

HAMEVASER

A Student Publication of Traditional Thought and Ideas
Published by the Jewish Studies Divisions of Yeshiva University

Volume 28 No. 6

Iyar 5749 • May 1989 • Page 1



EDITORIALS

A Radically Moderate Success

Rabbi Lamm's presence in Yeshiva this past Shabbat, sponsored jointly by SOY, IBCSC, and JSSSC, provided many students with a unique experience. It was the first occasion for many of us to speak personally with Rabbi Lamm and to feel his presence as Rosh Yeshiva. Rabbi Lamm's Friday night "tisch" and lectures gave him the opportunity to clarify many of his opinions in a forum small enough to allow for a warm and personal atmosphere. We appreciate Rabbi Lamm's effort to form a stronger *kesher* with the *talmidim*, and would encourage him to attend at least one such shabbaton each

semester next year. At the same time, we would like to express our appreciation to Rabbi Blau for spending last Shabbat at Stern. It is not necessary to impress upon the rabbis at Yeshiva University; especially those in positions of leadership, the importance of making their presence felt in both Yeshiva and Stern College. We would therefore like to see Stern continue to invite Roshei Yeshiva, including Rabbi Lamm, as well as faculty members for Shabbat. This would afford the Stern students the same opportunity enjoyed by their counterparts at Yeshiva College.

Torah V'Avoda

Some people spend June working or attending school. Those who don't must somehow occupy their time. How? In the past, very few students seemed to consider a ready answer *yeshiva*. With university over, the *bet midrash* should find itself gainfully employed by students who found themselves incredibly busy throughout the May finals period. Is there any reason for the learning of Torah in Yeshiva to depend on the schedule of classes? The MYP administration con-

tinues *shiurim*, so logically, the students should attend. Furthermore, to its credit, the *yeshiva* will be starting an afternoon *sefer* in June during which all *talmidim* will learn the same topic. This will hopefully tighten the somewhat loose cohesiveness of the *yeshiva*. We expect a lot from our Roshei Yeshiva and administration, and rightfully so. But ultimately, the vitality and success of the *yeshiva* depend on its essence — we *talmidim*.

...and Gemilut Chasadim

Virtually every YC student's awareness of *tzedaka* has been heightened by the appearance of ubiquitous receptacles for empty soda cans and bottles. The Board of Hamevaser extend a *yasher koach* to the founders and members of the newly-formed Philanthropy Society, and express admiration for their persistence in distributing the returns from these items to the needy. They have taught us through their actions the meaning of the old adage "a penny saved is a penny earned." Pennies truly do add up. We also applaud the efforts of those who

recently collected "Chametz for the Homeless." Instead of selling that box of cereal or half jar of peanut butter, let us in future years rid ourselves of every trace of *chametz* and fulfill another *mitzva* in the process. This would not only be an easier solution, but would also foster goodwill among our neighbors and create a *kiddush Hashem berabim*. Likewise, at the end of the school year, instead of throwing away our food, detergent, etc., let us salvage it for the destitute. The Jewish nation prides itself on *chesed*; let us live up to our tradition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Adina Mosak on Yiftach's Daughter	p. 3
Robert Klapper on the kerygma of the <i>Kuzari</i>	p. 4
Jerrold Rapaport on Bar Kokhba	p. 5
Alex Berman on spiritual resistance during the Holocaust	p. 6
Yair Yaish on <i>avoda b'gashmiut</i>	p. 7
Chaviva Leviñ on mandated moral regression	p. 8
Nechama Goldman reviews <i>I Shall Live</i> by Henry Orenstein	p. 10
Yehuda Galinsky on altruistic selfishness	p. 12

HAMEVASER

500 West 185th Street, New York, N.Y. 10033

The views of signed articles are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of HAMEVASER or Yeshiva University. Editorial policy is determined by a majority vote of the members of the Governing Board. Subscription rate: \$7.50 per year. All material herein copyright HAMEVASER 1989.

ROBERT KLAPPER
editor-in-chief

HOWARD SRAGOW
executive editors

RONALD ZIEGLER

GOVERNING BOARD

YITZCHAK BLAU
DAVID DEBOW
DOV FOGEL
YEHUDA GALINSKY
DAVID GLATT

MARK GOTTLIEB
AHARON HABER
SETH KADISH
ADINA MOSAK
HINDY NAJMAN

YAIR YAISH

STAFF

YITZCHAK ARIEL
DONNY BARENHOLTZ
EVAN BART
JOEL BEASLEY
ETHAN BENOVIITZ
ALYSSA BERGER
ALEX BERMAN
GILAAD DEUTSCH
HILLEL FELMAN
NECHAMA GOLDMAN

CHAIM GOTTSCHALK
YOSSI KLAVAN
NEAL LEHRMAN
CHAVIVA LEVIN
SHOSHANA LEVINE
JONATHAN MARVIN
BENJAMIN NACHIMSON
PAULA NEEDLEMAN
JERROLD RAPAPORT
MIRIAM SEGAL

ARYEH WIENER
graphics coordinator

cover photo by Avraham A. Witty.

The Board of Hamevaser extends its condolences to Dr. Yaakov Elman on the passing of his mother, Mrs. Pearl Elman z"l

HAMEVASER

Planning Meeting

for 1989—1990 academic year

Anyone who wishes to work with Hamevaser next year

(Whether as writer, artist, technical staff or just a nice person to have around) should attend

Monday May 15, 8:30 PM

Morgenstern Shul

For more information, Contact

Howard Sragow

Ronnie Ziegler

928-1316

928-2107

Mourning A Maiden

The Mysterious Fate of Yiftach's Daughter

by Adina Mosak

"And Yiftach made a vow to the Lord, and said: If you will truly give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites, it will be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering. And Yiftach passed over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hand. And he smote them from Aroer as far as Minit, twenty cities, until Avel Keranim, a very great slaughter. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel. And Yiftach came to Mizpah to his house, and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrel and dancing; she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And when he saw her, he rent his clothes and said, 'Alas, my daughter! You have struck me down, you have become my troubler. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot retract.'" (Judges 11:30-35)

The story of Yiftach and his vow seems to recount a shocking human sacrifice by a leader of Israel. Yiftach begins his life with a bad reputation. His brothers disinherit him and force him to flee his native area. Despite his early misfortunes he rises to a position of power, and saves the Israelites from their oppressors. Then, inexplicably, he commits an act of which the Torah says: "You shall not act thus toward the Lord your God, for they perform for their gods every abhorrent act that the Lord detests; they even offer up their sons and daughters in fire to their gods." (Deuteronomy 12:31)

Under closer examination, the theological difficulties multiply. The text never indicates that a sin was committed. The incident is reported objectively, without emotion. No one protests on behalf of the daughter during the two months Yiftach grants her before fulfilling the vow, and no one declares Yiftach an unfit ruler in response to the incident. Years after his death Yiftach is listed among the great leaders of Israel: "And God sent Yerubaal and Bedan and Yiftach and Samuel and He saved them from their enemies around them" (1 Samuel 12:11).

Yiftach's intentions in sacrificing his daughter are especially puzzling. Unlike the idolators referred to in Deuteronomy, Yiftach sacrifices his daughter in order to fulfill God's will as he sees it. Although he obviously regrets his vow, both he and his daughter assume that the vow, once made, must be carried out. *Halakha*, the *midrash* tells us (*Leviticus Rabbah* 37:3), does not bear out that assumption.

"Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish and Rabbi Yochanon [disagree]: Resh Lakish said: he was required to pay money and to bring an offering on the altar. Rabbi Yochanon said: he was not [even] required to pay money, as we learn: a thing which is fitting to be offered on the altar should be offered, and a thing which is not fitting to be offered on the altar should not be offered." Animals, not people, may be consecrated as a sacrifice: Why did Yiftach think he had to kill his daughter?

Several commentators develop an alternate understanding of Yiftach's sacrifice in order to avoid the difficulties in the story. They point out that the text does not explicitly state that Yiftach killed his daughter; it says merely that Yiftach "did to her as he had vowed, and she had not known a man" (verse 39). Radak quotes his father as suggesting that Yiftach,

rather than killing his daughter, "made her a house and put her there and she remained there separated from people and from the ways of the world." The phrase "she had not known a man", he argues, describes not her virgin state at death but rather the fulfillment of Yiftach's vow: she was shut up in a house and did not know a man for the rest of her life. She, therefore, asks her father for a chance to "bewail her virginity" (verse 37) instead of a chance to mourn her death.

Later commentators such as Ralbag, Abarbanel, Altschuler (*Mezudot David*) and Malbim adopt Radak's theory. Ralbag supports his interpretation by claiming that while Jewish tradition contains no precedent for male celibacy in the service of God, a female dedicated solely to God must remain celibate. "For if she had a husband she would not be designated for the service of God, but she would serve in addition her husband according to the law of married women."

Radak's celibacy theory sounds like *midrash* rather than *pshat*. Ironically, though, it appears nowhere in midrashic literature. *Midrash Tancheuma* (Bechukotai 5), for example, states that Yiftach mistakenly sacrificed his daughter out of ignorance of the law. *Leviticus Rabbah* explains that the tragedy resulted from a battle of wills between Yiftach and Pinchas, the high priest of the time:

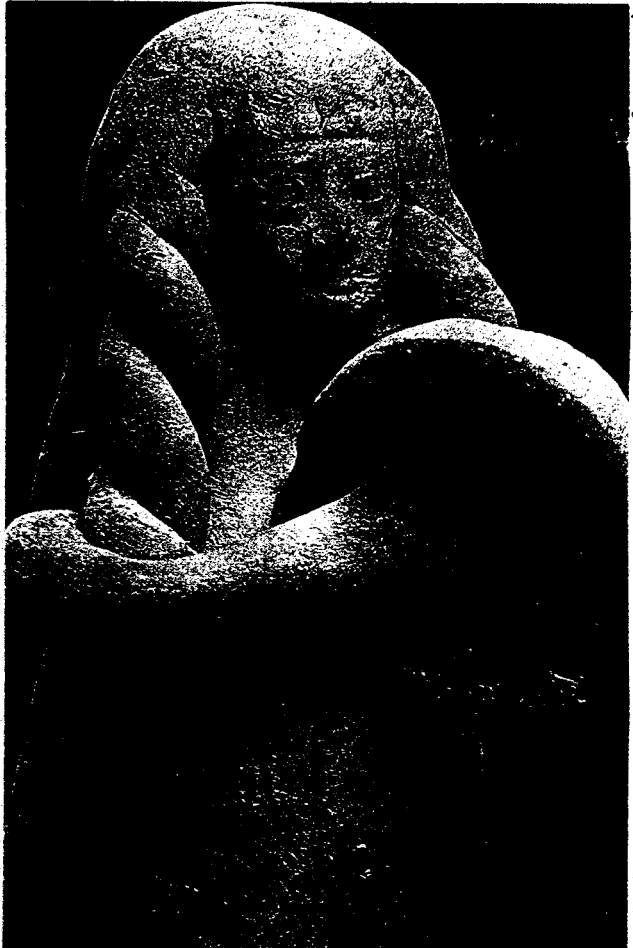
"He could have annulled his vow and gone to Pinchas, [but] he said, 'I am the king and I should go to Pinchas?' Pinchas said, 'I am the *kohen gadol* and I should go to this ignoramus?' Between the two of them the unfortunate one perished." (37:3)

Although the text never explicitly condemns Yiftach, and reports no Divine retribution, *Leviticus Rabbah* deals him and Pinchas their just desserts. Pinchas loses his *ruach hakodesh*, and Yiftach's limbs fall off everywhere he goes, as it says "And he was buried in the cities of Gilead" (Judges 11:7).

A "midrashic" interpretation of Yiftach's sacrifice seems out of place in Radak's commentary, which generally strives for *pshat*. Radak claims, however, that his commentary on Yiftach is the plain meaning of the text: "So the *pshat* of the verses seem to me. And [concerning] the words of the sages, if they are a tradition, we must accept them."

Although most modern scholars reject Radak's interpretation, *Iyyunim b'Sepher Shoftim (HaChevrah L'Cheiker HaMikra, 1966)* speaks of the "logical and simple explanation" which Radak taught the name of his father, (p. 8) and states that "Radak did not distort the intention of the verses." (p. 24) More recently, David Marcus argued in *Yiftach and his Vow* (Texas Tech Press, 1986) that Radak's interpretation is one, but not the only, valid reading of the text.

What, then, actually happened to Yiftach's daughter? According to *Iyyunim* the story can be read on two levels. The straightforward reading of the text seems to indicate that Yiftach did not kill his daughter but isolated her from human society. If one reads more closely, however, "behind the thin veil a terrible story of human sacrifice is revealed." (p. 8) The daughter's actual fate remains unclear. Marcus believes that we are not meant to know exactly what happened. He speaks of a "deliberate equivocation" (Marcus p. 12) in the text, and states that the fate of Yiftach's daughter "remains a conundrum to this day." (p. 55) Is the conundrum, in fact,



unsolvable? The arguments against a literal reading of the story do not seem strong enough to warrant a re-interpretation of the text.

A clarification of Yiftach's original intentions in making the vow would help us understand the story. The vow automatically calls to our minds a picture of Yiftach's dog scampering out to meet him. But that picture is probably anachronistic, and in any case non-kosher animals such as dogs cannot be sacrificed. Did Yiftach expect a cow or goat to come out of his house to greet him? Such animals generally are not familiar enough with their owners to do so. And what would a cow be doing in Yiftach's house? Marcus argues that the language of Yiftach's vow suggests that he had a person, rather than an animal, in mind; "Yotzei" and "asher yetzei", he notes, never refer to animals in *Tanakh*. His argument is weak; although in *Tanakh* these two forms of the root *yatza* only refer to people, other forms refer to animals. For example, "Every animal came out [yatzu] of the ark by families" (Genesis 8:17) or "And two bears came out [watzetainu] of the forest" (11 Kings 2:24). Perhaps the verb generally does not describe animals simply because animals do not often "come out" of things. In Hebrew, as in English, the expression "yotzei likrat",

"come out to meet", generally refers to human subjects. Marcus points out, however, that *likrat* is used in conjunction with a different verb, *shaag*, in reference to an animal: "And there was a lion roaring to meet me [likrat]." (Judges 14:5)

"Yotzei likrat" in Yiftach's vow might refer to an animal if animals were found in his house. Some claim that people did not keep their animals in the house in Yiftach's time, but others think that houses then were built with a central courtyard in which the animals lived (Marcus p. 14). A comparison of the phrase "*hayatzo asher yetzei midaltei beiti*" with an almost identical phrase in Joshua suggests that Yiftach intended a person, not an animal. The spies sent by Joshua tell Rachab, "And anyone who comes out of the doors of your house, his blood will be on his head." People, not animals, are the obvious subjects of that sentence.

Yiftach's intentions thus cannot be fully clarified by an examination of the phrase "whatever comes out of the doors of my house." Perhaps Yiftach intended to offer an animal as a sacrifice to God, and was shocked when a person emerged instead. But perhaps he did have a person in mind. Yiftach says that

The Case of the Missing Philosopher

The Kuzari's Unopposed Polemic

by Robert Klapper

The *Kuzari* presents itself as an essentially factual account of the eighth century conversion of the Khazars to Judaism. The Khazar king, troubled by a recurrent dream in which he is told "Your intentions are pleasing to the creator, but your actions are not pleasing to the Creator", (*Kuzari* 1:1) invites a series of theologians to prescribe for him a course of Creator-pleasing actions. Having rejected the recommendations of philosophy, Christianity, and Islam, he turns last and hesitantly to Judaism. The *chakham* he questions proves a convincing speaker, and the king converts secretly with his grand Vizier and eventually convinces his people to join them. The Khazars achieve great prosperity and military success (*Kuzari* 2:1).

Dunlop states in his *History of the Khazars* that Halevi's narrative is essentially historical, though perhaps it exaggerates the extent and rapidity of conversion; in fact only the upper classes converted, and probably not before the ninth century (Note: He agrees that the disputation occurred around 740. Halevi himself states only that many Khazars converted). Leo Strauss draws attention in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* to two more significant discrepancies. "In both the letter of Joseph, the King of the Khazars, and in the Genizah document published by Schechter (Jewish Quarterly Review, N.S., III, 1912-13, 204 ff.), disputations between the various scholars before the king are mentioned. In neither document is there any mention of a philosopher. The addition of a philosopher and the omission of a disputation before the king are the most striking differences between Halevi's version of the story and these two other versions." Strauss concludes that the dialogue and form of the *Kuzari* are, despite Halevi's denial of this in 1:1, literary inventions.

But while the *Kuzari's* details are almost certainly artificial, the Khazar story at least initially seems a natural setting for a "Defense of the Despised Religion," as Halevi titled his work. The Khazar king is biased against Judaism, vigorously questions the ideas presented to him, is a member of the highest social class, and has no material motivation for conversion; in short, if he is convinced by the arguments of Judaism, surely those arguments are compelling.

Strauss claims, however, that the Khazar is only seemingly an unlikely convert, and a largely irrelevant one to boot. The King rejects Christianity, Islam, and the philosophic religion before speaking with the Jew, yet believes that God has spoken to him; Judaism is essentially his sole remaining option. Furthermore, he has little philosophic sophistication or background. If the *Kuzari* is a polemic against philosophy, the Khazar is a weak opponent for the *chakham*, and his conversion proves almost nothing about the rational force of Judaism's arguments.

Strauss argues that as the *Kuzari's* form resulted from an artistic choice, Halevi must have deliberately chosen to present an irrelevant protagonist. He suggests that Halevi knew that a true philosopher, a believer in the primacy of human reason, could never convert. Perhaps Halevi also wished to avoid giving a thorough and possibly convincing presentation of the philosophic religion. Strauss concludes that "Halevi's defense of Judaism against its adversaries in general, and the philosophers in particular is addressed to naturally pious people only, if to naturally pious people of a certain type."

This interpretation, however, depends on

several questionable assumptions. The first of these is that the *Kuzari* is primarily intended as a polemic against philosophy. Strauss defends this position by pointing out that "Five positions more or less inimical to (orthodox) Judaism are coherently discussed in the *Kuzari's* philosophy, Christianity, Islam, Karaism and Kalam; philosophy is the only one of these positions which is coherently discussed twice (1:1-3 and 5:2-14). Besides, the occasional polemical references to philosophy are more numerous, and much more significant, than the corresponding references to any other of the positions mentioned. Above all, only the philosopher denies the Mosaic revelation whereas the Christian and Moslem admit it." Also, "Nothing is more revealing than the way in which Halevi demonstrates ad oculos the danger of philosophy. The King had been converted to Judaism, i.e., his resistance, based on the influence of the philosophy, had been overcome; he had been given a detailed instruction in the Jewish faith; the errors of the philosophers had been pointed out to him on every suitable occasion; he had even begun to consider himself a normal Jew. Then, almost at the end of their intercourse, a question of his induces the scholar to give him a summary and very conventional sketch of the philosophic teaching. The consequence of this disclosure is contrary to all reasonable expectation; in spite

priority. Strauss's quantitative evidence is also unconvincing, for much of the book deals with matters utterly unrelated to anti-philosophic polemic, for example *kedushat eretz yisrael*. His claim that Halevi reveals his hand in the second "coherent discussion" of philosophy also fails to convince me that *Kuzari's* primary function is anti-philosophic polemic, though the *chakham's* response to the Khazar's favorable impression of a single philosophic doctrine — "This is what I feared would come upon you" — certainly demonstrates a healthy fear of philosophy's seductiveness. Strauss's second assumption, that Halevi's undoubted poetic ability implied the capacity to make superb choices in the planning of a prose philosophic dialogue, fails on simple intuitive grounds. Indeed, the *Kuzari* contains several glaring incongruities. Among these are the Khazar's statement that he has seen the Karaites "exerting themselves more in the service of God than the Rabbinites, and their arguments appear more compelling and better coordinated with the plain meaning of the verses of the Torah" (*Kuzari* 3:22). Where has he seen these Karaites, and if he has, why are they not invited to speak with him if they impress him more than the Rabbinites? How has he heard their arguments? Similarly, his knowledge of Judaism and *Tanakh* fluctuates wildly in the course of the dialogue.

nal dogmas can only be accepted by one raised to believe them, and the Moslem that he cannot read Arabic (This is admittedly only part of his response to the Moslem; his other argument, that the concept of divine revelation requires miraculous proof, is nearly incomprehensible logically and unbelievable contextually. If the Sinaitic revelation proves the feasibility of Divine revelation, why do the Moslems need more miracles? And how can the king demand such proof after rejecting the philosophic religion on the ground that he had had divine revelation? Possibly the argument is that Divine revelation requires proof in each case, but that is not much of an argument). The dialogue which precedes the *chakham's* entrance is extraordinarily shallow.

Perhaps the weakness of the opening arguments reveals that in the argumentative arena they are insignificant. Perhaps they serve a purely literary function, emphasizing the historicity of the setting and making the call for the Jew believable. Yet if that were so, even the short presentations of Christianity, Islam and philosophy in 1:1 would be unnecessary. Halevi could have written merely that the king called their exponents and rejected their arguments.

A hint at a solution can be found in Halevi's title for the work, which describes Judaism as the "despised religion." Despised by whom? To pure logicians Judaism is surely no more despicable than Christianity. And Halevi wrote this work for Jews, most of whom surely did not despise their own religion.

Or did they? I think the ad hominem responses the Khazar gives at the opening of the work are crucial and included because they symbolize the major purpose and theme of the *Kuzari* — that Judaism should be studied and appreciated from within, on its own terms, rather than from without. Halevi states in his title and in 1:1 that the *Kuzari* is not an attack on but rather a defense of. His critique of philosophy is generally methodological; he concedes in 5:14 that philosophers often live exemplary lives.

The despisers of Judaism for whom Halevi writes are not Christians, Moslems or philosophers but rather the Jews themselves, who feel compelled to justify their religion in Aristotelian or other terms. Indeed, Halevi writes in 1:1 that he is responding to the attacks of "those drawn after philosophy," as distinct from philosophers. His response is not to respond, at least not in their terms — Judaism has a validity of its own that stems from Divine revelation.

Thus the Khazar's lack of philosophical sophistication is irrelevant. Halevi needs not an intellectual with whom the *chakham* can debate — the polemic is secondary — but rather a bright novice to whom he can show Judaism from the roots up, and who will not impose a philosophic framework on Judaism. If a pagan king can appreciate Judaism simply for what it is, Halevi argues, how can we not? The *chakham's* lack of rational detachment is as important as his rational arguments. Appropriately, when the king converts, he does not calmly, rationally declare his intention but rather travels to a Jewish mountain hideaway and "reveals his heart" (2:1).

The enduring intellectual legacy of the *Kuzari* has not been its rational polemic but rather its claim of the centrality and uniqueness of *am yisrael* and *eret yisrael*. Halevi would, I think, be satisfied. Logical arguments, he believed, come from finite man and may have finite lifespans. Spiritual ideas come from God and should be eternal.



Khazar I, silver etching, Sassanian

of all that men and angels had done to protect him, the king is deeply impressed by that unimpressive sketch of philosophy, so much so, that the scholar has to repeat his refutation of philosophy all over again." Finally, in the *Kuzari's* opening sentence Halevi mentions "those who are drawn after philosophy" as the first class of people he is responding to.

A second important assumption Strauss makes is that "In the case of an author of Halevi's rank, it is safe to assume that the connection between the content of his work and its form is as necessary as such a connection can possibly be." A third is that Halevi had no motivation for using this form and setting that may have superseded his desire to present a philosophically sophisticated discussion.

Halevi himself seemingly contradicts Strauss's first assumption, writing in one of his letters that the *Kuzari* was written primarily as a response to Karaism (Encyclopedia of Religion, "Judah Halevi"). This evidence can be downgraded as post facto and audience-directed, but certainly anti-Karaism should therefore be treated as a serious theme in the *Kuzari*. This seems to me an indication that Halevi did not feel competent adversaries a necessity of polemic, or at least not a

Finally, I believe that Halevi's choice of form and setting can be justified on literary grounds other than Strauss's. He utilizes the advantages afforded by the philosophical dialogue in general, and the master-disciple dialogue in particular, to achieve goals unachievable in the disputation form. In particular, this form enables him to introduce important assumptions unchallenged.

Strauss's claim that the *Kuzari's* major function is anti-philosophic polemic cannot be proven, though anti-philosophical polemic is certainly among its functions. But his structural points are highly significant. The absence of a *chakham-philosopher* disputation is significant; even more significant are the absence of all inter-denominational disputation and the lack of a Karaite character. The *Kuzari* is written as a conversation rather than as a disputation.

An additional puzzling feature of the *Kuzari* is the weakness of the king's responses to the Philosopher, Christian, and Moslem. To each he gives a response that specifically avoids refuting their arguments, instead claiming that they cannot convince him; he tells the philosopher that he has had a Divine revelation contradicting what he admits is the philosopher's logically demonstrated position, the Christian that Christianity's irratio-

Bar Kokhba:

Hero or Heretic?

by Jerrold Rapaport

Today, we view the Bar Kokhba Rebellion as a symbol of Jewish courage and heroism. We envision a nation unwilling to lie silent under Roman oppression, struggling to worship God peacefully and freely. Yet this impression is of recent vintage; no such associations were made prior to the late nineteenth century. In fact, following Bar Kokhba's rebellion, rabbinic authorities viewed it most negatively.

In the wake of the revolt Talmudic authorities anathematized the memory of Bar Kokhba. They attributed Betar's capture and the revolt's end to sinfulness. Bar Kokhba himself is said to have died for his sins (Yerushalmi Taanit 468d; see also *Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Melachim* 11:3). The sages go so far as to apply to him the verse in Deuteronomy 17:12, "And that man will die, and you will remove evil from Israel." One source even suggests that the sages themselves killed Bar Kokhba, rejecting his "Messianic status" (Sanhedrin 93b). Although we know that Bar Kokhba's real name was Simeon Bar Koseba, he is referred to by our sages as Bar Koziva, literally meaning "the son of lies".

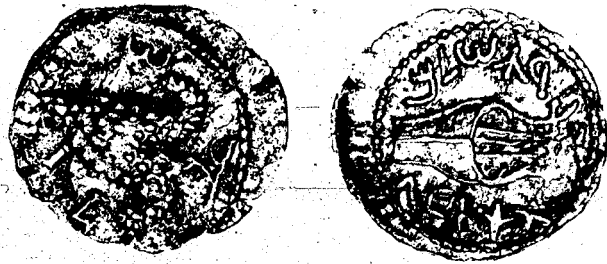
Why did our sages see fit to shame Bar Kokhba and denounce his rebellion? Why has Bar Kokhba become a source of national pride and inspiration only recently?

To understand the attitude of our Sages towards Bar Kokhba, we must first review the basic history and circumstances of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. In 130 C.E., after Hadrian's exit from the immediate area, a revolt broke out in Judea. Bar Kokhba, the rebel leader, implemented guerilla tactics against the Roman legions. By 132 C.E., this method enabled the rebels to recapture Jerusalem and most of Israel's countryside. At this point, Hadrian sent Julius Severus to crush the revolt. Severus conducted anti-guerilla campaigns, ambushing rebels and besieging their hideouts. His success culminated with Betar's destruction and Bar Kokhba's death in the year 135 C.E.

The revolt proved disastrous for the Jews. Although the Romans suffered heavy casualties, the rebels fared far worse. The combination of war, famine, and plague claimed over 600,000 lives, approximately half of Judea's population. Jerusalem lay in ruins while Jewish slaves glutted the market. Hundreds of settlements were destroyed. Most shocking, as a result of the general slaughter, Jews became a minority in their own country.

Yehoshafat Harkabi submits in *The Bar Kokhba Syndrome* that the Rabbis, observing the catastrophic results of the uprising, wanted to ensure that such a rebellion would never again occur. It would seem that Harkabi subscribes to the theory of Dr. Hugo Mantel that no specific incident or Roman action sparked the rebellion, but rather that it ensued from the spirit of independence that burned in the hearts of Bar Kokhba and his followers. He finds support in Eusebius, a Church Father of the third and fourth centuries, who ascribes the rebellion not to any specific cause but rather to the Jews' restless and rebellious spirit. Mantel claims that the belief in Bar Kokhba as the Messiah combined with this burning desire for emancipation to rally the Jews to war.

In this quest for freedom and autonomy, writes Mantel, the Jews of Bar Kokhba's time were carrying on the spirit of the First Revolt against the Romans, and even the spirit of the Maccabees three centuries beforehand.



Bar Kokhba Coins with lute and grape cluster, symbolizing the Temple

Mantel strengthens this link between the Hasmoneans and the Jews in the time of Bar Kokhba by noting that the coins struck during the Bar Kokhba rebellion carried the same symbols as those of the Hasmoneans: the *lulav* and *etrog*, a palm branch and cluster of dates, a vine, and a jug. Even the inscriptions on the Bar Kokhba coins mirror those on the coins of the Maccabees. It was thus this same struggle for freedom, the Jewish drive to rule their destiny, that led to this outbreak of war against Rome.

According to Harkabi, the Sages began a campaign against the ideals and heroic spirit that motivated the Bar Kokhba Rebellion. This same nationalistic feeling had brought the Jewish people through the Maccabean Revolt and the two revolts against Rome. But, after the catastrophic conclusion of the Bar Kokhba revolt, the Rabbis could not risk that same spirit sparking the people to another revolt. They took Bar Kokhba to task for causing the slaughter of half the Jewish populace of Judea. Indeed, Harkabi goes so far as to say that Rabbinic circles held him in revulsion. Harkabi points out the overwhelming lack of discussion of the Bar Kokhba Rebellion in Rabbinic literature. He speculates that the Rabbis attempted to actively repress the memory of the Bar Kokhba Rebellion, seeking to remove the passions of the Bar Kokhba Revolt from the minds and hearts of the people.

Harkabi further argues that the Sages' attitudes toward Bar Kokhba led to the political pacifism of the Jewish people for the next two thousand years. The Rabbis wrote oaths which served as political doctrines, forswearing the Jews not to rebel against the nations of the world and not to emigrate demonstratively to Israel. Harkabi stretches his theory to explain why Bar Kokhba was mentioned so rarely in medieval Jewish literature. This pacifist mood did not begin to change until the late nineteenth century. Only then was the Bar Kokhba Rebellion looked upon positively, and Bar Kokhba seen as a hero. Harkabi links 2000 years of meekness and silent submission to foreign governments and frenzied mobs to the trend of pacifism which began in response to Bar Kokhba.

Harkabi's approach, however, contains many flaws. Many historians, some of whom lived shortly after the revolt, ascribe it to specific causes and not to a general and continuous spirit of rebellion. Dio Cassius, a Roman historian born circa 150 C.E., states that the Emperor Hadrian wanted to turn Jerusalem into a Roman city and establish a

temple to Jupiter where the Temple once stood. This, says Dio, caused the Jews to revolt. Spartianus, who lived at the end of the third century C.E., writes in his biography of Hadrian that Hadrian's prohibition of circumcision caused the rebellion. Genesis Rabbah 64 poses that Hadrian ordered the rebuilding of the Temple. He rescinded this order, however, at the request of the Samaritans. The Jews, angered by this betrayal, rebelled.

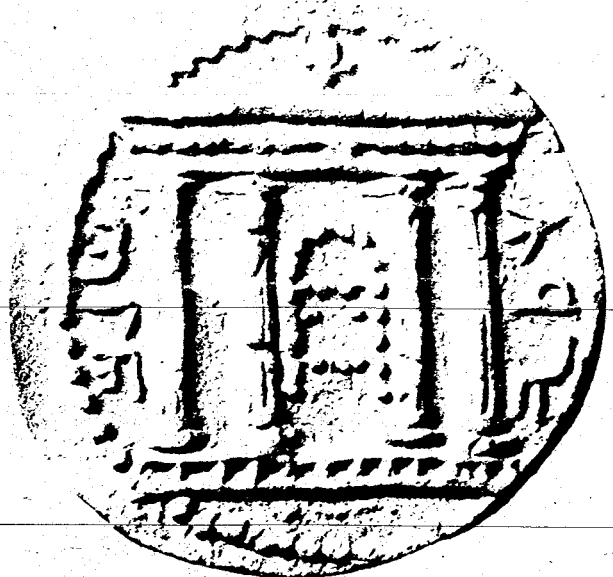
Accepting any of these three premises undermines Harkabi's position that the revolt had no definite cause. The revolt, if triggered by a specific event, would have no connection to or effect on other revolts that might ensue. There would have been no need for the Rabbis to eradicate a common and widespread hot-bloodedness had no such spirit existed.

Additionally, much of Harkabi's theory is founded on pure speculation. Lack of Talmudic discussion on Bar Kokhba does not necessarily point to repression of information. The Talmud centers around halakhic, not historical, dissertation, and as such has no obligation to deal with any given historical event in Jewish history.

Furthermore, there are various possibilities as to why our Sages showed extreme dislike for Bar Kokhba. The Yerushalmi records Bar Kokhba's excessive pride and self-confidence. When greeted with the words, "May God help you," Bar Kokhba's warriors would reply, "God shall neither help nor harm us." Denial of the Divine Hand in worldly events certainly qualifies as sufficient reason for the Rabbinic censure.

Yet a third possibility suffices to explain the rabbinic distaste for Bar Kokhba. We know that Rabbi Akiva regarded Bar Kokhba as the Messiah. In fact, he named him Bar Kokhba, meaning "son of a star." However, many Rabbis disagreed with Rabbi Akiva, arguing that Bar Kokhba failed to meet Messianic prerequisites. Despite their doubts, Bar Kokhba pursued the revolt to its ultimate failure, proving these *chakhamim* correct. Did the controversy surrounding Bar Kokhba stem from the question of whether only the Messiah could lead an uprising? Or did the controversy grant the fact that non-Messianic leaders may lead revolts, and center instead on the *chakhamim's* political outlook and assessment of the hopelessness of the situation? We may then ask, to what extent was Bar Kokhba obligated to follow the political forecast of the *chakhamim*?

Presently, a number of questions confront us. Do we wrongly honor one whose arrogant and brazen attitude made him an anathema to the Rabbis? Have we made a hero out of a man who denied God's Providence? Or, was the Rabbinic censure he incurred directed mainly at the political ideology he represented? If so, perhaps we must now look back at the tragedies suffered through the silence of two thousand years, and realize that it is no longer the time for pacifism and silence. Was Bar Kokhba hero or villain, to be emulated or despised? Sadly, the answers to these questions, and the valuable lessons that they embody, will most likely remain hidden as long as Bar Kokhba himself remains a mystery, buried in the sands of time.



Bar Kokhba Coin portraying the Temple

Omdim Alenu Lechalotenu

The Holocaust's Test of the Spirit



Chanukkah in the Westerbork Camp, Holland

by Alex Berman

"In each and every generation, our enemies arose to destroy us and God saved us from their hands." This statement from the opening of the *Haggadah* took on additional meaning in Warsaw on Passover eve 1943, the night that marked the last stage of the Warsaw Ghetto liquidation. Although history has reconfirmed this prophecy countless times, the threat posed in our generation was unique in its boldness. While Pharaoh limited his decree to newly-born males and the Spanish directed their Inquisition at the Jew's soul, the Nazis aimed their weapons at male and female, spirit and soul, flesh and bones.

The Jews always rose to meet these threats, each generation in its own manner. The Hebrew midwives in Egypt resisted Pharaoh by nourishing and sheltering the imperiled babies; Spanish Jewry responded to Torquemada by embracing martyrdom; although some submitted to insincere conversions. Ironically, the Holocaust, undoubtedly the worst of these three threats, inspired a seemingly less heroic resistance, mere survival. The concept of resistance through living finds frequent expression in Holocaust literature. As Rabbi Yitchak Nissenbaum of Warsaw explains: "When the enemy was after the Jew's soul, the Jew gave up his body to keep from the enemy what he was after. Now the enemy is after the body of the Jew and it is a duty to preserve the body and keep it well." (Huberband, *Kiddush Hashem*, XVI)

Beyond these front lines of defense the Jews erected another bulwark which until recently Holocaust historians have overlooked: battles of spiritual resistance. Numerous testimonials describe this protective shield as they record an unwavering religious commitment in the face of imminent death. We know that Rabbi Daniel Mowshowitz of Kelme and his Hasidim burst into a frenzy of song, exclaiming "*Ashreinu ma tov chelkenu* (We are happy with our lot)," as they assembled before a freshly dug grave. Rabbi Mowshowitz then turned to the Stunned Gestapo officer saying "I have finished, you can begin now." (Huberband XV)

We know of a Jew who asked a rabbi whether it was halakhically permissible for him to ransom his son from certain death if another child would be taken in his son's stead. When the Rabbi met this reply with silence, wordlessly begging the questioner not to force him to rule on such a vital question, the questioner interpreted the silence as no, calmly thanked the Rabbi, and resignedly set forth to say good-bye to his son.

We know of a Jew who asked Rabbi Oshry, of Kovno if there was a blessing to make before being killed "*b' Kiddush Hashem*," while sanctifying God's name (*Responsa of the Holocaust*, 37).

While such sacrificial acts illustrate the depth of many Holocaust martyrs' commitment, those Jews who remained alive often faced more trying challenges. To carry on without compromising religious beliefs or tenets was to resist Hitler in two realms, the physical and the spiritual. The diaries and annals of the ghettos, especially Warsaw's, attest to the Jews' success in accomplishing this task.

Largely as a result of Emmanuel Ringelblum's foresight, we possess a detailed recording of daily life in the Warsaw Ghetto, the largest the Nazis established. A noted pre-war historian, Ringelblum recognized the importance of creating a historical record and formed an organization, *Omeg Shabbat*, to accomplish this goal. The members of *Omeg Shabbat* delved into every facet of ghetto life. From ghetto folklore to cultural events, from morality to religion, from individual executions to mass deportations, nothing escaped their omniscient eyes. Chaim Kaplan, a ghetto chronicler, accurately portrayed *Omeg Shabbat*, its guidelines and goals:

"In our Scroll of Agony, not one small detail can be omitted. Even though we are now undergoing terrible tribulations and the sun has grown dark for us at noon, we have not lost our hope that the era of light will surely come. Individuals will be destroyed, but the Jewish community will live on. Every entry is more important than gold, so long as it is written down as it happens, without

exaggerations and distortions." (Diary, 58)

One of Ringelblum's many wartime studies, *Polish Jewish Relations During World War Two*, opens with an analogy that reveals Ringelblum's view of his self-imposed task:

"When a *sofer* (Jewish scribe) sets out to copy the Torah, he must, according to religious law, take a ritual bath in order to purify himself of all uncleanness and impurity. This scribe takes up his pen with a trembling heart, because the smallest mistake in transcription means the destruction of the whole work... with this feeling of fearfulness... I have begun this work."

Ringelblum and his associates labored to build a lasting monument. Fearing that bias or conjecture would cause it to crumble, they insisted upon a broad-based, purely factual foundation.

Working with evidence gathered by fellow *Omeg Shabbat* members, Shimon Huberband, a Hasidic Rabbi and scholar, produced while in the ghetto the definitive work on its spiritual life: *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland During the Holocaust*. Although unoriginal in methodology, *Kiddush Hashem* contains rich troves of new information concerning ghetto life.

Huberband relates that after the Judenrat (Jewish Council) caved in to German pressure and forbade *yeshivot* to remain open, underground study-halls sprung up throughout the city. Huberband listed their new addresses: "Gerer (Hasidic) ... groups arose at 30 Muranowska Street, at 4 Mlawka Street, at 49 Stawki Street, at 47 Stawki Street." (Huberband 179) After the Germans forbade *shechitah*, the ritual slaughterers began to work outside the ghetto and hired young girls to smuggle the meat "bearing [signed] certificates of *Kashruth* certification" back inside (Huberband 232). After the Germans ordered the *mikvaot* (ritual baths) closed, the *mikvah* owners bribed the Polish authorities to allow those at 1 Gryzbowski, 14 Gryzbowski, 38 Dzielna, and 22 Smuczka to remain open (Huberband 197). Discovery of any of these crimes meant immediate death, and

some Jews were caught and executed, but the observant remained undeterred.

Huberband did not confine his account to the actions of the Jews of Warsaw; he also gleaned information about the villages of Poland from the many refugees in Warsaw and recorded their reports. Thus we know that when the Nazis confiscated and then desecrated more than thirty Torah scrolls in Piotrow by leaving them in an open lot under armed guard, Avram Vatshof, a representative of the notoriously anti-religious Socialist Bund, organized a few of his friends to rescue and hide the scrolls (Huberband 250). As the Nazis set fire to the synagogue in Bedzin, a Mr. Schlezinger and his son ran into the flames to rescue the Torah scrolls; the Nazis coldly shot them as they emerged (Huberband 252). When the Nazis ordered the Rabbi of Wlodwa, Avrom Mordkhe Maroco, to tear up a Torah scroll or else be burned alive, he summarily refused. They poured gasoline over him and set him ablaze, then tossed the Torah scroll on top of him (Huberband 254). The roll call of courage, sacrifice and martyrdom goes on and on and on (Huberband 255).

Spiritual resistance in the ghetto expressed itself not only through action but in a state of mind. Those whose religious beliefs and commitments held firm fought Hitler's attempt to crush the Jews' spirit. The ghetto's literature also records this type of resistance. Consider Chaim Kaplan's diary: although raised in an Orthodox home, Kaplan, a Hebrew school principal, found himself questioning God's wisdom: "Almighty God! Are you making an end to the remnant of Polish Jewry?" (Kaplan 67) A few days later Kaplan repeated his query: "Is this the way the Almighty looks after his dear ones?" (Kaplan 69) A terse entry appeared soon after: "He who dwells on High is all-powerful." (Kaplan 70) Although the Nazis eventually murdered him, his spirit remained unbroken.

Another volume that survived the war, *Esh Kadosh* (Holy Fire) tracks the developing religious thought of Rabbi Kalonymos Shapiro, the Piasecener Ravi. *Esh Kadosh* contains the sermons Shapiro delivered from the time the ghetto was established until the final series of death camp deportations. Shapiro's religious explanation for the Holocaust changes radically during this period. At first, Shapiro interprets the suffering of the Jews as punishment and thus atonement for sin or impropriety:

"Individuals amongst you who were attracted to secular wisdom, in which Amalek prided himself... lost interest in the Torah and its wisdom... God made it happen that Amalek would engage you with all his vaunted wisdom, and reveal all of his wickedness." (Polen 259)

After realizing that the extent of the "decree" was by no means commensurate with the crime, he articulates a new position:

"There are some sufferings that we suffer on our own account — whether for our sins, or as sufferings of love in order to purge and purify us... There are, however, some sufferings which we just suffer along with Him... the sufferings of *kiddush Hashem*... these sufferings are for His sake, on His account; in sufferings such as these we are made greater, raised higher... It is not appropriate to ask, 'for what sin?', since while they do expiate sins... they are essentially sufferings of *kiddush Hashem*." (Polen 258)

Continued on page 9

Spiritual Materialism

The Development of a Hasidic Ideology

by Yair Yaish

We are all familiar with the outward conventions of the Hasidic movement. Distinctive garb, pious mannerisms, and a vibrant communal life are features common to all branches of Hasidism. Yet these hallmarks, rather than contributing to our understanding of Hasidism, often enhance the mystique surrounding it and obscure its doctrinal foundations. Indeed, many of us are unaware of the historical backdrop that led to the blossoming of *Chasidut* and are especially ignorant of its intellectual base.

The Baal Shem Tov, also known as the "Besht," founded the Hasidic movement. The Besht sought to remedy the exclusion of the common Jew from many areas hitherto reserved solely for the Talmudist and Rabbi. Yet it is fallacious to view the Besht as a romantic thinker whose only goal was to narrow the gap between the layman and God. His was a two-pronged conception that also incorporated a rigorous intellectual regimen, based on Torah learning and kabbalistic teachings, for his elite disciples. A central concept in this infrastructure, deserving close examination, is *avoda be-gashmiut*.

Until the advent of Hasidism, the ascent to the divine was primarily an ascetic journey and, in addition, restricted to a select few. *Avoda be-gashmiut*, however, stressed God's immanence, that His Presence can be found in every aspect of the universe and one's life. It encouraged serving God through worldly and material matters, enabling even the ignorant to soar to great spiritual heights. The common tasks of everyday life possess profound spiritual potential waiting to be unlocked by Man. *Avoda be-gashmiut* promised a spiritual renaissance by exalting the common experience, by touching the common Jew.

Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef of Polonnye was the first of the Besht's disciples to publish a major work, as well as the first to pen the thoughts of his master. His monumental work, *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, is his most famous. His writings also include *Ketonet Passim*, *Tzofnat Pataneach*, and *Ben Porat Yosef*, all *drash*-oriented in their exegetical style and dealing primarily with portions in the Bible.

Among the concepts stressed by the *Baal HaToldot*, and consequently by Hasidism in general, is that of the *tzaddik*, the holy rabbi who devotes his entire life to serving God. It is through the *tzaddik* that God relates to and deals with the world. He is the spiritual axis around which the world revolves.

Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef employs the philosophical/mystical distinction between *tzura* and *chomer*, found in the works of medieval scholars such as Maharal, to explain the role of the *tzaddik*. He contrasts the *tzaddik* — the *ish hatzura*, and the layman — the *ish hachomer*. The *ish hatzura* conducts his life in a supernatural way, *lema'alah miteva*, while the *ish hachomer's* life is restricted to the natural realm. He expresses this thought numerous times in his writings.

"There are two types of individuals, one type that conducts himself via natural law, the second, above natural law. And this is an encompassing principle that man should not enter further than his level [i.e. capabilities] which will then be the cause of his complete negation." (*Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, Mishpatim). A dividing wall is thereby erected that distinguishes the *tzaddik*, the spiritual elite, from the layman.

Rabbeinu Bachya's introductory remarks to *Pekudei* include a similar idea. He interprets "*tov aruchat yerek ve'ahava sham me'shor aviv ve-sin'a bo*, better a feast of vegetables with love therein than a fat bullock and hatred there" (Proverbs 15:17), as a reference to the heavenly experience of the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. Bachya contends that the overwhelming experience of revelation caused their spiritual downfall, leading to the sin of the golden calf. Likewise, claims Bachya; *Chazal* explain the tragedy of the "four who entered Pardes," from which only Rabbi Akiva emerged unscathed, as resulting from a spiritual hubris.

The theme of the *tzaddik's* innate spiritual superiority affects many concepts in Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef's writings; tracing its development is an arduous and fascinating task. Among others, it influenced his view of *avoda be-gashmiut*. Recall that *avoda be-gashmiut* served to negate the prevailing notion of asceticism, placing in its stead the theory of God's immanence and the idea that a close awareness of God is within every man's reach.

Rabbi Ya'akov employs various *midrashim* when laying the foundation upon which he erects the theory of *avoda be-gashmiut*. One, alluded to numerous times in his writings, relates the story of Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar as they fled from the Roman government. They hid in a cave for twelve years, all the while occupied in the study of Torah. Upon their emergence they saw a Jew running with two bundles of *haddassim* on *erev Shabbat*. At first, Rabbi Shimon was critical of this Jew for engaging in what appeared to be an idle and insignificant act. When apprised that these myrtle were to be used in honor of Shabbat, he immediately retracted his strictures and praised the Jewish nation (*Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, Mishpatim, Chayyei Sarah).

The *Baal HaToldot* boldly asserts that these two great *tannaim* had not yet grasped

the concept of *avoda be-gashmiut*. Only after this episode did they realize the importance and effectiveness of this method of serving God.

Continuing his argument, he cites *Taanit* 22a, which places special emphasis on the reward that God would grant two jesters in *olam haba* for making people cheerful. The Besht explained that the jesters referred to in the Talmud weren't just trying to induce guffaws. Rather, they had the deep intention of creating a receptacle for the Divine Presence by inspiring happiness in every soul (*Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, Tetzaveh). Once again: *avoda be-gashmiut*.

The *Baal HaToldot* often cites a *midrash* regarding Chanokh that also illustrates this concept. (Dr. Lamm also employed this *midrash* in last year's Torah U Mada lecture). The *midrash* relates that Chanokh, who was removed from this world prematurely because of his righteousness, (see Rashi, Gen. 5:22), was a professional shoemaker. His greatness lay in his ability to perform the menial task of stitching a shoe *le-shem shamayim*. Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef portrays Chanokh as a paradigmatic figure actively embodying the ideals of *avoda be-gashmiut*.

It is imperative to note that the aforementioned *midrashim* and their ilk act not merely as examples of the concept of *avoda be-gashem*; they establish its core, from which Rabbi Ya'akov develops it into a philosophic entity.

However, contradictions to this concept occur in Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef's literature. For instance: "The entire world is nourished on account of Chaninah my son; as for Chaninah my son a measure ("kav") of carobs suffices." Rabbi Ya'akov (*Ben Porat Yosef*, Vayechi) attributes Chaninah ben Dosa's greatness to his lack of materialistic craving. The *Toldot* here returns to the ascetic apprehension of spirituality. The Baal Shem Tov claimed that in Chaninah's merit the world received

sustenance. Rabbi Ya'akov develops this a step further and claims that Chaninah, symbolic of the *tzaddik*, was the "pipeline" through which the blessings of God descended to the world. Astonishingly, an act of denial, not material affirmation, forms the basis for the *tzaddik's* role.

To resolve this paradox, one might claim that Chaninah would have attained a higher spiritual level had he adhered to the doctrine of *avoda be-gashem*, but this interpretation seems forced. One also might claim that Rabbi Ya'akov deemed *avoda be-gashem* a mode of life for the *ish hachomer* and not the *ish hatzura*. But the *Baal HaToldot* clearly rejects this approach when formulating his theory of *avoda be-gashmiut*, actually affirming its opposite. Rabbi Ya'akov unequivocally states that the path of *avoda be-gashmiut* is not open to all who seek it. Only the *ish hatzura* — the great-souled individual — can approach the divine via this service.

This thought emerges clearly in his commentary on the second paragraph of *Shma*, recited by every Jew twice daily. The word *de-ganecha* claims Rabbi Ya'akov, implies "your grain — not Mine (God's)." Rabbi Ya'akov notes that the word is placed in a paragraph dealing with mass activities and comments that "the masses are not capable of attaching themselves to God when involved in mundane tasks. For this trait is not given over to the masses. . . . (*Ben Porat Yosef*, Vayechi). When the common Jew is involved in *divrei gashmi*, God is in the periphery of his thoughts. Only the elite few are always able to keep God at the center of their thoughts.

This elitist understanding of *avoda be-gashmiut* runs counter to that of the Besht's and appears inconsistent with the *midrashim* forming the concept's basis. In the *midrashim*, the person exemplifying the concept of *avoda be-gashmiut* appears as an ordinary individual

Continued on page 11



"A Hasid Studying"
Lazar Krestin, 1902

Stained Souls?

Hashkafic Catch-22's

by Chaviva Levin

Tanakh recounts several incidents in which individuals act *l'shem shamayim* - even explicitly receive God's approval for their actions - yet are morally stained by these very actions. Furthermore, some *mitzvo* require actions which directly cause an ethical decline in the person performing them. Thus God seemingly requires actions that will diminish our ability to serve him.

King David fights wars that, if not obligatory, are *l'shem shamayim* and therefore commendable (see Radak, *Metzudot Tzion*, I Chronicles 22:8). Nonetheless, God denies David the honor of constructing the Temple because "*dam larov shafakha*" - You have shed much blood." David's military campaigns, although conducted with God's approval, indelibly stain his character.

Pinchas provides another example of an individual whose character is tarnished by Divinely approved actions. After Pinchas kills Zimri, his act receives God's explicit approbation: "Pinchas... has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My passion. Therefore say: Behold I give upon him My covenant of peace." (Numbers 25:11-12)

But Pinchas does not emerge in peace; even though his actions preserve God's honor and save the Jewish people from destruction, killing causes him inner turmoil and turbulence. Netziv argues that God only gives gifts when they are needed; God's bestowal of His covenant of peace upon Pinchas indicates that Pinchas lacks inner peace. Neither the propriety of Pinchas's action nor his noble motive protects him from the bloodstain.

Abishai saves the life of David



Cases in which actions are, not only retroactively approved but even commanded by God are even harder to understand. God orders the Jews to destroy any *ir nidachat*, a city in which all of the inhabitants practice *avoda zara*. He then promises that He will grant mercy to the destroyers. Here the Netziv reiterates his supposition; God gives gifts which respond to a need. He comments (Deut. 13:18) that the act of killing all the inhabitants of a city, although done at God's behest, invariably causes the participants in the *mitzva* to become calloused and hardened to suffering. God's promise of mercy is necessary to mitigate the effect of the inevitable dehumanization incurred by one who carries out the dictate of His will.

Should not the performance of God's commandments lead to the moral elevation of the individual? Yes, but in several of the situations mentioned above, no available choice will result in moral improvement. Pinchas must either allow Zimri to continue his public defamation of God or else kill him. The Jews must either tolerate mass idolatry or eradicate its practitioners. In these circumstances the right action can at best moderate the negative impact of the situation. Personal moral regression is in some cases the lesser of two evils.

But this logic fails to justify the negative effect of *shechita*. According to both Rav Yosef Albo (*Sefer Halkarim* 3 chap. 15) and Rav Yitzchak Abravanel (Genesis 9:3), a *shochet* becomes insensitive to the act of killing. Furthermore, Rav Abraham Isaac Kook states that preferably the tasks of *shechita* and *bedika* should be performed by different people, as the *hodek* must be learned,

while slaughtering is an action not in accordance with the heightened ethical sensitivities of a learned, spiritually inclined individual (*Igrot HaReilah* vol. 2, p. 230).

The problem intensifies when we realize that certain *mitzvo* require *shechita* as part of their process. According to Rambam and *Tur*, one must eat meat to fulfill the *mitzva* of *simchat Yom Tov*. Similarly, all *korbanot* require *shechita*. These *mitzvo* cannot be fulfilled unless at least one individual damages his ethical sensibilities.

The Talmud states (Shabbat 156a) that a person born under the sign of Mars "will be a shedder of blood", and accordingly advises one born under this sign to become a *shochet*. In so doing, this individual redirects his innate violence into an activity both useful and reforming. As Ramban (Deut. 22:6) and Rav Yosef Albo (*Halkarim* Book 3 chap. 15) point out, many of the strict requirements of *shechita*, such as slaughtering at the jugular vein, covering the blood of the animal, and the prohibition against eating a limb of a living

animal, were formulated to inculcate the trait of mercy.

Perhaps, then, slaughtering in accordance with these strict requirements does not additionally harm the ethical character of those individuals who would anyway be "shedders of blood". It may even refine that violent trait. This explanation assumes that *shechita* is the best possible option for this individual, given his nature. Other people might be harmed morally by performing *shechita*, even if that action was performed for the *mitzva* of *simchat Yom Tov* or for a required sacrifice. Those *mitzvo* do not, however, require a person not naturally a "shedder of blood" to slaughter.

While it is disturbing to realize that performing Divinely approved actions can be morally harmful, the notion becomes more acceptable if we realize that the best action in a given situation is not necessarily ideal. Presented with a situation in which both alternatives are ethically harmful, a person can only hope to limit the inevitable damage - and wait for God's gift to meet our needs.

Mourning

Continued from page 3

the first thing to come out of his house to meet him "will be the Lord's", and he "will offer it up as a burnt offering." If he intended to offer a person to God, what do these phrases mean? "Will be the Lord's" might refer to the consecration of a person to the service of God rather than an actual sacrifice. The second phrase, however, is difficult to reconcile with this interpretation. Marcus believes that "*vehaalithu olah*" can be taken figuratively, citing in support the phrase "*lehanif tenufah*" in Numbers 8:11: "And let Aaron wave the Levites before the Lord as a wave offering from the Israelites" (However, Rashi believes that Aharon physically waved the Levites.)

Marcus's solution is improbable; figurative usage of sacrificial language in a prose passage is very unusual. The phrase "*lehaalot olah*" never occurs in a figurative sense. Radak, who interprets "*vehaalithu olah*" literally, offers a different solution. He claims that Yiftach considered two possibilities in his vow: "And it will be for the Lord," *hekdesh* (consecrated), if it is not fit for a sacrifice, and "I will offer it up as a sacrifice" if it is worthy for sacrifice". In the usual reading of the verse, "*vehaalithu olah*" is understood as the explanation of "*vehaya lahashem*". Radak, however, considers the phrases disjunctive: the *vav* of "*vehaalithu olah*" does not mean "and" but "or", as in the verse "And one who strikes his father or [ve] his mother shall surely die" (Exodus 21:15). This solution introduces other problems. According to Radak, Yiftach's primary choice was to offer an animal sacrifice. If so, "*vehaalithu olah*" would naturally precede "*vehaya lahashem*". Most importantly, if the *vav* means "or", it cannot be a *vav hahipuch* (conversive *vav*). "*vehaalithu olah*" would then mean "and I offered it up as a burnt offering", which makes no sense in context (Marcus p. 18).

Perhaps Yiftach actually intended to offer a human sacrifice to God. Although the phrase "*lehaalot olah*" generally occurs in connection with animals, it occasionally refers to human sacrifice. God tells Abraham "Take

your son, your only one and offer him there as a burnt offering [*vehaaleihu...leolah*]." (Genesis 22:2) Although Abraham does not actually kill his son, a different father, the king-of-Moab, completes the act in a desperate attempt to win a war with the Israelites: "So he took his firstborn son who was to rule after him and he offered him up on the wall as a burnt offering [*vayaaletihu olah*]." (II Kings 3:27) According to one opinion in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 39b), Meisha sacrificed his son to God. Thus Yiftach might have intended a human victim, thinking that God would be pleased with his great sacrifice. If Yiftach wished to sacrifice someone from his household, his extreme reaction upon seeing his daughter indicates that he expected a different victim.

Perhaps Yiftach was not sure what he intended. His vow was a wild promise made in the heat of battle preparations; he did not stop to consider its possible consequences. The careful phrasing of the vow makes this interpretation unlikely, however. Yiftach's vow was more likely a kind of gamble, intended to impress God with its daring. Yiftach promised to sacrifice anything that belonged to him, assuming that things would work out all right in the end and that he would lose nothing worse than a sheep. Whether Yiftach intended an animal or a person, it seems clear that he intended to offer a real burnt sacrifice to God. This does not necessarily mean, however, that Yiftach killed his daughter; when things did not turn out as he wished, he may have altered his promise. We can discover the daughter's fate only by examining the continuation of the story.

"And she said to him, 'My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone forth from your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you against your enemies, the Ammonites.' And she said to her father, 'Let this be done for me: let me alone two months and I will go down upon the hills and I will bewail my virginity, and my friends.' And he said, 'Go.' And he sent her away for two months and she went,

Test of the Spirit

Continued from page 6

Shapiro shifts the focus of the Nazis' attack from the Jew to the Jewish God. "Israel's suffering is the result of her identification with the Divine Cause." This understanding gave the Jews an incentive to carry on. Their God had not forsaken them. On the contrary, He identifies so closely with them that His enemies direct their attacks against the Jew as God's representative.

Shapiro wrote as a religious theologian, Huberband as an Orthodox historian. Both Hasidic Rabbis lost wife and daughters to the Luftwaffe's guns. Shapiro in the bombing of Warsaw and Huberband in the strafing of its approaches. Both resisted Hitler, but each in his own way. Shapiro clothed his resistance in theology, while Huberband wove it permanently into the tapestry of history.

Orthodox Jews were not the only spiritual heroes in the Warsaw Ghetto. Many non-observant Jews experienced a reawakening of faith. From the diary of Adam Czerniakow, head of the Judenrat, we see that even the enlightened intelligentsia felt the stirrings of their heritage. Thus Czerniakow, a non-

observant Jew, scolded a Dr. Stein for smoking on the Sabbath in front of the German administrator of the hospital (Czerniakow 159). Czerniakow also successfully convinced the Nazis to make Saturday a mandatory day of rest. (Huberband notes that this was counterproductive, as the observant did not need the Judenrat's decree and the non-observant simply bribed the police to look the other way. Only the police profited from this well-intentioned regulation.) Czerniakow even persuaded the Nazis to reopen three synagogues in Warsaw.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of the Ghetto remained non-observant. As Rabbi Zeitlan, a noted orthodox leader, attests,

"The Sabbath is disappearing. In the house where I live, among two hundred and twenty families, there are hardly two or three of them who are Sabbath-observing." (Norman Frimer, Tradition 15:1 87)

Huberband confirms this with uncharacteristic humor: "Although Sabbath-observance has fallen greatly, one matter relating to the

Sabbath has flourished greatly, cholent, the traditional Sabbath stew." (Huberband 208) Although no one can refute the decline of observance, a story relayed by Czerniakow puts the feelings of some non-observant and apostate Jews in another perspective. Soon after the ghetto's establishment, the Germans ordered a census. The Jews could not divine the Germans' intentions, but they sensed that the census boded evil. Yet, Czerniakow's diary entry of 29 May 1940 records the following letter:

"I have learned... that I am considered a Christian convert. I wish to state that I have never been baptized. I left the Jewish community in 1933 to be a person without any religion. I did not leave the Jewish religion to be a member of some better or worse faith... To list me as a baptized Jew - a category which I myself look down upon - is a grievous moral wrong... correct this unintended injustice by placing [my name] in the appropriate register.

Aleksander Mielnikow [sic] Even before the plans for the Final Solution had been drawn, 5000 Jews a month were dying in the ghetto (Claude Lanzman, *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust*, 182). When Jan Karski, a member of the Polish government-in-exile visited the ghetto, he could stand it for only an hour. Forty years after that one hour he still "does not go back to those memories" (Lanzman 174). Karski lived on to leave those memories behind, but the Jews of the ghetto were not so fortunate.

What caused some to falter and others to rise? Whatever the answer, it does not lie along lines of observance. Members of both camps stumbled; many within both camps soared. To those who died and lived "*b'kidush Hashem*" we owe recognition and homage. That we cannot begin to comprehend their experience by no means absolves us of this debt. Perhaps by reading their works and studying their lives, by keeping their memories and ideals alive, we can begin to repay it.

A Maiden

Continued from page 8

do not conclusively prove the celibacy theory. Proponents of his theory try to bolster their claim by questioning the supposed reticence of the narrator at the conclusion of the story. Why would the narrator avoid direct mention of the daughter's death when several bloody incidents are recounted in full detail elsewhere in the book? In Judges 3 we read about the gruesome death of Eglon king of Moab at the hands of Ehud; in chapter 4 we see Yael take a tent pin to Sisera and drive it through his forehead. *Tanakh* describes the death of the "good guy" with the same objectivity used for stories of the enemy's defeat: Asahel's stabbing at the hands of Avner in II Samuel 2 is almost as gory as the death of Eglon.

In the Yiftach passage, however, the omission of all details serves several useful functions. The narrator minimizes reference to the sacrifice even in the dialogue between Yiftach and his daughter. The effect is to preserve the dignity of her death, and to render the story all the more tragic. The effect on the emotions of the reader is only increased by the brevity of the account.

Finally, one might point to the objectivity and nonjudgemental style of the Yiftach passage as an argument for the celibacy theory. Could such a shocking story would be recounted without any condemnation of Yiftach's act? However, objectivity is the norm throughout the book of Judges. Several horrifying stories are told in Judges in a dry, emotionless style. The narrator does not pass judgement on Michah's idol in Chapter 18. In Chapter 19 we read the sordid story of the concubine of Gibeah. No emotion appears in the story until the narrator describes, again with perfect objectivity, the outrage of the Israelites following the incident.

The act of recording the story for all succeeding generations to read and remember is the most effective condemnation possible. Yiftach's continued rule after the sacrifice of his daughter is puzzling. But the tragedy did not pass unnoticed. The daughters of Israel commemorated her death each year as a reminder of the terrible consequences of ignorance and pride.

Radak's suggestions are plausible, but they



I Shall Live
 by Henry Orenstein
 Simon & Schuster, 1987
 Reviewed by Nechama Goldman

Cold Memories

Henry Orenstein's autobiography *I Shall Live* tells of his life in Poland before and during the Nazi Occupation in the late 1930's. Before the Germans invaded Poland, rumors circulated about the vicious Nazi treatment of Jewish men. As a result, Orenstein moves with his father and two brothers to Soviet Poland, leaving behind his mother, sister, and brother (Women were thought to be less threatened, and his brother was a medical doctor and felt secure). However, when the Nazis invade Soviet Poland, the Orenstein family is reunited in German Poland. Eventually, the Nazis find the family and take the parents away to be shot. They leave one message for the oldest brother: "Fred, save the children!"

The Nazis initially send the four brothers to the same concentration camp, the first of five for Orenstein. Once there, Henry and his brother Sam sign up for a special unit called the Institute for the German Eastwork, pretending to be scientists themselves. The

Nazis allow this unit to sit in a warm and dry bunker working on pointless assignments while the rest of the Jews in the camp perish under brutal work conditions. Orenstein realizes that the unit was set up by German professors seeking to avoid service on the Russian front; he uses his own "front" to join it and survive the camp.

While on a death march, Orenstein is liberated by Allied American soldiers. Eventually, he rejoins his two surviving brothers. He decides, however, that he can no longer live in anti-semitic Eastern Europe, and so emigrates to America.

Despite the poignancy of its subject, *I Shall Live* lacks emotional impact as a consequence of Orenstein's literary style. He drops pieces of information, picks them up, and re-inserts them at odd moments. For example, he interjects a story about his first girlfriend into a discussion of the Soviet invasion of Poland, forcing the reader to switch abruptly from history to anecdote. He often leaves thoughts

hanging or jumps inexplicably from subject to subject.

Orenstein concentrates on relating physical facts rather than emotions to his reader. His description of a beating, for instance, falls flat because no feeling of terror and pain exist beyond the description. Perhaps he has distanced himself from the subject and as a result cannot capture the fear, terror, hurt, and pain he experienced during his years in concentration camps.

Orenstein also frequently understates his own feelings. "Many people we knew had been killed in that march. We were deeply troubled." "Troubled" cannot possibly convey the depth of his feelings at that time. Referring to the time he spent in Soviet Poland while part of his family lived under Nazi rule, he writes "All in all this time was not an unhappy time. I was young, I had a girlfriend... as a Jew I had a feeling of equality with the Gentiles." Where is the fear he must have felt? How could he have felt equality with Gentiles

in the pervasively anti-semitic atmosphere of 1930's Poland? Perhaps he succeeded even then in suppressing the tension and terror he must have experienced. Certainly he succeeds in doing so in this book.

Nevertheless, Orenstein evokes paths indirectly, through his characters. His words recreate real people suffering a tragedy, Jews struggling through the Holocaust. This is perhaps a powerful subject. Still, I emerged with no sense of outrage or horror. Orenstein has distanced himself too far from the past, and blocked out too much of the pain.

The book's closing is its most powerful line. As Orenstein enters his last camp, an S.S. officer greets him, "Juden! What are you doing here? I thought there were no more Jews left!" While this book has numerous shortcomings, it remains essential for survivors such as Orenstein to record their stories. The world must continually be reminded that the Jews have indeed survived.

SOY is pleased to announce the publication of **BEIT YITZCHAK**

a journal of essays on
Torah She-be'al peh
 and
 the inaugural issue of

RINAT YITZCHAK

A Compendium of essays on
Torah she-bikhtav
 Concentrating on Genesis

**Available
 May 16**

Ohavei Shalom *Tsedaka Fund*

Dedicated to the Memory of
 Rabbi Solomon P. Wohlgelemerter

*"Reaches out to the needy in Israel,
 Hearing their silent cry"*

You are invited to participate in the
 eleventh spring campaign at Y.U.
 Now in progress.

Contributions
 can be given to

Judah Wohlgelemerter
 Pollack Library
 Y.U. Campus Representative

Contributions
 can be mailed to

Rabbi Eliahu P. Rominec
 611 Beach 8th Street
 Far Rockaway, NY 11691

Spiritual Materialism

Continued from page 7

— a common Jew. This is clearly evident from Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai's remark: *kama chavivim mitzvot al Yisrael*. The word "Yisrael" is used here in a collective, all-encompassing sense — "all of Israel" — the layman as well as the scholar, the *ish hatzura* and the *ish hachomer*. Without this *midrashic* base the concept has little backing in Jewish tradition.

It seems that in the aftermath of the Besht and the subsequent flourishing of Hasidism, the untenability of a lifestyle based on *avoda be-gashmiut* for the masses was evident to Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef. He extracts the original concept and forms a more viable theory by restricting its application to a scholarly caste. But where does this leave the common Jew?

To solve this dilemma, Rabbi Ya'akov formulates the concept of *deveikut*, attachment — to the *ish hatzura*. He thus gives the *ish ha-chomer* a means of salvaging his spiritual existence. Rabbi Ya'akov utilizes a famous quote of *Chazal* as evidence for his idea: "To love God and to cling to Him" (Deut. 30:20) — Is it possible for a man to cling to the Presence? Rather [it means:] that anyone who weds his daughter to a Torah scholar, and one who does business with a Torah scholar, and one who benefits Torah scholars from his possessions, the Torah likens him to having clung to the Presence." (Ketubot 111b)

The concept of *deveikut ba-tzaddik* is also illustrated by *Chazal's* description of the relationship between the Jews and *Moshe Rabbeinu* — the *ish hatzura* par excellence.

After the Jews cross the Red Sea, Scripture testifies: "...and they believed in God and Moses his servant." (Ex. 14:31) The *Mekhilta* states: "Anyone who believes in the shepherd of Israel is as if he believes in God Himself." From this Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef extracts the notion that *deveikut batzaddik* is equivalent to *deveikut haShem* (Toldot Ya'akov Yosef, Yitro). He interprets Rabbi Akiva's statement, "Et Hashem Elokekha tira, le-rabot talmidei chakhamim" (Pesachim 22b), similarly, Awe of the *talmid chakham* — the *ish hatzura* — is a form of *deveikut*, and the implied juxtaposition in the verse between him and God points to this relationship between them. Fear and awe of the *tzaddik* transforms itself into fear and awe of God. To obtain closeness to God it is enough for a layman to have *emunat chakhamim*, to attach himself to the *tzaddik's* persona.

Once this principle is firmly established, Rabbi Ya'akov further develops and stresses the importance of one's commitment to the *tzaddik*. "If the people will agree and allow the leaders of the generation, who wish to choose a path of seclusion in order to attach themselves to God, freedom from worldly burdens, it will prove fortunate for them who will be able to attain *deveikut* through him (the *tzaddik*)." (Toldot Yakov Yosef, Yitro) If the *tzaddik* is the "pipeline" to heaven, and if the layman relies on him for spiritual fulfillment and closeness to God, then it is imperative that he be free of worldly worries and frustrations, enabling him to reach a higher level of *deveikut*, which then trickles down to the

masses — the *ish hachomer*.

Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef thus severely limits the individualistic aspirations of the *ish hachomer*. We can suggest alternate interpretations for the passages and quotes he cites to buttress his theory of *deveikut*. For one, the *Mekhilta* referring to *Moshe Rabbeinu* may simply be the basis for Maimonides' seventh and eighth articles of faith. Belief in the *shlichut* of *Moshe* presupposes the belief in *Torah min ha-shamayim* and belief in God. Also, the word "va-ya'aminu" may signify trust, not belief. This interpretation conforms with God's promise to *Moshe* that the *ot* (sign of *Bnei Yisrael's* belief in *Moshe*) will occur when the Jewish nation gathers to serve God at Mount Sinai.

Likewise, we may interpret Rabbi Akiva's statement as asserting that the survival of Judaism necessitates awe and respect for *talmidei chakhamim*, upon whose shoulders rests the task of interpreting the written law. This is then a natural extension of the commandment "lo tasur min ha-derech asher yaggidu lekha yamin usmol" (Deut. 17:11). By relating fear of the *chakhamim* to fear of God, Rabbi Akiva places the two on almost equal footing. Indeed, the Talmud (Bava Metzia 59b) describes God, *kaveyakhot*, as according to the opinion of the *talmidei chakhamim* — "nitzchuni banai".

Hasidism emerged at a time when the Jewish commoner felt remote from God and abandoned by the elite scholarly circles. One of its goals was bringing the simpleton closer to God's presence. *Avoda be-gashmiut* was a

vehicle that led to this goal. But though the *Baal Shem Tov* included the masses in his conceptual philosophy, his disciple limited their involvement, actually reversing the process his master initiated. But while previously the commoner was removed from the scholar, the *Baal Ha-Toldot* did place them in close proximity, creating a symbiotic relationship. The common Jew provides the material sustenance for the *ish hatzura*; the *tzaddik* provides the commoner with spiritual sustenance and a medium through which he may approach God.

In removing the concept of *avoda be-gashmiut* from the masses, Rabbi Ya'akov placed an unprecedented emphasis on the role of the *tzaddik* in the Jewish community. His theory has had consequences, some extreme, to this day.

Perhaps Rabbi Ya'akov's foresight in envisioning the increasing popularity of Hasidism among the masses forced him to reformulate his views on *avoda be-gashmiut*.

The greater the number of people attempting to reach God through this form of service, the greater the risks of misuse and distortion.

Rabbi Ya'akov's bold break from his master's conception may be the cause of *Hasidut's* success. But his sacrifice may have been unnecessary; other movements opposed the institution of the rebbe *tzaddik* and succeeded. The Besht's notion of mass spirituality may have been unworkable, but *Rav Yaakov* prevented us from ever knowing whether his master's dream could have become reality.

Summer Kollel

July 1989

Teaneck, N.J.

Rosh Kollel: Rabbi Yosef Blau

Learn, Teach and Outreach
in a congenial setting

Fellowships available

Open to advanced students in YC and RIETS

To Apply, Contact

Kenneth Fogel

or

Department of Educational Services — Furst 419

Sponsored by the Max Stern Division of Communal Services — RIETS

Economics: An exercise in self-improvement

by Yehuda Galinsky

The Talmud in several cases, particularly that of *tzedaka* provides motivations for *mitzvos* *bein adam lechavero* that are non-altruistic and occasionally even materialistic. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik argues that these instances are not exceptional; rather, the general *mechayev* (obligating factor) of intrasocial commandments is the concept of "*galgal hachozar baolam*". One Jew must help another so that he may, in his time of need, ask (or even demand) help from his fellow. Thus *mitzvos* *bein adam lechavero* bind all Jews together, creating a pact of social responsibility and a basic insurance net. 1

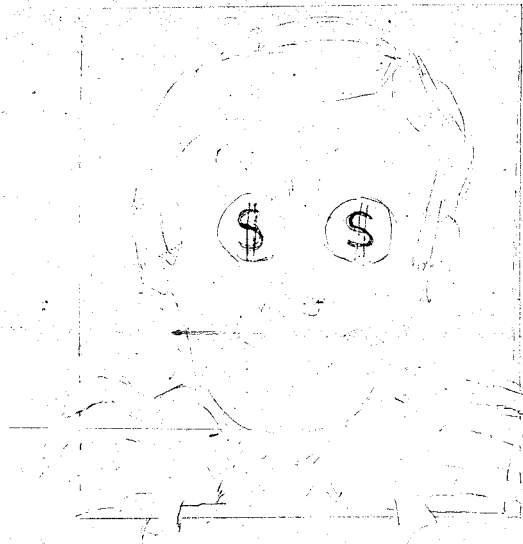
Shabbat 151b recommends giving charity on pragmatic grounds. "Rav Hiyya said to his wife: When a poor man comes, be quick to offer him some bread, so that others may be quick to offer it to your children . . . as the School of Yishmael has taught [give charity] for it [poverty] is a wheel that revolves in the world." *Sifre*, commenting on Deut. 5:11, echoes Rav Hiyya's advice: "for the poor shall never cease from the land, therefore I command you saying -- thou shalt surely open thy hand unto the poor and needy brother as I command you. I am giving you advice for your own benefit." As Netziv explains, man should be charitable so that if he becomes poor others will act mercifully toward him. Possibly *Sifre* refers to the communal obligation to maintain public charitable institutions, the *kuppa* and the *tamchui*. If these standing institutions are well supported, all Jews are secured from the day the wheel of poverty turns.

The theme of *galgal hachozar baolam* should not be viewed in isolation. Other statements in the Talmud also promote a non-altruistic approach to *tzedaka*. "If a man says 'I wish to give this *sela* for charity in order that my sons may live or that I may be found worthy of *olam haba*', he is considered a truly righteous man" (Rosh Hashana 4a, Pesachim 8a). Possibly the Talmud's utilization of the emphatic "*tzaddik gamur*" (or as Rabbenu Chananel has it, "*tzedaka gemura*") is due to the formulation of the commandment of charity in Deuteronomy 15:10: "You should surely give him (the pauper) as your heart shall not be grieved when you give him: because for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works and in all that to which you put your hand." Enlightened self-interest is a legitimate motivation for this *mitzva*.

Rav Yochanan's statement on Taanit 9a makes this point even more explicitly. "What is the meaning of '*aser t'aser*'? Give the tithes that you may become rich (*tit'asher*)." Rama (*Yoreh Deah* 247:10) extends this idea to monetary tithes given to the poor. 2

According to this general theme, it would seem that certain religious tasks can be perceived in purely economic terms, as designed merely to properly direct and channel natural self-interest and profit motives. Indeed, Adam Smith frequently emphasizes that "the powerful motive of self-interest is only enlisted in the cause of the general welfare under definite institutional arrangements" (M. Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, p. 63). Yet is it plausible that *mitzvos* merely sublimate without elevating, merely turn base motivations into worthwhile deeds without positively transforming the motivations themselves?

Rav Eliezer once said: "All the charity and kindness done by the heathen is counted as sin because they only do it to magnify themselves." The Talmud then asks, "But is this not



an act of charity in the full sense of the word, as we have learned, if a man says 'I give this *sela* for charity in order that my son live... that I may be found worthy of the future world, he is truly a righteous man?' The Talmud answers: "No. In one case we speak of an Israelite, in the other of a heathen." What is unique about charity given by a Jew? Why is his tainted motivation holier?

Rishonim (Rabbenu Gershom, Baba Batra 10b; Rashi, Pesachim 8b) explicate this anomaly by positing that when a Jew gives charity, he recognizes that he is fulfilling the Divine command to have mercy on the pauper. Self-interest plays a role as the initial motivator, but in the final analysis the Jew's willingness to give of his material goods is rooted in the religious nature of the giving. The non-Jew, however, lacks the *mitzva* orientation necessary to overcome his initial nonaltruistic motivation.

Rav Yaakov Yechiel Weinberg (*Sridei Aish* Vol.4 pp 343-44) elaborates on this point in his general discussion of the differences between the Jewish ethical system and Christian moral principles. When Hillel taught a potential convert "Don't do to others what you don't want done to yourself; this is the entire

Torah", Rav Weinberg writes, he revealed the unique feature of Judaism: the centrality of *halakha*, of deeds, in its religious system. Judaism believes that religion must concretize and objectify its ideals into specific modes of action. A religion that begins and ends with "Love thy neighbor" cannot fulfill its task. When spiritually uplifting principles are not applied to real life situations, they are relegated to the esoteric and fleeting world of the imagination. The beauty of Judaism lies in its being a way of life for all people.

Thus the Jew gives charity to fulfill God's positive command to have mercy on the poor and to sustain them. His initial motivating factors recede into the background when confronted by the objectified act. *Halakha* may not transform a selfish impetus, but it enables the selfishly impelled to achieve purer motivations.

Rav Shimon Shkop (Introduction to *Shaarei Yosher*) offers a more radical integration of the seemingly conflicting ideals of altruism and self-love. After defining the concept of *k'doshim tih'yu* as "channeling all ones efforts towards the betterment (spiritually and physically) of society, Rav Shimon

demonstrates that Judaism accepts and even embraces man's natural inclination towards self-love. What role can the *k'doshim* imperative play if man is by nature a selfish being?

To resolve this paradox Rav Shimon redefines the concept of self. On the most basic level, he postulates, "self" begins and ends with the material -- the body and its desires. Man, however, is capable of understanding that his self includes spirit and soul. He may further realize that his family qualifies as his extended "I". A Jew following the precepts and spirit of the Torah may then grasp that the entire nation of Israel is part of his extended self. And finally, man can reach a level of sophistication at which he views the entire world as an extension and expansion of his "I".

Self-love, therefore, is not the antithesis of altruism, but rather its true point of departure. As man includes others within his definition of self, his love extends to them. Self-love is the source of all love.

In John Donne's famous words, "No man is an island, intire of it selfe; every man is a peeces of continent, a part of the maine; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a promontoire were, as well as if a mannor of thy friends, or of thine owne were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." In this journey of redefinition of self, religion's role is crucial. Judaism, therefore, serves not merely as an agent for the channeling of selfish motives. It changes our perception of self from the purely materialistic to the encompassing and majestic.

Economics is the science of description; religion of education. For the economist, everything begins and ends with the real; man as he is. For homo religious, the real is only a stepping stone, a point of departure for greater and loftier goals.

Notes

1. Quoted by Rav Herschel Schachter in *Or Hamizrach*, Nisan 5743. The theme is elaborated upon in an earlier article in the same journal, Nisan 5733, p. 187.

2. Rav Schachter in *Or Hamizrach*, Nisan 5738, p. 178, explicates the major arguments surrounding this issue.

HAMEVASER

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan
Theological Seminary
2540 Amsterdam Ave.
New York, N.Y. 10033

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
New York, N.Y.
Permit No. 4729

Subscribers please send in your renewals.