at first disbelief, and then widespread anguish and distress throughout Eastern European and Mediterranean Jewry. Ten years later, he died alone in exile, never to bring about the ultimate redemption for the Jewish people. How did this eccentric figure become so confident of his Divine appointment

and abilities to end the centuries long exile of the Jewish people? How was he able to attract such a large following

despite his odd and anti-traditional behavior?

Shabbetai Tzvi was born in Smyrna, in the Ottoman Empire, in the year 1626. In his book, *History of the Jews*, the famous Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz explains that Shabbetai Tzvi came from a rather typical background, received a traditional education and learned



SABETHA SEBI  
Verrijcyn den Meilias Der Ioden

Talmud in his community’s Yeshiva. As he grew, he was eventually exposed to the Zohar, and found his true calling in Kabbalah. Shabbetai Tzvi was especially attracted to the teachings of Isaac Luria, and led a life of asceticism, which included daily mortification of his body and long periods of time in solitude. His intense study of Kabbalah, a s c e t i c

lifestyle, and beautiful voice attracted a number of members of his community to follow him until he had a small

circle of faithful disciples.<sup>1</sup>

According to many historians, Shabbetai Tzvi seems to have suffered from bipolar disorder. During his manic episodes, he would violate

***Persecutions in Poland left Jewish Poles in a state of great suffering, and the Chmielnicki pogroms ravaged the Jewish communities of Ukraine... By the time Shabbetai Tzvi announced that he was the Messiah, many Jews were prepared to believe him and become his devoted followers.***

Jewish teachings, and perform strange and disturbing acts.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Graetz writes that Shabbetai Tzvi frequently engaged in antinomian behavior, rejecting traditionally accepted rules and standards. More than once, he publicly violated Kashrut and Shabbat laws. According to Luria, who was deeply revered by Shabbetai Tzvi, the Jewish Messiah would be a pious man, possess an immaculate soul, and have a deep connection to the world of spirits. For Shabbetai Tzvi, this may have served as a satisfying elucidation for his bizarre behavior, for it meant that his craziness was due to the fact that he was the Messiah and that he was connected to a secret, mysterious world. After Shabbetai Tzvi revealed himself to his followers as the Jewish

Messiah, he and his adherents were put under *herem* by the community’s rabbinic leaders and then later banished from Smyrna.

The self-proclaimed Messiah wandered around the Ottoman Empire gathering a large group of supporters. He continued to perform strange acts, including an episode in which he married a *sefer* Torah. The turning point of Shabbetai Tzvi’s Messianic career came when he traveled to Jerusalem. As Graetz explains, he there met a man named Nathan of Gaza, and the two formed a close friendship. Soon after meeting each other, Nathan of Gaza announced that he was Elijah the Prophet and that Shabbetai Tzvi was to be the Jewish Messiah. He sent news of this to many Jewish communities and circulated outlandish stories and fantastical details about the powers of Shabbetai Tzvi. According to Nathan of Gaza, Shabbetai Tzvi would soon go before the Turkish Sultan himself and take the crown from him. Perhaps fueled by psychological imbalance, and spurred on by the faith of Nathan of Gaza, Shabbetai Tzvi became entrenched in his view of himself as the long-awaited Messiah. Perhaps more surprisingly, many Jews were very receptive to these false prophecies, and almost immediately accepted Shabbetai Tzvi as the long awaited Messiah. Especially in Jerusalem and its neighboring communities, those who rejected Shabbetai Tzvi were scorned by his believers, known as Sabbateans.<sup>3</sup>



NATHAN LEVI VAN GAZA  
Prophet van den Ioodischen Meilias

Looking back, historians question why Shabbetai Tzvi was so readily accepted as the Messiah by so many Jews. Throughout Jewish history there were many people who declared themselves to be the Savior of the Jewish people, yet were shunned and did not gain a large following. Why should the story of Shabbetai Tzvi be any different?

The majority of historians claim that the success of Shabbetai Tzvi’s messianic campaign was due to the fact that it emerged after a very tumultuous time in Jewish history. Dr. Jacob Barnai explains that the Jews had suffered centuries of oppression and persecution at the hands of their Gentile rulers, and so they were eager to believe that the Messiah had finally come. Persecutions in Poland left Jewish Poles in a state of great suffering, and the Chmielnicki pogroms ravaged the Jewish communities of Ukraine. The Jewish community was left wondering if God really cared about His people, and started searching for the deeper meaning of their exile. By the time Shabbetai Tzvi announced that he was the Messiah, many

Jews were prepared to believe him and become his devoted followers. These Jews turned to the leadership of Shabbetai Tzvi, thinking that he would provide for them the solution to their problems.<sup>4</sup>

In any event, Nathan of Gaza’s stories permeated through many communities and continued to spread. The Sabbatean movement burst forth, sweeping the Jewish world into a Messianic frenzy. By the time Shabbetai Tzvi returned to his hometown, the people of Smyrna were eagerly awaiting him, and immediately accepted him as the true redeemer. The ban pronounced on him fifteen years earlier by the community’s rabbis was conveniently forgotten. Exaggerated stories of his miracles continued to spread throughout the Jewish world, and many took mere rumors to

be absolute truths. With increasing support, Shabbetai Tzvi started to engage in more antinomian behavior, and he proclaimed that the mourning period for the *galut* had ended.

When Shabbetai Tzvi eventually went to the Turkish authorities to obtain the royal crown, they remained unconvinced of his powers and threw him into prison. With the Jewish community in such a state of unrest, the Turkish authorities decided to keep him in prison for several months while they deliberated on how best to handle the false Messiah and the fervor that he was creating. Dr. Heinrich Graetz relates how Shabbetai Tzvi’s followers took his imprisonment as a positive sign, and viewed it as a step closer to redemption. While Shabbetai Tzvi was in prison, the Messianic craze only intensified. Hungarian Jews unthatched their roofs in preparation for the end of *galut*, and the Jews in Amsterdam prepared to sell their homes. In Hamburg, one could walk into a synagogue and see all members of the community, including very respectable and dignified men,

dancing and jumping in jubilation over the coming redemption. Prayers for Shabbetai Tzvi were recited in many synagogues, and all the congregants were forced to reply Amen. Shabbetai Tzvi’s many followers exalted him to such a state until they considered him to be almost a god in his own right. It remains unclear whether Shabbetai Tzvi truly viewed himself as a deity, or whether he simply followed what his disciples led him to believe was

***Neither the rabbis nor the Jewish populations at large were able to put a stop to the Sabbatean fever. Instead, the Ottoman Sultan decided to put a stop to Shabbetai Tzvi’s influence and forced him to choose death or conversion to Islam.***

the truth.

Heinrich Graetz also explains that the Sabbatean movement greatly undermined Jewish rabbinic authority. Generally speaking, the learned population and scholarly rabbis were against the Sabbatean messianic movement and were appalled at the radical changes taking place in the community. However, there were few Jews who were willing to listen to them, and many rabbis felt powerless in the wake of the new messianic craze.

In the end, neither the Rabbis nor the Jewish populations at large were able to put a stop to the Sabbatean fever. Instead, the Ottoman Sultan decided to put a stop to Shabbetai Tzvi’s influence and forced him to choose death or conversion to Islam. The false Messiah chose to convert to Islam, and placed a turban on his head. Initially, Shabbetai Tzvi’s believers refused to accept the news, as they could not believe that they had been deceived in such a terrible manner. Eventually the reality of his conversion to Islam set

in. His followers were badly shaken and deeply ashamed. Shabbetai Tzvi’s rejection of Judaism and conversion to Islam sparked a great crisis in the Jewish community, and plunged many of his former adherents into a great depression. It took many years for the Jews to recover from the messianic craze that Shabbetai Tzvi brought about.<sup>5</sup>

Shabbetai Tzvi’s legacy continues to linger until today. Dr. Graetz relates that at the time of his conversion, Nathan of Gaza announced in a fit of desperation that Shabbetai Tzvi’s conversion to Islam was part of the grand Messianic plan. A few hundred of his followers, in order to show their support, outwardly converted to Islam, but secretly continued to practice Sabbateanism. Long after the disappearance of their charismatic leader, these *Donmeh*, still exist in Turkey today, numbering about 4,000 individuals. The persecutions which primed the Jews to accept Shabbetai Tzvi have long passed, and have been replaced with new sufferings. And yet, these *Donmeh* faithfully continue to await the return of Shabbatai Tzvi, the self-proclaimed Messiah, to finally bring about their long awaited redemption.<sup>6</sup>

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(Endnotes)

- 1 Graetz, Heinrich. “Spinoza and Sabbatai Zevi.” *History of the Jews*. Vol. 5. Jewish Publication Society, 1895. 118-21.
- 2 Soltes, Ori. *Mysticism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Searching for Oneness*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2009. 236.
- 3 Graetz, 122-33.
- 4 Barnai, Jacob. “The Outbreak of Sabbateanism—the Eastern European Factor.” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1995): 171-83.
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- 6 Graetz, 209-11.

# An Interview with Ruth Guggenheim, Executive Director Jews for Judaism

By: ATARA SIEGEL

Ruth Guggenheim serves as the executive director for Jews for Judaism, an anti-missionary organization active on college campuses and in the wider Jewish community

AS: Can you tell us a little about the history and mission of Jews for Judaism?

RG: Jews for Judaism was founded 30 years ago and began predominantly as a response to the growing Hebrew Christian movement and missionary groups specifically targeted at Jews. Nowadays both Jews and non-Jews usually use the term Messianic Jews to describe these groups, but we prefer to use the term Hebrew Christian to indicate that while these people

**Pluralism has its place in our society. However, deception never has a place.**

may have been born Jews, they are Christian in their belief system. To give them the title “Messianic Jews” gives credence to their claim that they are an identifiable arm within the Jewish community.

While Jews for Judaism started in a reactive mode to these spiritual predators, over the years, we’ve also become more proactive, empowering Jews to know more about what the Jewish faith system is. Most Jews who are receptive to missionizing are really searching for something they perceive to be missing in the Jewish faith system.

Jews for Judaism focuses on researching and monitoring of evangelist groups targeting Jews. We bring this information to larger community, and additionally work on a one-on one basis with individuals looking for a relationship with God who have become caught up in these movements. We also work on educational programs for high school students, youth groups and college campuses. Our office in Baltimore has

begun working on an exciting new by kids for kids leadership project, the LEAP, Leadership Empowerment and Achievement project, aimed at harnessing the power of social media as a venue where kids can share their passion for Judaism with other kids.

AS: Do you do most of your work on College Campuses?

RG: We really work both on and beyond college campuses. When missionary groups come in and target Jews in a specific community, we will work with the community’s federation to help raise awareness of these groups and their tactics. For example, Tom Cantor’s group, Restoration Israel, recently recruited volunteers dressed like Orthodox Jews to visit homes, and ask residents questions about their Judaism and their relationship with Israel. Currently, the Chosen People ministry, one of the largest and most well-funded Hebrew Christian groups in world, is currently opening an outreach center in the heart of Flatbush. If you follow what they’ve done over the past years, they’ve now become confident about reaching even Orthodox Jews and Hasidic Jews, and are designing their center in Flatbush to look like any other *kiruv* organization, with a *Yeshivah* and *Beit Midrash*. This is the type of activity these organizations are now involved in. We



also are active on college campuses. For example, around *Chanukkah* time, a husband and wife Hebrew Christian couple came to the University of Maryland, and began handing out

*latkes* and *sufganiyot* to Jewish students, aiming to form connections with them. We were able to alert the staff at Hillel and other Jewish organizations on campus so that they could make their students aware of what was going on, and could contact interfaith organizations to have these type of deceptive activities condemned.

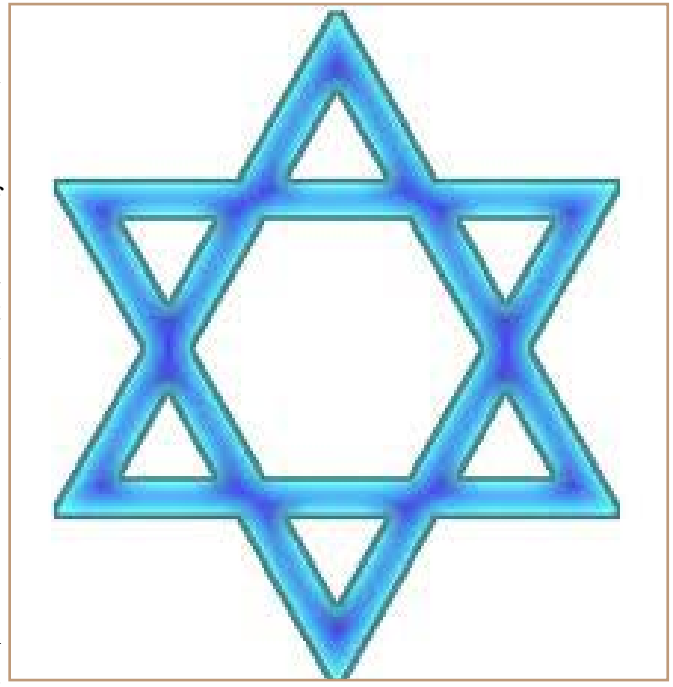
AS: What are some common missionary claims or tactics, and how do you try to refute them?

RG: Deception. They are notorious for deception. They are extremely confident in their capacity to deceive the average Jew. We need to do our part and raise awareness among the Jewish community that not everything you hear is authentic Judaism. To be frank, these Hebrew Christian groups are very well organized on social media and with their friendship evangelism

campaigns, and we can’t keep up. AS: What would you say to people who say that groups like Jews for Jesus have a right to put their ideas out there, and people’s decisions to join them is

simply a matter of individual choice?

RG: Pluralism has its place in our society. However, deception never has a place. Judaism and Christianity are



two separate faiths. Christianity very consciously broke off from Judaism and developed separate traditions and theology. Everyone would have to accept the fact that Christianity evolved, developing

the belief that after Jesus they are no longer bound by the *mitsvot* and the so-called Old Testament. To all of a sudden begin to engage in them again two thousand years later is deception. Pluralism has its place, but you cannot lie to other people.

AS: How big of a problem are missionary groups as opposed to assimilation?

RG: It goes hand in glove with assimilation. The less engaged a Jew is, the more vulnerable he is to any type of outreach. At all points of our lives, we are all looking for different things, we are all “searchers.” The human condition dictates that we have to have something to hold on to, and many of us find that through a relationship with God. If someone gives us that feeling, and acts like a Jewish role model, that is very powerful. Hebrew Christians will explain that they grew up Jewish, but didn’t feel the spirituality, didn’t feel anything in *shul* on *Rosh Hashanah* or *Yom Kippur*, until they found *Yeshua*. When people are not engaged Jewishly, anyone can become a target for missionary. Statistically speaking, over the past 25 years, approximately 350, 000 Jewishly born Americans

have chosen to engage in Christianity in some form. Some say the numbers should be closer to 500, 000. We tend to believe the numbers are on the lower end, and one of the reasons we are hesitant with the numbers is that often you have people calling themselves Hebrew Christians who are not in any way

shape or form Jewish. For example, one young lady I am working with is going through a Jewish conversion. Her father was born Jewish and her mother was not, but she and her three siblings were all raised to call themselves “Messianic Jews”, even though halakhically they were not Jews at all.

AS: Going to school at Yeshiva University, students are mostly

**Sometimes we build our own barriers, to our detriment, and we are never really giving out or projecting to other people.**

## Zionism and Israel, Exile and Redemption in the Thought and Deed of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson

By: ELISHA PEARL

I.

The dawn of Jewish history was not characterized by a philosophical imperative or ordinary deed. Instead, our beginnings were characterized by a destination. God’s first commandment to Avraham is a charge to travel, to “Go forth for yourself from your land, to the land which I shall show you.”<sup>1</sup> When the Jewish nation proper appears, while in exile in the land of Egypt, they too have a destination that will constitute their “ascent from the poverty of Egypt,”<sup>2</sup> they too are headed towards that same land that God commanded Avraham to settle centuries earlier. The nation’s travels in the desert mark the beginning of their journey to that Land. The final stanza of the legal revelation at Sinai discusses entry into the Land.<sup>3</sup> The Land of Israel, that destination, seems central to the formation and identity of the Jewish people. They may leave the land, but always, they return.

This tension between being in the land and traveling toward it has pulled on the Jewish people from Avraham’s time until today. In the modern era, the Jewish people’s return to Israel and their subsequent creation of a sovereign state raise the thought of Messianic redemption. After all, the accounts of redemption mentioned in the Torah are intimately related to the land of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Any Jewish ideology or thinker is then challenged to

respond to the modern state of Israel and assess to what extent it is related to redemption, to the Messianic era. In the broadest sense, salvation, relationship with God, and redemption all seem somewhat intertwined with this land. What is so unique about this land? What is its significance? Why is it considered the arbiter of exile and redemption?

Perhaps more than any Jewish leader in history, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, popularly known as “the Rebbe,” had this explicit agenda at the focal point of his leadership: That the Jewish people be *redeemed*; in his locution, “with the true and complete redemption, by way of our righteous Messiah, in a moment, immediately, literally, and in our time.”<sup>5</sup> Perforce, we must consider, what was the Rebbe’s conception of The Land of Israel? How did he view the concepts of *galut* and *ge’ulah*? What role does the Land of Israel play in answering these cosmic questions of Jewish destiny? What might the Modern State of Israel have to do with these issues?

II. Mission

On Ten *Shevat* 5711 (January 17, 1951) the Rebbe delivered his inaugural address as the seventh leader of the Chabad movement.<sup>6</sup> In this address, entitled “*Basi le-Gani*” the Rebbe set forth the vision that would guide his agenda for the next forty-one

years of his leadership. In this address, he ignores both the land and state of Israel entirely, or so it would seem. Instead, the Rebbe develops the idea that this generation<sup>7</sup> has the mystical status of the “seventh generation...

unaffected by missionaries directly. What do you see as our role in interacting with missionary groups? RG: As people who have a very strong Jewish education and background, you owe it to *klal yisrael* to go out, and reach out to your fellow Jews, to be an *or lagoyim*. Sometimes we build our own barriers, to our detriment, and we are never really giving out or projecting to other people. Young people often become disillusioned, because of

**The focus is on personal exile, which is thought of as distance from God, effected through sin. Redemption is transcendence of the sin and reconnection to God.**

who are found in the *Ikveta di-Meshika, bi-siyuma di-ikveta*,<sup>8</sup> (“in the footsteps of the Messiah, at the very end of the footsteps”- that is, the Messianic redemption is imminent) and its task is to complete the [act of] drawing down the *Shekhinah* (God’s Divine Presence)... into the lower realms specifically.” This act is the ultimate purpose of creation, and its fulfillment ushers in the Messianic era. The Rebbe continued to explain that the resting place of the *Shekhinah* in the lower realms is “each and every individual of Israel.” That is, the Jewish people are bearers of the *Shekhinah*, and when they act righteously, they effect an indwelling of God’s presence within the physical world.<sup>9</sup>

III. Exile

In much of his inaugural address

these unnecessary barriers. Most Hebrew Christians we work with, the average people we meet are truly just individuals looking for meaning. The more you can go out and engage other Jews with your knowledge, the better chance we have to keep Jews Jewish.

the Rebbe speaks at length about “bringing the *Shekhinah* into the world.” Clearly then, the *Shekhinah* is currently absent, and if so, it would appear that the *Shekhinah*’s bearers, the Jewish people, are in some way not fulfilling their duty. The question becomes, why have the Jewish people failed thus far in their divine mission, and how can they ultimately “draw the *Shekhinah* down into the lower realms.” To answer this question, we must first understand the concept of exile in Chabad *Hasidut*.

Much of Chabad’s foundational philosophical text, the *Tanya*<sup>10</sup> is devoted to a discussion of exile and redemption. Indeed, one way to view the entirety of the *Tanya* is that it is a guidebook to *personal* spiritual redemption. Although, the word “exile” is common throughout the *Tanya*, Messianic redemption and Israel are not the work’s central focus. The focus is on *personal* exile, which is thought of as distance from God, effected through sin. Redemption is transcendence of the sin and reconnection to God. This approach transforms the general conception of exile from one that focuses on a physical reality to a spiritual one, and redemption from a focus on national return to the land of Israel to a focus on a personal relationship with God. It takes redemption out of a far off eschatological context and allows redemption to take place immediately

within the life of the individual. When the Jewish people collectively undergo personal redemption, the aggregate effect is a general redemption of the Jewish people and the world.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the work's focus on the individual Jew, the Alter Rebbe does discuss Jewish national exile in two places in the Tanya. There he explains exile from Israel within the context of the Kabbalistic "*Sod Galut ha-Shekhinah*"<sup>12</sup> (the mystery of the exile of the *Shekhinah*) as follows:

"[Exile occurs when we] fall into the forces of evil, which is the mystery of the *Shekhinah* in exile, as our Rabbis, of blessed memory state, 'When [the Israelites] were exiled into Edom, the *Shekhinah* went with them.' That is to say, when a person practices the acts of 'Edom' he degrades and brings down the Divine spark [that is The *Shekhinah* into Edom]"<sup>13</sup>

"The cause of the exile is as our sages, of blessed memory, said: 'They were exiled to Babylon, and the *Shekhinah* went with them.'<sup>14</sup> The Alter Rebbe continues to explain that by living a life of "mundane matters and worldly desires, which are referred to as 'Babylon'" one enters exile as he shifts his identity "the innermost point of the heart" into exile.

*Sod Galut ha-Shekhinah* is based on an early *Midrashic* concept which states that wherever the Jewish people are in exile, the *Shekhinah* accompanies them.<sup>16</sup> Simply, this *Midrash* can be understood as an allegorical emphasis of God's mercy on the Jewish people, that though He exiles them, He does not forsake them. He is still with them, and even, as it were, bears their suffering with them. The Alter Rebbe reveals that the deeper meaning of this homily is that the Jews are the cause of the *Shekhinah's* exile. The Jew is the bearer of God's presence in this world. Should a Jew perform acts of "Edom" or "Babylon" then he or she causes the *Shekhinah* to be exiled from the world. This is no magical or supernatural concept. Given that Torah and *mitsvot* are Hashem's will, fulfilling them causes Hashem's will to be revealed in this world. Conversely,

if Torah and *mitsvot* are not fulfilled, God's will, and hence revelation, is not manifest in the world in a practical sense, and therefore exiled. In Chabad philosophy, corporeal entities are by nature a reflection of higher metaphysical truths, and, conversely, metaphysical truths are reflected within the corporeal. It follows then, that if the corporeal reality is such that the Jewish people are engaged in acts of "Babylon" and "Edom," the metaphysical reality is such that the Jewish people, and hence, the *Shekhinah*, are found in Babylon and Edom. Should the Jewish people perform acts of Babylon or Edom while in the physical land of Israel, they will soon actually find themselves in these foreign lands. The modern exile of the Jewish people then, is a reflection of their of the fact that they are in a state of spiritual exile.<sup>17</sup>

Although Chabad philosophy accepts the traditional orientation that *galut* is a punishment for sin, at some level, it is the Jewish people who exile themselves. God, in donning his attribute of stern judgment, simply decrees that the temporal reality reflect the metaphysical one, instead of allowing the Jewish people to live a false reality supported by God's abundant mercies.

#### IV. The Land of Israel

If Edom and Babylon are temporal representations of metaphysical evil, then we have found a key to understanding

what the land of Israel is. By this logic, "Israel" is not primarily a temporal destination, but rather a destiny.<sup>18</sup> That is to say, "Israel" is a metaphysical reality. This reality may then be reflected in physical reality as the temporal land of Israel. In a dictum often cited by Rabbi

Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Rebbe of Chabad) explains, "the land of Israel is [a] disclosure of divinity [*giluy Elokut*] by means of involvement with the Torah and worship of the heart."<sup>19</sup> *Erets Yisrael*, then, is primarily Torah and *mitsvot*, and the temporal Israel is supposed to be a reflection of those values.

Although the physical land of Israel is meant to be the model of God's revelation on earth through fulfillment of the Torah and *mitsvot* by the Jewish people, it would seem that God's revelation in all earthly things need not only apply to the land of Israel. The Rebbe strongly emphasized this point, quoting the Rabbinic adage "*atida Erets Yisrael she-titpashet al kol ha-olam kulo*"<sup>20</sup> ("In the [Messianic] future, the Land of Israel shall spread to the world in its entirety"<sup>21</sup>) throughout his writings and teachings.

Chabad philosophy teaches that this statement is a description of the way in which the Messianic reality will come to be. As the *Tzemach Tzedek* directed his followers "*aseh kan*



*Erets Yisrael*,"<sup>22</sup> "make here the land of Israel," emphasizing the idea that every place in the world can be made into Israel by studying Torah and performing *mitsvot* there. As the Rebbe put it "The matter of the land of Israel is to make physical things a vehicle for divinity, and therefore, entry into the land, in the spiritual sense can

be achieved even outside of the land. ["Make here Israel" means that] in any place within which one is found, he must make of the physical things a vehicle for the holy"<sup>23</sup>

The Rebbe summarized his vision of Israel quite succinctly in the following comments:

Since the Children of Israel are similar to the land of Israel, it is within their power to make of the whole world the land of Israel, that is, to make all the physical matters around them vehicles for divinity a sanctuary for his [God's] residence... With this we may understand the statement of our sages 'Israel is destined to spread forth to all lands' which, on the face of it, is unclear. Given that all matters of the future [the Messianic end time] come [to pass] through the service [*avodah*] of the time of exile, and if this is the case, what is the service whereby which in the future *Eretz Yisrael* will spread to all lands? The explanation is that the service of the children of Israel during the *galut* is to make of the entire world the land of Israel in the spiritual sense, and by way of this in the future 'the land of Israel is destined to spread in all lands in the physical sense'"<sup>24</sup>

If we understand the directive "make here Israel," as a guiding principle of the Rebbe's Messianic vision, then the Rebbe's activism becomes clearer. The "army" of the Rebbe's *shelukhim* are *Tsevat Hashem*<sup>25</sup> (God's armies) engaged in a spiritual *kibbush Erets Yisrael*, conquest of the land of Israel. Their goal is to make the part of the world to which they are sent "Israel."<sup>26</sup> The wars of Hashem can be fought on the platforms of Grand Central Station just as they can be fought on the dunes of the Sinai Desert. Furthermore, the Rebbe's policy of moral outreach to gentiles makes sense in this context. The Jewish people are charged to redeem the world, thus we must enlighten non-Jews such that they too may enter the redemptive state of "*Erets Yisrael*." The Rebbe's Messianic vision of *Erets Yisrael* is one that encompasses every person.

It is clear that the Rebbe saw *Erets Yisrael* primarily as a redeemed state of being, rather than as a physical location. Jewish destiny hinges on Israel not because of its geographic location or any magical qualities associated with it, but rather because of what Israel represents. In this respect, the Rebbe's mission statement in his inaugural address "to create a dwelling place for Hashem in the lower realms" is precisely the same as his directive to "make here Israel." And indeed the Rebbe conflates the two directives in some places. In this vein, the Rebbes of Chabad understood journeys to the land of Israel in *Tanakh* as journeys of redemptive consciousness, primarily as journeys towards spiritual redemption rather than physical location.

For the Rebbe, *Mashiah* will come as a result of the Jewish people's efforts. For the Jewish people to be redeemed, they must take the initiative and bring about spiritual redemption in the world. This explains, to some extent, the Rebbe's Messianic agitation. The Jewish people are entrusted with the task of redeeming themselves and the world. Unlike in other Jewish eschatological philosophies, the redemption has not already conclusively begun, nor is the redemption something that God will miraculously bring, whilst the Jewish people engage in Torah study and *mitsvah* observance in the context of their insular communities. The Jewish people have a mandate to actively draw God's presence into the world, and then God will bring the Messianic redemption. Or perhaps it is not God who will respond, it is we who will be responding to His call to bring the Messianic redemption. The Rebbe's constant refrain that *Mashiakh* is almost here seems to be intuitively true given the cataclysmic events of the past century, but *Mashiakh* will not come on his own, we must bring him.<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, the Rebbe's conception of the land of Israel seems radical. Israel is a land after all, not a state of mind or Torah and *mitsvot*. Yet, on further reflection, it is difficult to envision

state of being, rather than as a physical location. Jewish destiny hinges on Israel not because of its geographic location or any magical qualities associated with it, but rather because of what Israel represents. In this respect, the Rebbe's mission statement in his inaugural address "to create a dwelling place for Hashem in the lower realms" is precisely the same as his directive to "make here Israel." And indeed the Rebbe conflates the two directives in some places. In this vein, the Rebbes of Chabad understood journeys to the land of Israel in *Tanakh* as journeys of redemptive consciousness, primarily as journeys towards spiritual redemption rather than physical location.

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place he or she is presently located in "*Erets Yisrael*." This would then hasten the true redemption. The Rebbe argued that relocation to Israel was not inherently an act of spiritual elevation, it smacked of escapism, for one could well enter Israel while they are in an exilic state, and change nothing internally.<sup>31</sup> The Rebbe wrote: "If indeed we wish to travel to Israel, the single way [in which to accomplish this is] to rectify 'because of our sins'<sup>32</sup>... through the removal of the filth, we hasten the general redemption, and therefore also the personal journey to Israel."<sup>33</sup>

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### *The Jew is the bearer of God's presence in this world. Should a Jew perform acts of "Edom" or "Babylon" then the he or she causes the Shekhinah to be exiled from the world.*

Israel as nothing more than a physical destination. In R. Soleveitchik's terms, a land that is inherently sacred without qualification, "smacks of fetishism."<sup>35</sup> The land of Israel is a destination to be reached through fulfillment of our national destiny. The Rebbe offers us two practical lessons here that are of paramount importance. Firstly, the redemption is not a faraway, unattainable concept; it is something that we can choose to bring with specific acts. Secondly, soulful American Jews need not necessarily feel as if they are shirking their religious obligation by remaining in the diaspora. By fulfilling their mandate to make their homes and communities in the diaspora "Israel" they actively bring the Messianic future wherein "Israel is destined to spread to all lands" into the present.

#### VI. Postscript

Two issues in the above treatment of Israel in the Rebbe's thought might strike some as philosophically troubling.

It might appear that the Rebbe holds an anti-halakhic conception of Israel: Kabbalistic systems speak of "ideal" (*pnimiyut*) and "real" (*hitsoniyut*) states. Everything in this world is said to be a representation of a metaphysical ideal. But the metaphysical ideal's existence does not replace reality. So while every *mitsvah* is representative of an abstract ideal, the ideal never replaces performance of the deed. While the land of Israel is presented here as an idea, more than a place, the Rebbe never gave up the idea of returning to the actual physical land of Israel. The Jewish people will one day return to the land of Israel forever. When they do though, the hope is that they will have elevated the entire world to a higher state of Godly existence.<sup>36</sup>

The Rebbe's opinions might sound like anti-Zionism: While to the casual observer, the Rebbe's

position on the Modern State of Israel may appear similar to that of the Satmar Rebbe (R. Yoel Teitelbaum)'s position in his anti-Zionist polemic *Al ha-Ge'ula ve-al ha-Temurah*, on further reflection it is clear that such a comparison is unfounded. Whereas the Satmar Rebbe saw in the Six-Day War "the force of Satan and his soldiers"<sup>37</sup> the Rebbe saw "open miracles from God... by way of the soldiers of the Israeli Defense Force."<sup>38</sup> Where the Satmar Rebbe saw the Holocaust and the creation of the state of Israel as one continuous Satanic act,<sup>39</sup> the Rebbe saw this process as a divine "*hitorerut le-ge'ulah*"<sup>40</sup> On a metaphysical level, the Satmar Rebbe held that building up the state effected a destruction of the metaphysical Israel.<sup>41</sup> The Rebbe saw no such destruction. He even encouraged further building in the state, especially the settlements over the green line, provided such building would create settlements of "Torah and *mitsvot*" for they were a "miraculous gift from God." The Rebbe may have believed that the gift of the Land of Israel was being used improperly, but that did not mean it was not a gift. In fact, the Rebbe's pragmatic attitude toward the state seems more comparable to that of R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, as the Rebbe encouraged and recognized the element of physical salvation in the state, but did not ascribe spiritual redemptive value to simply settling in Israel. Elliott Wolfson, a scholar of Jewish mysticism, puts it thus: "The Rebbe affirmed a religious Zionist ideology."<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to note that the Rebbe agitated against territorial concession, and had his followers in Israel take steps to thwart it, from financial backing to settler groups to electoral support for anti-concession parties. To this day, this policy has created a political alliance between *dati-leumi* ideological followers of R. Tzvi Yehuda Kook and the Chabad movement. If anything, there was one Jewish leader who was certain that the Rebbe was no anti-Zionist. The Satmar Rebbe attacked the Rebbe as a supporter of "the Zionist enterprise."<sup>43</sup>

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# Creative Arts

Images and information provided by the Yeshiva University Museum

## The Art of Hope

BY: MIRIAM RUBIN

Imagine someone who lived a century ago receiving a postcard from Jerusalem. She would probably receive that card with all the delight of one who has touched on the exotic, as one who has come as close as she may ever to Jerusalem. In that moment, the postcard represents the extent of her closeness to the place that that postcard has come from, and she longs for her distant homeland. This postcard becomes a taunt; in her hands she closely clutches the Western Wall or the city gates, yet no distance was ever as great. Perhaps through some miracle, she might see the real thing, but most likely, this postcard, slide, or photograph, will be the closest she will ever come to being in Jerusalem. For this person, living in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the difficulty, dangers, and expense of travel are almost insurmountable. She understands that it may be impossible to ever see Jerusalem.

Old postcards and glass lantern slides (premade slides used to project photos) from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jerusalem are particularly interesting because they represent the limited but increasing travel that occurred before the creation of the State of Israel. These postcards and slides were commercial keepsakes of travel, relatively mundane as far as artwork goes. Nonetheless, through the passage of time, these commercially produced items came to be looked at as artifacts that illuminate how a city was presented and viewed by the people who had travelled there.

The messianic hopes that were conjured with the increasing travel to

Israel seem similar to ideas developed by Gershom Scholem, Jewish theorist and philosopher of the 20th century, in his essay "The Messianic Idea in Judaism". In this essay, Scholem discusses differing opinions on the fundamental Jewish messianic belief. Scholem concludes with a discussion about the effects of Messianism, and how it relates to the 20th century return to Israel and the formation of the State. He writes:

"[...] For the Messianic idea is not only consolation and hope. Every attempt to realize it tears open the abysses which lead each of its manifestations *ad absurdum*. There is something grand about living in hope, but at the same time there is something profoundly unreal about it [...] Thus in Judaism the Messianic idea has compelled a *life lived in deferment*, in which nothing can be done definitively, nothing can be irrevocably accomplished [...] Precisely understood, there is nothing concrete which can be accomplished by the unredeemed [...] Jewish so called *Existenz* possesses a tension that never finds true release; it never burns itself out[...] Little wonder that overtones of Messianism have accompanied the modern Jewish readiness for

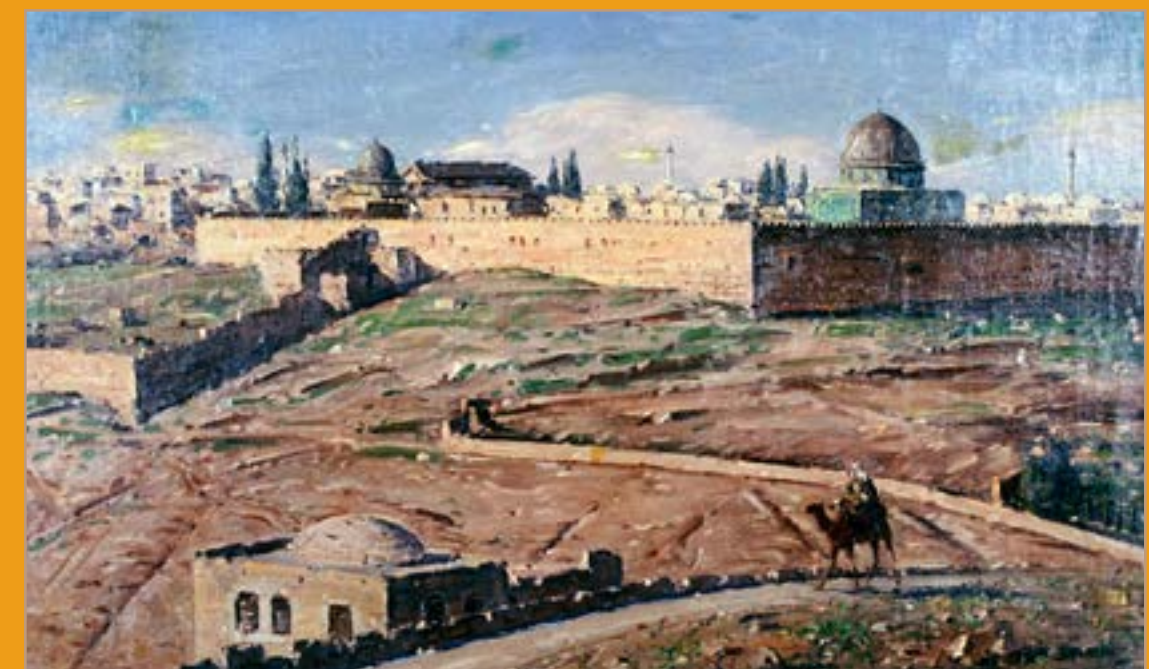
irrevocable action [...] when it set out on the utopian return to Zion [...]."<sup>1</sup>

According to Scholem, Jewish Messianism, though consolatory, also represents the unrealized redemption. Because Jewish Messianism centers on hope, it suggests the despair that breeds the hope for messianism. Therefore, Jewish Messianic hope is accompanied by the despair of exile, constantly reminiscent of the lack which pervades Jewish existence.

Furthermore, Messianic hope does not merely taunt the hopeful with visions of redemption, but to a certain degree, diminishes the value of the life spent in that hopeful, unredeemed state, because, as Scholem says, "there is nothing concrete which can be

its aspirations on life post-redemption, and in the interim between exile and redemption, there is a lack of completeness or accomplishment.

While Jewish reality possesses all the pains of the existence of the individual, the Jewish hope possesses all the grandness of the visions of redemption that man believes in. In that sense, the life of the unredeemed is a life on the edges of reality and grandness, between hope and despair. The divide between the reality and hope creates a tension that time does not mitigate. The longer history progresses without some redemption, the more highly stacked are those hopes, extending farther and farther from reality.



1985.040  
Panorama of Jerusalem  
Ludwig Blum (1891-1974)  
Oil on canvas  
Israel, mid 20th century  
Collection of Yeshiva University Museum  
The Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Collection

Here the Rebbe innovates an amplification of the term, "*bi-siyuma di-ikveta*" the end of the footsteps. This amplification is likely an extension of the sixth Rebbe's characterization of the 1940's as *Ikveta Di-Meshikha Mamash* "literally the footsteps of the Messiah." See Menakhem Brodt *Ha-Ma'arakha Al Hageula, "Ma'ayanotekha" Gilyon MeYuhad Li-regel Gimmel Tamuz* 32-36 (Hebrew).

9 Ibid. 31-32: Translation mine.  
10 In this essay, I follow the accepted theory in the Chabad movement that the Rebbe's works are to be understood in light of his predecessor's work, and that the Rebbe viewed his philosophy as an extension and application of that of his predecessors. See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, (New York; Chichester West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2009) p. 24 who advances the theory that for the "critical scholar, no less than the pious adept" the meaning of a later Rebbe's teaching in the Chabad dynasty's leadership may be illuminated by the teaching of an earlier Rebbe, and vice versa.

11 See Tanya IV:12 For a discussion of the distinction between individual and general redemption.  
12 See Tanya III:6.  
13 See Tanya I:17. Nissan Mindel, trans. *Likutei Amarim Tanya Bi-Lingual Edition* (Brooklyn, London: Kehot Publication Society, 1998) p. 73.  
14 See note xvi.  
15 Tanya IV:4; *ibid.* J.I. Schochet trans. p. 403.  
16 See *Mekhilta D'Rabbi Yishmael, Bo- Mesikhta D'Piskha Parsha 14 s.v. VaY'hi Miketz Shloshim Shana; Megilla 29a Sifrei Bamidbar Piska 161 s.v. V'Lo Titama et Ha'aretz.* among many others.  
17 See *Torat Chaim, Shemot I, 1a.*  
18 Here I am employing the distinction made by Rav Yosef Dov Solev-

eitshik. See Abraham R. Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav: Man of Faith in the Modern World* volume 2 (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1989) p. 70-72  
Clearly, Rav Soleveitchik does not share the metaphysical framework advanced by Chabad. Nonetheless, at the abstract level, this distinction fits well with the Rebbe's philosophy. Likely, this distinction is shared by all Torah allegiant thinkers. (My thanks to Adam Berman for calling this piece by the Rav to my attention).

19 Cited in Wolfson 133 and 351n1:1 Translation Wolfson's.  
20 See *Yalkut Shimoni Yeshayahu* 503. This citation is based on the text that was available to *Likkutei Torah* cited on page 89b. An alternate text reads "*Atida Eretz Yisrael Shetitpashet Bekhol Ha'aratzot*" Modern standard editions of *Yalkut Shimoni* read "Said Rabbi Levi [In the future] *Yerushalayim* shall be like *Eretz Yisrael*, and *Eretz Yisrael* like all lands". There, Rabbi Levi is answering a factual question on *Yeshayahu* 66:23. How indeed will "all flesh come to bow" before G-d in the Messianic future?  
See also See also *Sifrei Devarim 1 s.v. KaYotze Bo Darash Rabi Yehuda.*  
21 Translation mine.  
22 *Reshimot* Section 9, v. 1 p. 255 referenced in Wolfson p. 351n11.  
23 *Torat Menakhem: Hitva'aduyot* 5742, part 3 p. 145: Translation mine.  
24 R. Yosef Havlin and R. Shlomo Bistritsky ed. *Sha'arei Eretz Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Heikhal Menakhem, 5762) (Hebrew): Translation mine.  
25 See *Shemot 12:41* and *Basi Legani* cited above.  
26 See Avraham Shmuel Bukyet, *Tiferet HaShlikhut* (5760) p. 116.  
27 *Sefer Me'or Einayim Parshat Matot s.v. Ma Rabu Ma'asekha Hashem Me'or Einayim* was a student of the Ba'al Shem Tov and Maggid of Mezritch, as well as a contemporary of the Alter Rebbe. He is one of the few non-Habad Hasidic masters who exhibits influence on the Rebbe's thought.

28 *Likkutei Siphot* volume 5, p 149n51.

29 *Torat Menakhem Hitva'aduyot* 5716, volume 3 p. 89.  
30 *ibid.* p. 91.  
31 *Torat Menakhem Hitva'aduyot* *Torat Menakhem Hitva'aduyot* volume 13 5715 part 1 pp. 77-80.  
32 As in *U'Mipnei Hata'einu Galinu Me'artzenu* ("because of our sins we were exiled from our land") of the Mussaf prayer for Rosh Hodesh.  
33 *Torat Menakhem Hitva'aduyot* *Torat Menakhem Hitva'aduyot* volume 14 5715 volume 2 p 191 see also pp. 183-192: Translation mine.  
34 See Tanya I:37. This is a simplified version of a more nuanced position that runs throughout the Rebbe's works, and those of his predecessors.  
35 R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Pub. House, 2005), 150. (Cited in Gilad Barach, Rav Soloveitchik's Bold Stance on Kedushat Erets Yisrael, *Kol Hamevaser* 7.2 (2013)).  
36 See *Torat Menakhem: Hitva'aduyot* 5751 part 4 p. 64. Furthermore, as a brief survey of the Rebbe's writing will attest, the Rebbe ends a copious number of lectures with the hope for the imminent redemption and return to the land of Israel in a literal sense.  
37 Cited in Aviezer Ravitzky *Ha-Ketz HaMeguleh U'Medinat HaYehudim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved/ Sifriyat Afikim, 1993) p 105: Translation mine.  
38 Levi Groner and Moshe Leib Karishovsky (ed.) *Karati V'en Oneh*, Two Volumes. (M.L. Publications: Jerusalem, 2003) volume 2 p. 242-245.  
39 Ravitzky, see index entry "Teitelbaum Y.M." for extensive analyses of the Satmar Rebbe's position.  
40 See note xxiv.  
41 See Jonathan Garb, *The Chosen Will Become Like Herds* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) p. 71 Yaffa Berkovits-Murciano Trans.  
42 Wolfson, p. 132.  
43 Yitzchak Kraus, *The Seventh* (Tel Aviv: Miskal, Yedioth Ahronoth Books and Chemed Books, 2007) p. 167-169.



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### (Endnotes)

- 1 *Bereishit* 12:1.
- 2 See *Shemot* 3:8,17.
- 3 *Shemot* 23:20-33.
- 4 See *Devarim* Chapter 30:3-5; *Vayikra* 26:42-45 *Targum Yerushalmi, Rabbeinu Bekhaye*, R. Samson Raphael Hirsh, to verse 42. This centrality of Israel (Zion) as a locus of redemptive tension is also a dominant theme in *Nevi'im* see for some examples *Yeshayahu* 35,42, 43, 52; *Yirmiyahu* 30, 50.
- 5 The Rebbe used this phrase and variations thereof to close a major portion of his public lectures: Translation mine.
- 6 See *Sefer ha-Maamarim Basi Legani* p. 29-36.
- 7 It is unclear if the modern era fits the Rebbe's categorization of "the seventh generation." Clearly, this question is contingent on the definition of the term generation. The consensus within the Chabad movement is that the modern era is a continuation of the seventh generation. Some thinkers in secular sociology are of the opinion that there was a global paradigmatic shift in thought soon after the Second World War that continues to the present day. In any event, the identity of the modern era in the Rebbe's thought should not seriously impact an analysis of his perception of the land of Israel.
- 8 *Ikveta Di-Meshikha* is a term used widely throughout Jewish history to reference the era immediately preceding the Messianic era. See *Tehilim* 89:52 and *Sotah* 9:16

This relationship between sight, yet his distance from the city hope and despair is apparent in a collection of 20th century postcards and glass lantern slides in the YU museum collection. These works depict Jerusalem during the early part of the 20th century, and reflect the contradictory elements of hope's grandness and reality's despair discussed by Scholem. Included within this collection is a glass lantern slide "Jerusalem", ca. 1934, which projects a monochrome, photographic image of the mountains around the old city, the city walls, and the Mosque above the western wall. Above the cityscape, the sky is vast, both luminous and dark, rolling forward in anticipation.

In looking at this image, one sees the encapsulation of Scholem's concept of the unrealized life of the unredeemed and the tension that "does not burn itself out."<sup>3</sup> In this image, the old city is nestled in the very center of the picture. It is separated from the viewer by the ledge that continues off the frame, and by the valley that is placed between that ledge and the mountaintop on which the city is settled. The wide scope of the image shows the sunlit structures of the city continuing to the upper right of the frame. The cityscape continues to stretch beyond the edges of the picture, disappearing at the horizon. The city is illuminated, and rests in the center of the image. It is as grand as anyone's hopes, and also as distant.

The image is framed so that the viewer is standing upon the cliff in the foremost of the frame, placed on the edge of reality and the phantom of his hopes. Standing upon that ledge, the viewer is possessed by the sight of the city, yet the viewer remains an outsider, only able to capture the walls and the shadows cast. Furthermore, the plane that the viewer stands on, which is so separated from the city, becomes the reality of the viewer, so that the viewer's very purpose becomes entangled in the hope of reaching the city. He is wrapped up in the grandness of its

expresses the reality of his situation. It is the great distance between the viewer and his city that projects the haunting want that Jerusalem has represented in the past millennium.

This longing is further reflected in the large cloud that overtakes the frame. This ominous sky competes with the cityscape at the centermost of the image, drawing the viewer's eye towards the darkest corner of the cloud, which hangs directly over the brightest part of the city. It reflects the distance between the viewer and the city, by competing for the viewer's attention. This cloud becomes the representation of the tension of hope, the anticipation of redemption and realization. At the same time, the cloud holds the history of Jewish suffering within it, and hangs over the vision of a gleaming city, as if to remind one that visions of hope are borne in suffering. In that cloud all the fears and painful wants condense the way they do in the unrealized life of the unredeemed.

In the postcard titled "The Western Wall", ca. 1908, the picture's unique visual perspective also reflects the polemic between hope and reality. The scene is a colored depiction of the women's area of the Western Wall. The viewer is placed on the same level as all the other figures, in such a way that one feels as though she is entering the scene depicted. There is no gulf between the viewer and the city. Yet despite that, the postcard alludes to a psychological distance. Instead of the focus being the Western Wall, which is the title of the card, or of the multitude of figures standing there, there is an open space filled only with the cobblestone ground. Most of the figures there are curtained away by their robes, and have their backs to the viewer. The only figures facing the viewer are so far away their faces are indiscernible. The viewer has no interaction with either the place or the people, as all the figures and the

Western Wall itself is at the periphery of the image. In fact, Western Wall is only given a sliver of space on the card. In this way, the postcard has enabled one to see the object of desire, the Western Wall, surrounded by people, while also narrating the unfulfilled hope that it represents. Despite its proximity, despite the fact that the viewer has entered the scene, there is no connection between the viewer and the place. One is just as distant from the Wall as when she started. The illustrated quality of the image adds to unreal characteristic of the scene, reminding one, that the picture is an artificial construction of a scene that she longs for.

The collection's monochrome postcard, titled "Interior of the Golden Gate" published in 1921, shares a similar striking attitude with the previously mentioned pieces. The picture shows another outsider's view of the gates of Jerusalem. To the left, an olive tree stands, its branches obscuring part of the city; the shadows extend to the far left, into the city limits, carrying with them stillness and relief. In this picture Jerusalem is the focal point; there are no looming clouds or distracting perspectives. The sky is still and clear, and the image retains a calmness that the other pictures lack. In this image, the viewer feels positioned nearby, perhaps on a low hill or mount near the tree. The scape in view is close, a few more steps and he will reach it. One feels immersed in the picture, more so than in the others, as he is not gapingly distant from the city walls, nor is his destination in the periphery. Instead, the destination is only a few yards away, separated by a grassy area and abundant shade. His closeness, the feasibility of reaching that place, creates a pleasantness that is lacking in the other images. This postcard expresses relief. All the tension that might have been has dissipated on the peaceful day depicted. One can almost

**The image is framed so that the viewer is standing upon the cliff in the foremost of the frame, placed on the edge of reality and the phantom of his hopes.**

envision oneself standing there, in the pleasant shade, so close the place he has sought for so long. The traveler who sees this scene is neither arriving nor leaving, but leisurely taking in the sight of the Interior of the Golden Gate.

In a way, this image is the purest expression of hope's grandness, in that it mounts no tension against the hope—within the image. But, because it is merely an *image*, one becomes immersed in hope, and then acutely aware of the reality that surrounds him. The viewer is not standing in the shade with his beloved city in sight. Perhaps he is standing in his kitchen, or at the post office, or even in a museum, looking at this mere postcard, seeing in it, the representation of hope, suddenly aware of how unrealized that hope is. This is also true of the glass lantern slide, "Jerusalem", and of the postcard "The Western Wall." All these images are well-depicted reminders of what people wish they had and where they long to be. They all give glimpses of the city that stirred so many to think of what they might one day reach. The hopes and despairs that are conjured by these pieces are difficult to understand

today, when travel is so accessible to most people. Yet, what does remain in our own generation, is the tenuous hope and despair that exists within the unrealized redemption that haunts our beloved city.

*Miriam Rubin is a sophomore at SCW.*

(Endnotes)

- 1 Gershom Scholem, "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism," in Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism And Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 35-36.
- 2 Ibid, 35.
- 3 Ibid, 35.



1987.054

*Map of Jerusalem from Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610 George Sandys (1578-1644) London, 162 Collection of Yeshiva University Museum Gift of Herbert M. Honig*



2001.403

*City of Jerusalem or Jerusalem Landscape Fima (Efraim Reuytenberg) (1916-2005) Oil on canvas Israel, 1963 Collection of Yeshiva University Museum The Kathryn Yochelson Collection*



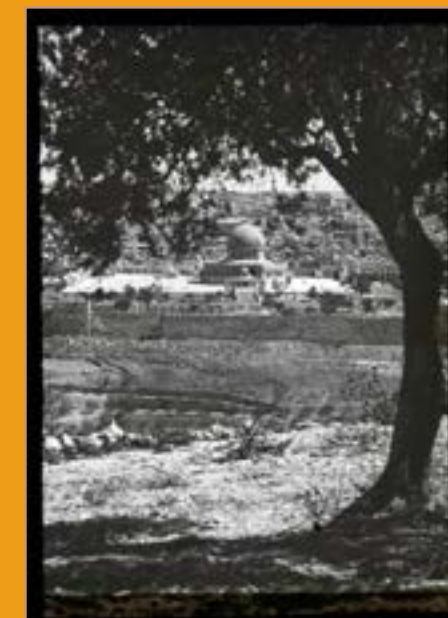
2009.411

*Jerusalem Glass lantern slide Ca. 1934 Collection of Yeshiva University Museum Gift of Av Rivel*



2001.134

*Postcard: Jerusalem, Animal market at Herod's Gate Photographer: Yaakov Benor-Kalter (1897-1969) Publisher: Art Publishing House Jerusalem, ca. 1926 Collection of Yeshiva University Museum Gift of Henny Brenner*



2009.412

*Jerusalem - Temple Place - Golden Gate Glass lantern slide Ca. 1934 Collection of Yeshiva University Museum Gift of Av Rivel*

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