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ובערת הרע מקרבך:

We applaud the **Commentator** and its editor-in-chief Dov Pinchot for their courage in finally exposing the scourge of Jeffrey Silver. It is unconscionable that nearly twenty years have passed without Silver being stopped. During this time, when many have been scared into silence and others have actually extended aid and encouragement to him, Silver has continued to harass and besmirch countless innocents. **Commentator's** public unveiling of Silver's outrageous activities was both heroic and necessary.

All arguments which have been raised against the publication of **Commentator's** exposé are untenable. In reference to Silver, *poskim* have cited Yerushalmi Peah 1:1: "It is permissible to speak *lashon ha-ra* of those who instigate *machloket*." More to the point, they cite Rabbenu Yonah's opinion (B.B. 39b) regarding one who regularly sins *be-meizid*: "It is a *mitzva* to embarrass him publicly...so that people will keep themselves far from his wicked path."

It has been contended that since Rav Soloveitchik not only tolerated Silver's presence in Yeshiva, but even granted him "*semicha*," action should not be taken against Silver. The very premise of this argument is highly ironic since this so-called "*semicha*," signed by Rav Soloveitchik shortly before he ceased giving *shiur* in 1985, was itself part of a deal to finally rid Yeshiva of Silver's presence. Furthermore, the idea that one could honor Rav Soloveitchik by protecting a man who has incessantly persecuted the Rav's family is absurd.

All evil people are by definition not completely sane; does this mean we must not fight them? To claim that we must show compassion for this vicious man because he is demented is to play right into his hands. Silver feeds off malice, ambition and misplaced sympathy. Where is our compassion for those he has tormented!? Allowing him to remain among us exhibits callousness and heartlessness to the real victims.

A man who gleefully blames people for their relatives' deaths and who bullies our Roshei Yeshiva and their families deserves not our compassion but our ostracism at the very least. How can we allow a man who organizes hate campaigns against our yeshiva to post his writings on our walls? How can we allow a man who routinely employs deception and slander to achieve his aims gather information and spread misinformation in our own *beit midrash*?

It is clear that this man must be removed from our yeshiva entirely. His presence within our walls is shameful and destructive. All deals to get rid of him have failed. His attacks are increasing. The conspiracy of silence must end.

How can we allow Silver to enter our library and photocopy his calumnious writings? Why haven't the guards stopped him at he door as they would any M.T.A. boy? How is it possible that he can distribute leaflets in Muss and Rubin dormitories in the dead of night? Where is our security? At minimum Y.U. should enforce its rules against intruders. Better, we should give Silver's picture to the guards so they know whom to kick out. The administration's timidity in dealing with this problem has allowed Silver a base for his attacks and only extended Silver's abilities. It is incomprehensible that the university allows this unprincipled man to conduct a Shabbat *minyan* in Tannenbaum Hall. Why is he given the opportunity weekly to spread his hate campaign against our *rebbeim* in his *shiur* for *ba'teiv batim* in our own *beit midrash*? The administration must take swift and decisive action in barring him from all University buildings.

Students must not tolerate his presence either. How can he be allowed to enter a *kollel* whose *Rosh Kollel* he has maliciously attacked for twenty years? The students must rise as one and throw him out. We must shun him like the evil man he is as he walks the streets of our campus.

We now have the opportunity to rid ourselves of Jeffrey Silver. For anyone to maintain contact with him or to rise to his defense is incomprehensible. To know his true nature and to still continue to support him is unthinkable, and indicative of either absolute confusion, unfathomed weakness, or worse, knowing unscrupulousness. In honor of the Torah, in defense of Yeshiva, in support of our Roshei Yeshiva, we, the student body must demand that the administration act. We must rise to the call: "And you shall eradicate the evil from your midst."

HAMEVASER

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Letters To The Editor

To the editor:

Dov Pinchot is owed the thanks of the entire Yeshiva community for breaking the conspiracy of silence that has surrounded Jeffrey Silver's activities for twenty years. I have seen and felt the stultifying influence that the fear Silver arouses has on *hashkafic* and *halakhic* thought at Yeshiva. Every *hashkafic* or *halakhic* word written or uttered in Yeshiva is measured lest it be taken out of context and included in next month's collection of poison pen letters to other *yeshivot*. Having seen these letters myself, I can attest that those fears are not unwarranted. As the last quote in the article says, "it is incredible that this has gone on for twenty years."

Unfortunately, that quote also revealed that Mr. Pinchot's courage cannot by itself end this situation. The fact that its author refused to be quoted by name shows that he still feared reprisals from Silver... Indeed, most of the people quoted in the article, including more than one *rosh yeshiva*, refused to be named.

Unfortunately, while I can (and do) verify the truth of Mr. Pinchot's article from personal experience and private investigation, many other readers have no such opportunity. The failure of many around Yeshiva to match Mr. Pinchot's courage may give Silver the opportunity to fulfill their fears.

Y.U. *roshei yeshiva* suffer more than anyone else when Yeshiva is slandered, and Silver has launched many attacks against them as individuals. The present attempt to slander Rav Schachter in the right-wing community is far from unusual. I hope that all *talmidei hayeshiva* will support their *rebbeim* by supporting Mr. Pinchot. Any with doubts should ask their *rebbeim*, many of whom are in the best position to know the truth.

Some *roshei yeshiva* have claimed in the past that they were powerless to act, that Silver was the administration's responsibility. The administration, of course, has refused to act without a prior commitment to public support from all the *roshei yeshiva*. Mr. Pinchot seems to have beaten both to the punch. But he cannot finish the job himself.

It is now their responsibility to support him loudly, publicly, and unambiguously, to ensure that no one in the Orthodox community will retain any excuse for believing Silver's slanders.

Robert Klapper
YC, BRGS '89, RIETS '93

A True Chesed

To the Editors:

Rabbi Avraham (Arthur) Saslow, a YU alumnus (1967), and his five year old son Rafael were killed in a traffic accident in Israel this past January.

Rabbi Saslow, who had been active in NCSY before coming to YU, was one of the first students enrolled in JSS to transfer to RIETS and later obtain *semicha*. He was known to all for his cheery disposition, always smiling, always seeking ways to help others, and never criticizing or complaining. His warm nature won him many friends who loved him dearly, and made him very successful in NCSY in America and in *Tzumah l'Hafatzat HaTorah* in Israel, where he built *yeshivot k'tanot* in five settlements that previously had none.

Rabbi Saslow married the former Dorrie Turk (Stern, 1968) in 1968 and moved to Israel in 1971. Prior to the tragedy, they had eight children; another son, Avraham Baruch, was born after the accident on 21 Sivan 5749.

An effort is being made to complete the study of *mishnayot* in memory of Avraham ben Shlomo and his son Rafael David ben Avraham. David Seff, who is co-ordinating the effort, may be contacted at his home, 1443 East 12th Street, Brooklyn, New York 11230, or by calling (718) 336-5818.

We thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,
David Seff

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Rabbi Nosson Friedman's art can be obtained from Mordechai Lent, Mo 713, (212) 795-3123.

Mysticism, Modernity and Massora

An Interview With Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, a noted thinker, has authored many books including *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*, *The Long Shorter Way: Discourses on Chasidic Thought and his recently-published anthology The Strife of the Spirit*. A pioneering educator, he has through his monumental translation of the *Talmud* enabled thousands to study this most central text. On December 4th, while touring the United States to promote the English translation of the "Steinsaltz Talmud," Rabbi Steinsaltz spoke to Hamevaser's Mark Gottlieb and Ronald Ziegler. Excerpts from the interview follow.

Hamevaser: What are the most acute problems facing the modern rabbi and educator?

R. Steinsaltz: Every rabbi now faces more problems than previous generations had to face. Life is changing so fast — the new problems, you have to solve them, and not everything can be asked by telephone. Some are not equipped — not halakhically, not conceptually. So the best people are needed and they are not always the ones that do it. It's a big problem. If there is one person that can do it properly, then sometimes it makes a huge change — not only for one or two people, but the whole community has changed.

H: You said a moment ago that a lot of rabbis aren't halakhically equipped, and I can understand — you don't know enough *Shulchan Arukh*, and so on; but what do you mean by "not conceptually equipped"? How does someone become hashkafically equipped?

R. Steinsaltz: Well, first of all, even the source material is vast. People have a look at the *Kuzari* and they have a look at the *Moreh Nevuchim*, and sometimes they know what the pages of *Chovot HaLevavot* look like, and that's about it, more or less. You add some more writings here and there, and you have to make a theology out of it. It's very hard. You are facing lots of practical moral-spiritual questions. People are asking constantly, and if you are a practicing rabbi people come and they ask you, "Why did my child die?" Now you are sort of the *Ribbano Shel Olam's* voice. Most people feel that they are very inadequate. It's not because the rabbis are no good; they simply feel inadequate. In family situations you have to face the most delicate problems and you have to come up with answers that are both halakhically sound and personally amenable; sometimes you have to deal with an *almna*, sometimes you have to deal with older people. It's not always easy.

Any rabbi worth his salt has to think about the bread. I mean, every case is a new case. Every person is a new person. You cannot just open the book. What is the biggest problem? Why are rabbis needed? All the social functions are really [secondary] — you see, there are so many books, practical books, first-aid books, about every subject, that you buy at a tremendous rate. Somebody told me — I thought this was a joke — that somebody wrote a book about taking the three steps after *Shemoneh Esrei*? A book... I hope it's not a big book. So you have the real questions now, where usually you're not facing a clean-cut case. Regularly, the questions are complex. This is the same reason why most doctors will tell you that the first-aid books are sometimes more dangerous than having nobody there.

H: Simplistic?

R. Steinsaltz: They are simplistic — they are simplistic in the sense that even when they deal with a matter deeply, they deal with a simple situation. But usually in the problems that you face, whether you are a medical doctor or an engineer, you are facing complex questions. You have sometimes six, seven different considerations... You have to have all of them in mind. That is one thing which no book will give you. Specific situations here and there: what do you do about them?

A student of mine came to me to get *semicha*. We had an interview; this wasn't very formal. "You forgot the light in the refrigerator on *Shabbat*. What do you do now?" You have to find out what are the problems there: what is the case? Who is in the house? Is there a different situation between *Eretz Yisrael* and *Chutz LaAretz*? Which is to be preferred in such a situation? You have different options and they don't apply in every situation. We are speaking about a very small and not very involved question. But you may ask from everything, from *hilkhot nidda* to whatever it is and some of these questions are so complicated by human needs, by human desires, dreams, [and] fears. All of these come together, and you have to take this into consideration. If you say it is forbidden, what are you doing? And this is a legitimate consideration. Everything is a consideration. [For example,] what is *hefeseh merubeh*? How do you estimate it? Is it objective? Surely not. It is subjective. So how do you estimate it? How can a person take it in this case? If you say that a certain thing shouldn't be done, then sometimes you have to keep quiet, sometimes you have to make a scandal. What are the rights of it?

All these things are really the work of the local everyday rabbi, and not the glorious person, the *posek ha-dor*. To make a balance of all existing ingredients, to make the right judgement, that is the work of the rabbi. He has to know that sometimes the people that come to ask the questions ask the wrong questions. This happens in so many cases. You have to find out what lies behind it. Sometimes the question that is asked is not important, but if you answer one way or the other, you give the wrong answer. You have to deal with what really happened... You have to know all the ingredients...

One hundred and fifty years ago a great Rebbe gathered together all of his pupils, the *rabbanim*, his *talmidim*, and he made a list of what a rabbi has to know — the number of books that they have to know — and said, "Does anyone know all these?" So we trust what is called *siyyata d'ismaya* not to give the wrong answer. But still, there is a vast amount of information and a person has to cope with all that. The way I see it, it has many levels and the simplest question may include three parts of the *Shulchan Arukh*. It's not that simple; a simple question of *Yoreh Deah* is usually not asked. When you have it, it is usually a complex question.

Rabbanim have to comply with a statement found in Mishna Berakhot: you have to pray before you enter the *Beis Medrash* and after you [leave] it. I mean you have to pray, in fact, every morning when people come to ask you, and you have to pray every night that you didn't make too many mistakes. How many books can you really learn? And the answers are not really clear-cut. What are the answers? What is the right way? There are

no clear answers. So there it is: sometimes you see the young man who possibly should learn another thirty years. Sometimes you have to do it [i.e. join the rabbinat] because there is no one better equipped. That is the problem: any amount of learning before is just a small part of what has to be done. I am not speaking now about *mitzvat talmud Torah*. I am speaking about the practical applications — when a person is dealing so many times [with] *dinei nefashot*. It is *dinei nefashot* in one way or another.

I don't know if you ever saw the *Mishna Berura* about *Kaddish*. People [now] say *Kaddish* together, [but] there are laws of precedence who has the right to say *Kaddish*.



Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz

You have six different considerations on such a small point and you have a case of *shefikhut damin* when you take away the right to say *Kaddish* from a person. It might be better to let a man say *Kaddish* because otherwise you are killing a man. I am just taking a detail to which you may say, "What harm does it do?" There are other problems [as well]. Part of it is the classical books. But they are not really helpful. I hope this is not heresy, but you read the whole *Moreh Nevuchim* — which is a guide for the perplexed — just for another perplexion.

H: The problems facing the 12th-century Aristotelian scholar are not those facing 20th-century man?

R. Steinsaltz: That is what I am saying! You are facing different problems. By the way, they are not more clever problems. Some of them are far more stupid, but they are different. They are different. You are facing — I once spoke in Yeshiva University about a year and a half ago, about *Torah U'Madda* — some of the real challenges don't come from the hard sciences, but they come from all the social sciences. They have assumptions, they have a theology, they have a philosophy, and you have to encounter them. Unfortunately, very few guidelines exist for this. When you are dealing with modern life situations, among other things, reading all the old books is just some kind of a help. They have to be mentally transferred constantly. Put it this way: there is a lack.

I don't know how it is now at Yeshiva University, but it was... there are whole dimensions of Jewish thought, anything that has to do with what's called — it is such a terrible name — Jewish mysticism, which is lacking. Now I am not speaking about what is the mode of the times, what is considered

modern or not modern. You see, it is such an essential part of Jewish thought. You have to remember that in the last five hundred years, the formal theology of the Jewish people has been *Kabbala*. It is the primary theology. It is accepted, by the way, not only by the *Vilna Gaon* on one side and the *Chasidim* on the other side; and the Eastern Jews on their side: even in a book by Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, he says exactly the same thing... it's funny he writes it very clearly. [I think it is in the introduction to his book of *Mitzvos*, *Chovev*] So even *Torah Im Derech Eretz* has this attitude.

So just imagine, *lehavdil kama allei havdalot*, take a Roman Catholic priest who doesn't know any of his theology. I mean, what faith does he have?... but you have lots of *rabbanim* that don't know anything about their own theology. They don't have the vaguest notion. See, you cannot — I don't know if you ever encounter it in *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* — but you find it in *Magen Avraham* and so forth. It's constantly [referred to] in halakic points.

H: The *Mechaber* himself.

R. Steinsaltz: The *Mechaber* himself was involved very deeply in *Kabbala*. There are beautiful descriptions in the books of that time the *Maggid Mesharim*. He really introduced *akkun leil Shavvet*. There is a description of how he used to speak [to the *maggid*]; there was almost a prophetic way.

H: Would you say then that rationalistic approaches, for example, the Rambam, are alien intrusions in the organic Jewish experience?

R. Steinsaltz: You see, to deal with the Rambam adequately is very difficult. The Rambam is deceptive, intentionally so; he said so in the introduction [to the *Moreh Nevuchim*].

First of all you cannot be a Jew with a completely rationalistic turn of mind. Rav Kook, a man who talked very highly about contemporary things, wrote a whole book trying to show the deep similarity between what the Rambam writes and what is written in the books of *Kabbala*. See, we are speaking in a very different jargon, a very different jargon, but when we come to content it is not so very different. In fact, that's what I am saying — the real work is the internal translation of language. Not of simple language but of language of thought. If you are working with computers [you encounter] the language problem. You have a problem, a real life problem, and the computer may be able to answer it, but it needs somebody to translate the problems from one language to another language. That makes sense. That is the constant work that people have to do. But I am just saying that the point of view is not entirely rationalistic. As a Jew you cannot have a [purely rationalistic system].

You don't [always] have to deal with *ta'amei ha-mitzvos*. People are asking about halakic problems which are also in many ways not [only] halakic problems. That's always the added ingredient. There are very few cases in which you can divorce the person from the question and the problem. There is a person attached — not just what we call in Yiddish "a *teppel unt a leffel*," a pot and a spoon got mixed — there are people attached to it. Sometimes it is a monetary consideration, sometimes it is a halakha in *Yoreh De'ah*. [For example, suppose] I have

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A Slightly Disjoint Panel

by Gavriel Shapiro

In recent years, the problem of non-Orthodox conversions has become a major source of friction between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities. During coalition negotiations in Israel last year, the presence of a handful of American olim affected by this problem led to the eruption of "Who is a Jew" as an issue dividing American supporters of Israel and confounding Israeli politicians. Now, the prospect of a joint "screening panel" for conversion has also split various segments of the Jewish people, stirring up emotions and often eliciting scornful barbs from prominent Jewish figures. This issue, which is far more complex than the straightforward halakhic issues from which it arises, has especially captivated the attention of Orthodox leaders. It directly addresses the question of how Orthodox Jews should relate to those who don't share their *hashkafot*.

The debate over a proposed joint *beit din* began thirty-five years ago. To solve many of the same problems facing Jewry today, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik proposed a true joint *beit din* — one including non-Orthodox members yet still halakhically valid. That proposal, however, required that members of the *beit din* believe in *Torah min ha-shamayim*, observe the *mitzvot*, and be *talmidei chachamim* as well. The Rav, according to some reports, does not seem to think his idea practical any longer. Rabbi Moshe Tendler relates that about five or six years ago, when he reminded the Rav of his original suggestion, the Rav responded: "Have you ever seen a camel fly?" Rabbi Tendler concludes that apparently, the Rav feels that such persons can no longer be found in non-Orthodox circles.

Since a real joint *beit din* is apparently no longer viable (if it ever was), an alternative has been suggested. The new proposal calls for a screening committee to evaluate potential converts who wish to make *aliya*. This committee, including Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox representatives, would evaluate the sincerity of the potential convert. If the candidate qualifies, the committee would then refer him to an Orthodox *Beit Din* which would perform the actual conversion. The idea, according to Rabbi Tendler, probably originated from Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein's suggestion in 1987 that "our people will deal with the actual conversion while others can deal with the certificate and other formal, side items."

On November 24, 1988, a delegation of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) including Rabbi Louis Bernstein advised Prime Minister Yitzchak Shamir not to bring the issue of halakhic conversion to a Knesset vote; the RCA considered such a move dangerous and doomed to failure. That same day Rabbi Bernstein was invited to the Prime Minister's office, where, to his surprise, he met with National Religious Party Knesset members Chanan Porat and Rabbi Chaim Druckman, and two important leaders of the Conservative movement. They discussed the "Who is a Jew" dilemma, and all of the parties involved agreed to keep the proceedings secret. But the next day, the Mizrahi newspaper *Hatzofeh* printed a front page article documenting the dialogue. Rabbi Bernstein believes Chanan Porat was responsible for leaking word to the press. After this, Rabbi Bernstein tried to bury the issue in order to avoid the press.

The Prime Minister's office soon exchanged letters with Rabbi Lamm and with the presidents of the Jewish Theological Seminary and Hebrew-Union College.

Refusing to give up on the object of the November meeting, Shamir requested that the three presidents convene to solve the conversion problem, which had so stymied the Israeli government. Each president chose a representative. Rabbi Bernstein, Rabbi Shamma Friedman (JTS), and Rabbi Walter Jacobs (HUC) met at the Jewish Agency offices in New York. At this and at a subsequent meeting in Israel, the representatives laid the ground rules for a plan.

But on September 1, 1989, the Yiddish newspaper *Algemeiner Journal* published a document purporting to relate the contents of the meeting in Israel. The document was one of many drafts drawn up at the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs after Rabbi Bernstein left Israel, and he had never seen nor approved it. Rabbi Bernstein claims the document "was leaked... by a source close to Lubavitch with a political axe to grind against Zevelun Hammer, the Minister of Religion." He also sees the leak as an attempt to sabotage the sensitive negotiations for a joint panel. The Israeli police recently launched a criminal investigation into the circumstances surrounding the theft of the government document.

Some time after this, Rabbi Tendler drafted a statement listing his guidelines for any solution to today's conversion and divorce problems. His rules seem to invalidate the proposal agreed to in Rabbi Bernstein's meetings; the document stresses the importance of not appearing to compromise with the Reform and Conservative movements. The statement, signed by a number of Roshei Yeshiva at RIETS, was the product of Rabbi Tendler's unease regarding Rabbi Lamm's presenting views apparently in the name of Yeshiva University and Orthodoxy in general. The signatories wanted to clarify that Rabbi Lamm was expressing his personal opinion, not necessarily that of the entire university.

Rabbi Tendler did not make any special effort at "security," he admits that he made several copies of the document to share with other Roshei Yeshiva for their suggestions. But someone illicitly obtained a copy that happened to be unsigned, and brought it to the November convention of Agudat Israel of America. [Editors' note: Commentator has recently revealed it was the ill-famed Jeffrey Silver who released this document to the press.] Announcing that he had a signed document, the person then guessed incorrectly as to which rabbis had signed it. One of the Roshei Yeshiva he thought had signed was Rabbi Tendler, who in reality never signed the document. Rabbi Bernstein claims that two of the actual signatories later regretted having signed.

The Issues

Are there halakhic problems with a joint "screening panel?" Rabbi Bernstein declares that the idea is totally within halakhic bounds. Rabbi Tendler, however, maintains that the panel violates the dictum *kesher reshatim einam min ha-minyan*, "a cabal of evildoers is not to be counted," which forbids cooperation with *apikorsim*. Rabbi Tendler does

believe that proponents of the joint panel use valid halakhic reasoning (a *horaat sha'ah*, necessity of the time) in abrogating this violation in order to avoid further division, argument, and hatred between brothers, but does not share their view. Rabbi Bernstein, however, believes this law does not apply at all, differentiating between cooperation on a screening panel and joining evildoers on a tribunal.

The Israeli tabloid *Yated Ne'eman* raised another halakhic issue. Orthodoxy in general accepts that any conversion must, as stated in the statement drafted by Rabbi Tendler, include a "full unreserved commitment to observe all *dinei Torah*, including *minhagei Yisrael*". If a candidate for conversion affiliates himself with a movement which denies essential principles of Orthodox belief (as do the Conservative and Reform), Rabbi Tendler says, then *ipso facto* the prospective convert does not have an "unreserved commitment."

Rabbi Bernstein argues that the *aliya*-minded converts, who wish to convert independently, do not identify with any sect. Their only connection to the non-Orthodox movements is one of convenience; they use Conservative and Reform rabbis whom they find available. Following the plan, those approached rabbis would send the candidate to the screening panel for a decision on sincerity.

All the literature and interviews indicate that the major issue at hand is more philosophical than halakhic. Rabbis Bernstein and Tendler paint vastly different pictures of our relations with non-Orthodox Jews. They markedly differ on whether non-Orthodox rabbis desire Orthodox recognition as legitimate religious authorities. Rabbi Bernstein maintains that "the very highest Conservative and Reform leaders... laugh at the issue of recognition, which is meaningless to them." They have no use for recognition from an Orthodoxy which they have rejected; rather, they are agreeing to the plan in order to prevent personal tragedies and because a universal body can prevent future strife among Jews. Rabbi Tendler, though, claims that "the one thing the Reform and Conservative do not have is the legitimacy given to them by Orthodox people. We'll talk to them, we have contact with them, we sit on [certain] committees with them, but they know that we know that they are not rabbis."

Rabbi Tendler also questions the practical use of the joint panel, alleging that the gains a panel will bring are illusory. "Who will come to an Orthodox *beit din* for *gerut*? [Only] a *ger tzadek*. Would he go to the Reform? If he's [acceptable] he'll bypass them and he'll come to us directly... If he goes to them he'll never pass us! But of course they're smart, and they know that..." A similar plan carried out in Denver drove hundreds of people to "agree" to accept the *mitzvot* when they actually had no intention of fulfilling them. And the demi-legitimacy granted here could propel the Israeli government toward recognizing non-Orthodox rabbis as authorities for

conversion and divorce procedures. "It is an astute, brilliant approach on their part to get legitimacy. What this will do is launch them in Israel... They will demand legitimacy for [their] *gerut* in Israel, for *kiddushin*, for *gittin*..."

But "recognition" and "legitimacy," as well as the dangers they pose, may not be a necessary outcome of a joint panel. Rabbi Bernstein insists that "dialogue doesn't mean recognizing the religious legitimacy of their theology and practice. Quite to the contrary, they are recognizing halakha and halakhic *batei din* if they agree to any of the plans under consideration." Rabbi Tendler disagrees, maintaining that non-Orthodox rabbis participating in a legal capacity constitutes recognition of their rabbinic authority. In his view, "This plan should be unacceptable to the Reform and Conservative. They would have to be crazy like a fox [to] admit that they can't give [their own] *gerut*. The end result is there's a *gerut* protocol in which Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox are co-sponsors of an individual and therefore we are legitimizing them... The best proof that I have is [that] they refuse to accept the limitation that the screening committee should only be [comprised of] laymen... Why? [Because] they can now say, 'Look, you couldn't do the *gerut* without us! Without the screening committee you can't go to [the Orthodox *beit din*].'"

Whether the plan can be carried out effectively is also a subject of debate. Rabbi Bernstein did not raise the possibility that referring all conversions, and eventually maybe marriages and divorces, to an Orthodox *beit din* may be difficult. Rabbi Tendler, on the other hand, worries about this. He even says, "I'm waiting for one Reform remarried woman who will give birth to *mamzerim* without the benefit of a *get*, and those *mamzerim* will meet your friend, and they fall in love, and he finds out that she's a *mamzer*, and they sue the rabbi for never telling them that when he remarried them [the parents], he made it impossible for her [the child who is a *mamzer*] to ever, ever marry within the Jewish nation, as interpreted by Orthodox or Conservative law."

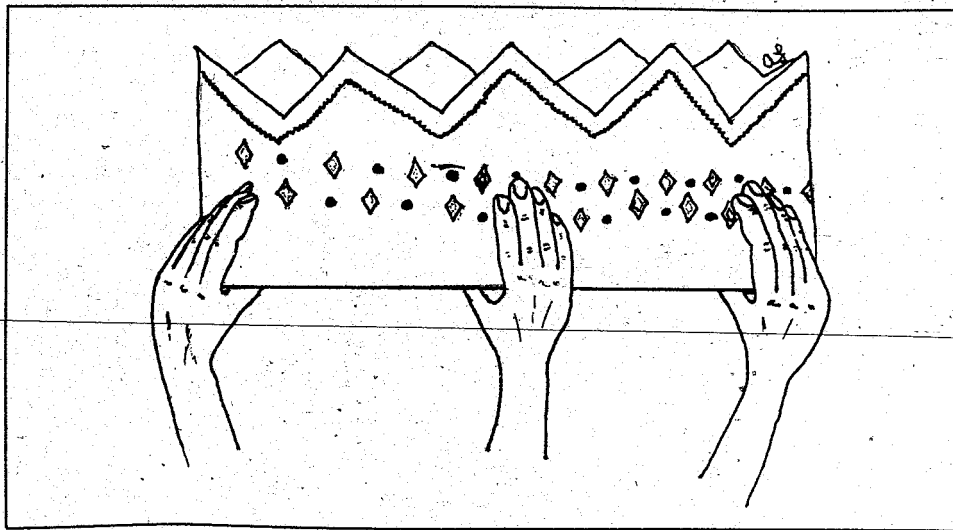
Would the proposal's implementation lessen friction among Jews? Rabbi Bernstein says that, at least for the non-Orthodox, "The only reason they're interested in an agreement is to terminate the divisiveness in the Jewish community." Rabbi Tendler, however, seems more concerned about unity within the Orthodox community: "We are being attacked on this issue by everybody from the right, everybody, I mean... Agudat Israel, the Chasidic element... [for] having any kind of relationship with Conservative and Reform. They may be wrong and we may be right, but the price to pay right now... is [the right wing] splitting with us."

Rabbi Bernstein candidly admits that the efforts to find common ground may be temporarily thwarted, but still hopes to reach a solution. While currently working on two plans (he will not comment on them), he realizes that he faces strong opposition from respected authorities such as Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik. Rabbi Soloveitchik declined to comment to *Hamevaser* on this subject, claiming "Bakesh shalom ve-rofifenu."

As the situation now stands, nothing concrete has been agreed to. Rabbi Bernstein holds out the hope that if the problem of conversion can be solved, it may be possible to move on to the far more serious issues of *ishu* and *mamzerut* which threaten to permanently divide the Jewish people. At the very least, he feels, it is important to press on in order to avoid another damaging fight over "Who is a Jew" in Israel. Though Rabbi Tendler has no clear solution to these problems, he believes that Orthodoxy only stands to lose by pursuing the screening panel idea. Both rabbis agree that the debate within the Orthodox camp should be conducted with respect and *bakshat shalom*.

The Office of Rabbinic Alumni is proud to announce a *Yom Iyun* on the topic *Bishul B'Shabbat* at the Queens Jewish Center, Forest Hills NY February 7, 1990 Interested Semikha students invited to attend

All For One And One For All: The Rabbis Of Riverdale



by David Ehrenkrantz

Jewish communities in the United States have largely been plagued by divisiveness and controversy. The Riverdale community, however, remains a notable exception to the national norm. Although occasional differences of opinion among the Orthodox spiritual leaders do occur, an intense spirit of cooperation predominates, with rancor prominent in its absence. In an effort to gain new insights into the American Rabbinate based on the Riverdale model, **Hamevaser** conducted interviews with those most responsible for maintaining such a unique atmosphere: Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblatt of the Riverdale Jewish Center, Rabbi Mordechai Willig of the Young Israel of Riverdale, and Rabbi Avi Weiss of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

When describing the relationship between themselves, the rabbis consistently used such words as "respect," "understanding," "selflessness" and "friendship." Yet the main reason for "the presence of harmony," as Rabbi Rosenblatt put it, is the non-competitiveness of each of the leaders; "there is no sense of jealousy," he says. Upon hearing that a new young Jewish couple would like to move into the Riverdale community, he advises the couple to pray in the other two shuls as well so that they may see if they are more comfortable in a different environment. He is obviously most concerned with the welfare of the people.

Rabbi Willig feels that Riverdale's peaceful situation should not be unique. He asks, "Why should there be conflicts? The *gemara* tells us that *talmidei chachamim* are supposed to help each other out, and if one succeeds, the other will as well." Rabbi Weiss adds that "the harmony has to do with the understanding of each other on a personal level, the recognition of each of our strengths, and the fact that we share a common vision." That "common vision" is the promotion of Torah study, Torah ethics, and Torah values; in short, it entails the carrying out of Torah with *chesed*, honesty, and wisdom.

Rabbi Rosenblatt commented, "Each of us is comfortable in the others' shuls." Nevertheless, each shul uses a unique approach towards reaching their shared vision. Rabbi

Weiss summarized the differences: "The Young Israel is considered more 'yeshivish,' the Riverdale Jewish center represents the classical establishment, and our shul [the Hebrew Institute] is known for outreach." Rabbi Weiss added that "our *beit knesser* is based in Torah, the teachings of ethical monotheism. We have a tremendous amount of outreach. Our philosophy is to use a direct manner to bring to shul those who don't usually come, by seeking them out with *chesed*. We will go to the streets in an attempt to bring them closer to Torah." Rabbis Willig and Rosenblatt agree that each shul fills a niche in the community and that each "sells" something different; Rabbi Willig's shul primarily serves those already committed to both Orthodox and learning, while Rabbi Rosenblatt's attracts a more diverse crowd.

The rabbis easily handle disagreements that inevitably arise because, as Rabbi Willig says, "We are civil to each other." Rabbi Weiss says that disputes do not escalate because everyone understands that "our purposes are sincere." Rabbi Rosenblatt emphasized this point: "We are not out for personal gain. All three of us acknowledge that the varieties we represent are normative within the halakhic realm." Clearly, one of the strongest assets of Riverdale's Jewish community is the supportive and tolerant atmosphere created by the three rabbis.

But they are more than tolerant toward each other and each other's methods. Each rabbi expresses admiration and respect for the other two. All emphasize learning, though each stresses to a certain extent a different aspect of Jewish identity. Rabbi Weiss stresses the centrality of Israel in his shul and pushes *aliya* strongly. "Though [the United States] is currently our home, we must remember that Israel is our homeland." He also likes to "do outreach" and involve his shul in activism inspired by Jewish pride and dignity. Rabbi Willig, on the other hand, emphasizes learning, *chiddushei Torah*, and *zerizut* in *mitzvoit*, while Rabbi Rosenblatt tries to inspire the young and the old with love of the Torah ethic.

Rabbis Willig and Weiss feel there are no problems unique to their harmonious community, though Rabbi Rosenblatt does point out that "The property values are very high,

and we are losing the best and the brightest. After a few years of living in apartments, young couples often want to buy a house. Since they cannot afford the Riverdale home, they move into other communities."

In regard to more general aspects of the Rabbinate, all agreed that rabbis today speak much more frequently than their predecessors in Europe. There, the *rav* of a community spoke twice a year, on *Shabbat Shiva* and *Shabbat Hagadol*. They explained that additional speeches were unnecessary because even the average tailor or cobbler possessed sufficient Torah knowledge. In American society, though, many community members do not study at all during the week. Because their only opportunity to learn may be the rabbi's speech on *Shabbat*, Rabbi Willig insists that the speech consist of Torah.

While the three agree that the sermon should be bound in Torah, Rabbi Rosenblatt is not afraid to call it a sermon. "The Orthodox Rabbinate has become a more complex Rabbinate. In the European model, the rabbi didn't speak that often. And when he did, he was primarily a teacher. Now, a more 'protestant' *drush* has become the mode in which the rabbi speaks. I love to preach. I love the sermonic genre." Still, he adds that "I wouldn't mind not speaking once in a while."

Rabbi Weiss declares, "I do not give sermons. I give *divrei Torah*." He adds that one should focus on Torah ideas because, when assessing the situation in Riverdale, he feels that "thank God, we are learning more." Rabbi Willig agrees, and explains that he occasionally tries to add a little *musar* to the *devar Torah*. Rabbi Rosenblatt reveals, "I love to hear both [of the other] rabbis speak, and see what each one does at his best."

General agreement exists in the rabbis' views towards *semicha* programs as well. Rabbi Willig was definitive in his answer, that such a program must stress "learning, learning, learning. There are many areas of halakha which *rabbanim* are asked about all the time, yet they are not proficient in them." Rabbi Weiss believes it should emphasize interpersonal relations, the business ethics of Torah, as well as *Yoreh Deah* and *Orach Chaim*. All three stressed that a *semicha* program should not be treated as a pro-

professional schooling. Had Rabbi Willig the opportunity to design a *semicha* program, he would base it on that of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, "where they emphasize the points of halakha that are most sought after. A *semicha* program should be tailored for the needs of today."

Rabbi Rosenblatt agrees that a rabbinical student must focus on the needs of today, adding that a rabbi's job is to help people, not 'make' people, and that even though "we are paid by the shul, we work for our Creator." Rabbi Weiss would "try to emphasize the meaning of *Ahavat Yisrael*. If there is someone out there who has not said *kiddush*, then I have not said *kiddush*. We should try to be more like Abraham and Sarah, building *cholim* [tents] that are open on all sides. We must not be Noah-like and build walls around us that no one can enter... we should enter the Rabbinate with our eyes open, and be able to love every human being."

The three leaders disagree about a rabbi's role in politics. Rabbi Willig feels strongly that a rabbi should not get involved in political causes, whether they be in or out of the Jewish arena. Rabbi Weiss believes, to the contrary, that "every cause is a Jewish cause," and requires the rabbi's involvement. He feels that "the stronger you are in terms of your own self-respect and pride in being a Jew, the greater you become aware of the larger universal issues." Nevertheless, Rabbi Willig says that "this is not the job of the Rav."

Rabbi Rosenblatt thinks that "it really depends upon the rabbi. If the rabbi feels that this is an issue where the moral contours of society are at stake, and that if he gets involved it will benefit the Jewish community... then by all means get involved." Still, he warns that one should get involved "*leshon Shamayim*, and not for the glory." He adds further that rabbi should not let political involvement detract from a "serious level of Torah study. A rabbi has limited resources."

Assessing their overall experiences in the Rabbinate, they primarily extolled their congregants. The rabbis call them "wonderful," "pleasant," "intelligent," "sincere," and "inspiring." Rabbi Weiss noted that his greatest achievements and biggest disappointments stem from the same source. "God has... allowed us to bring Jews closer to Torah, and that is most wonderful. But the hardest thing is that after you've touched their lives and helped to cultivate their lives with Torah... in the end you are unable to sustain the relationship. People come and go... That is the hardest thing for me." For all three, the joy of influencing people with Torah goes hand in hand with the anxiety of separation.

Rabbi Willig's main source of satisfaction is the general Jewish growth in the area, especially in Torah learning and the observance of *mitzvoit*. Contrasting today with the situation 16 years ago, he points out that there was no *va'ad kashrut*; very few (if any) *shiurim* were given; and the overall observance was much lower. Rabbi Rosenblatt seems most disappointed with losing the naive that one has when entering the rabbinate, the belief that one can change the world with a swift motion. The world changes, he says, in a "gradual process."

Hamevaser adds a special note of thanks to each rabbi for offering his valuable time and straightforward answers. Their rare community has clearly benefitted from their cooperation as well as their *midos* and erudition.

The Rav As Ba'al Aggada: Selections

by Rabbi Zelo Schusheim zt"l

edited by Rabbi Shalom Carmy

Note: This spring Rav Schusheim zt"l handed me an account, as precise as he could render it, of comments on aggada he had heard long ago from maran haRav Joseph Soloveitchik, may God restore his health. Disappointment with "certain writings of individuals," purporting to present the views of the Rav, combined with the *urgaius* of other *Roshei Yeshiva*, helped him to overcome his hesitations about publication. He hoped that my experience in working with the Rav might help him with the editing.

We spent quite a few hours trying to cast the Rav's spontaneous remarks in literary form without sacrificing the exact, remembered phrasing. Unaccustomed to publication, R. Schusheim was a bit frustrated at our slow progress and occasionally felt like giving up. When we last met, I assured him he would feel differently after the summer...

Alas, R. Schusheim's death cut short his participation in the project. I offer the following excerpt of his record of our rebbe's words as a living testament to a talmid's fidelity and as inspiration and memory for his colleagues and students. Tehei Nishmato Tzerura Bitzeror Ha-chayyim. S.C.

I
One afternoon, at the home of the Rav's mother (in those days, when he taught at the Yeshiva Tuesday through Thursday, his abode) I found the nerve to ask him how he had arrived at his understanding of a strange piece of aggada at which he had labored mightily that morning: The Rav put me on the spot: "Why do you not ask me the same question about halakha?" Hesitating, I replied that there are so many commentaries in print, to say nothing of what the Rav had heard from his father and family. The Rav, with his tremendous diligence in learning that which is not commonly known, explained and clarified the material *la'mitah shel Torah* [to the truth of Torah]. But here, in aggada, none offers assistance. Without Rambam, when even Maharsha is silent, where does the Rav find any hint to lead him to an explanation? To which the Rav responded: "I see it between the lines." He continued: "Many times I *hovev* [take pains] in aggada more than in halakha. In halakha, if one doesn't understand the Ra'avad, he will say, 'The Ra'avad knew what he was talking about, but I do not understand the Ra'avad.' In aggada, when the words of Chazal seem strange, one may foolishly think that Chazal were merely enunciating beautiful phrases, a *barg mit verter* [a mountain of words]. This is false; every word is *kodesh kodoshim*, the heartland soul of Torah and *yiddishkeit*. One must work to elucidate them."

II
Berachot 30b: "Rejoice in fear; the situation of joy requires a measure of awe." The gemara relates that Rav Ashi and Mar brei d'Ravina hosted wedding celebrations for their children. When they saw excessive levity, they smashed expensive goblets. According to *Tosafot* this is the reason why we break a glass at a wedding ceremony. In line with *Tosafot*, the Rav was critical of rabbis who instruct the groom to break the glass in memory of the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash.

The gemara adds that one is not to fill his mouth with laughter in our time, but

rather only in the Messianic era: "Then [only then] shall our mouths be filled with laughter." The gemara implies a halakha: joy must be restrained; undisciplined hilarity is forbidden and simply disgusting.

What defines real joy and what mere hilarity? If a wild party is going on and an ambulance siren is heard, the hilarity pauses for a moment; it won't continue at the previous pace. It has been somewhat cut off. A *simcha shel mitzva*, however, will pause for a moment, then resume as before.

This gemara is halakhic, but the Rav showed that it also describes a fact of life. Each of us has dreams, hopes and aspirations. Their fruition is *simcha*. Yet Chazal say: "No one dies with most of his wishes fulfilled." Even the dreams that are fulfilled, interpreted the Rav, are only partially attained, as we all know from experience. Hence, there can never be complete *simcha*. The dream is ever more beautiful, more bountiful than the reality. And so it is forbidden to fill one's mouth with laughter — yes, it is forbidden, and for a thinking human being it is impossible.

"Then shall our mouths be filled with

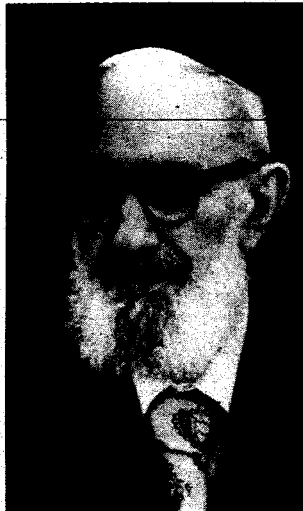
five, God commands him to leave his country, birthplace, and father's house. After all his tribulations in Egypt, the strife between the shepherds of Abraham and Lot, and the war and the captivity of Lot, Abraham and Sarah are childless. Many adventures later, at the age of one hundred years, Abraham begets a son, Isaac, through his wife, Sarah — a son through whom the entire heritage of Abraham is to be transmitted. And then the Almighty tells him to offer Isaac as a burnt-offering. The Torah then tells us that after all these tremendous difficulties — the lifetime of waiting for one child and then being asked to sacrifice him — Abraham is informed that his brother, without any hardship, has begot eight children. Yet, Abraham's destiny is unique, and symbolizes that of his descendants. This is an integral part of the *akeda* theme which each Jew must make his own on *Rosh Hashana*. Hence, the reading of these four sentences at the end of the *akeda* liturgy.

IV
Bereshit 24:19: "And she began to give drink to him and said, 'Also for your camels I will pour until they finish drinking.'"

Halakha commands one to feed his animals



Rabbi Schusheim



Rabbi Soloveitchik

laughter." The Rav taught that when Chazal quote a *pasuk*, one must also examine the context. When *The Ribbono shel Olam* restores Zion, "hayyinu ke-cholmim," we are like dreamers. We recover the original dream with all its *kedusha* and bounty; with no distinction between the dream and reality. Not through the *shivat Zion* of Ben-Gurion, or through that of Begin, but *be-shuv HaShem* — through the *shivat Zion* of the *Ribbono Shel Olam* — will our mouths be full of laughter. Our entire being will be full of *simcha*, for reality and dream are one.

III
The *Akeda*: On Rosh Hashana we ask God to remember the merit of the *akeda*, which is the reason why we read this section on that day. But why add the sentences at the end of the chapter telling us that Milka had borne eight children to Abraham's brother, Nachor?

The Rav emphasized that each Jew, on this sacred day, must recognize that the destiny of *Knesset Yisrael* is different from that of all other nations. When Abraham is seventy-

before he eats. I recall the Rav's story about the cat that Rav Hayyim [Soloveitchik, the Rav's grandfather] would always feed before he ate. When the cat could not be found the search went on for hours before Rav Hayyim would eat. Rav Hayyim did not distinguish between *halakhot*, but rather maintained that each halakha be observed diligently.

Why did Rivka, as it is related in the verse above, apparently disregard this command by giving Eliezer water before running to the well to draw water for the camels? The Magen Avraham's answer has become household knowledge: the rule of animals first applies only to food, not to drink. Therefore, Rivka offered him drink and then drew water for his camels.

The Rav was not completely at ease with this explanation. Why should drinking be different from eating? Secondly, and most importantly, why does the animal take precedence?

The Rav suggested that we attend to the two concepts of *din* and *tzedaka* (or *chesed*). *Din* means pure justice, unaffected by any

semblance of kindness or charity. *Tzedaka* suggests the attainment of something one does not completely deserve. Food belongs to the realm of *din*; a person must deserve it. He who sins loses his claim to sustenance (see end of Kiddushin). Since no individual does not sin (Kohelet 7:20), each person forfeits his sustenance. But God is *rachum*, merciful, and feeds man with the attribute of *chesed*. The animal, however, does not sin, and therefore merits its sustenance from the Almighty according to *din*.

The conclusion is self-evident. Since *din* takes precedence over *chesed*, the innocent beast must be fed first. Only then can man eat and be satisfied, for he eats by virtue of God's mercy. This remarkable explanation only sharpens the question: what about drinking? Ought not the animal to drink first too? It seems that the Rav was not entirely satisfied with the Magen Abraham's distinction between food and water, though he did not dismiss the *pesak* for *halakha le-maaseh*.

According to the Rav, Rivka gave Eliezer water before the camels because it was not she who was eating and drinking but another person. An individual knows that he is fallible; hence the animal comes first. However, when giving food or water to another, one has no right to say that the other person has lost his right to food and water. Rivka saw Eliezer as being worthy of sustenance due to the principles of justice. Hence she was justified in offering water to Eliezer first.

V
Berachot 33b: "Is fear of Heaven (*yirat Shamayim*) a small matter? ... Yes, with respect to Moshe it is."

Imagine telling a mathematical neophyte: all you must do is understand nuclear physics. One protests: it is all too complicated. To which the reply would swiftly come: Why? To Einstein it is very easy! Obviously, such a response reflects reasoning that is quite faulty. The student wetting his feet in mathematics is no Einstein and what is simple for Einstein is obviously not simple for the young man. Moshe Rabbeinu demands *yirat Shamayim* of all Jews as if it were within their grasp. Is it so easily attainable? Yes, says the gemara; for Moshe it is a small matter. But clearly not every Jew is Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Rav read this gemara differently. Everyone reads the answer as the complete phrase "Yes, with respect to Moshe it is a small matter." The conclusion then follows that every Jew could reach the heights of *yirat Shamayim*, and generates the obvious question: The Rav suggested dividing the phrase: Is the goal of *yirat Shamayim* easy? Yes, with respect to Moshe... Here we should pause. Yes, says the Gemara; let them treat Moshe our teacher with fear, honor and respect. Then it is not difficult to acquire fear of Heaven.

The Rav expounded upon the importance and necessity of having a *rebbe*. *Yirat Shamayim* does not exist in a vacuum. Each individual must have someone to whom he looks authoritatively for Torah, halakha, and guidance. He who lacks a *rebbe* will not reach the heights of *yirat Shamayim*. The individual who thinks he can stand completely on his own two feet, admonished the Rav, is terribly mistaken.

In recent years, when the Rav, may God grant him a *refua shelema*, has been absent from the Yeshiva, these words have become for me all the more poignant.

When Something Goes Right...

Reflections on Shabbat at Yeshiva

by Rabbi Mayer Schiller

What exactly are we up to here at Yeshiva? At times it seems that so many different things are going on here that it is almost impossible to speak of Yeshiva College as one entity. Are all the students, *rebbeim*, Roshei Yeshiva, administrators, professors, etc., all part of the same enterprise in any serious sense? These questions surely strike many of us with disconcerting forcefulness as we walk around the campus seeing, hearing, and participating in... well, most everything.

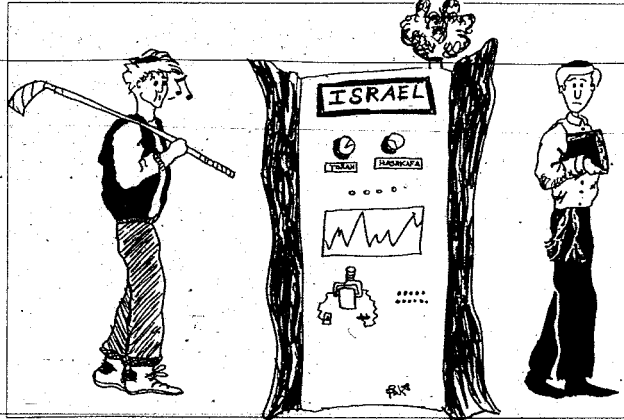
A few weeks ago I was the guest along with Rabbi Well at a joint S.O.Y. - J.S.S. "Shabbaton" (I do not know what the word means in this context and the anti-modernist in me finds it a bit distasteful, but anyway) at which both of us spoke periodically, got to sleep in the Referee's Suite, sat at the head of the table, etc. Last year I was featured at a similar event. Both years my reaction was the same. I did not want to go before the event and was most happy I did afterward. Why this reluctance on my part? Well, quite frankly, after a week of giving a high school *shnur* in a Modern Orthodox setting (or perhaps better said, after thirteen years of giving such a *shnur*) one tends at times to suffer from a bit of despair: there is a heavy sense at times that heartfelt effort and serious attempts at communication are like just so much pouring of water upon the sand, words uttered to rooms—ostensibly full, but in the deeper sense, largely empty.

Of course, this feeling is somewhat errant and certainly tragically self-defeating. Much of value is accomplished in the MTA-type high school classroom both in terms of planting seeds for future flowering and in actual present effect. The outer forms of adolescent cynicism, crudity, simplicity, and rebellion are very often just that: forms of a period in a young man's life which leave little imprint on his mature self. (How many Young Israel successful professionals go about on weekends sporting The Who's 25th Anniversary Tour t-shirts?) A certain type of behavior is expected of teenagers under the dogmas of "Americanism" and those influenced by its doctrines act accordingly, at least for a brief period. After that fateful year of crossing the Rubicon in Israel in 13th and at times 14th grade, much of the situation changes... sometimes briefly and sometimes for good. (The implications of the rapid effect of Israel should send a shudder down the spine of those of us who labor in American high schools, for what exactly do we do for four years? But that is a topic for another time.) In any event, despite the consolations of Torah seriously learnt (at times by some), of hopes for the future, and realization of the transient ephemerality of Modern Orthodox adolescence, teaching a quarter of one's audience at all times other than when there is a test rearing its ugly head on the horizon can, if one yields to the Tempter's promptings, produce a sense of *deja vu*, despair, boredom, and plain old-fashioned heartache.

So who needs more of the same come the weekend? *Shacharit* on Friday morning in the *Shinaver Shtetel* (continuing that tradition of the *Zanzer kinder's* unique combination of *derekh haBaal Shem* interwoven with hard core *kana'ut*) and *Shabbat* in the warm embrace of *Rachmistrivkaism* do wonders for the soul, the heart, and one's sense of perspective in the world. Yiddish speaking *chadisher friends*, and Rabbis, most of

whom are frightfully serious about God and His Torah, are a welcome respite from a week of wrestling in the "steel cage" with a far tougher opponent than Andre's team in the Survivor Series, namely the Orthodox adolescents of modernity's bourgeoisie.

But Rabbi Cheifetz, he always does it to me. I am always silly putty in the hands of people both nice and sincere. So, when he comes and talks about *Shabbat*, and J.S.S., and things like that, the "no, I can't's" are hard to produce, and the cardinal rule of my middle years ("no pay no speak") will yet



again be violated.

So, now it is Friday and time for *Mincha*: I, personally, do not feel particularly comfortable with the *Ashkenaz nusach* for Friday night *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Ma'ariv*, and *yeshivish nusach* is not what I call "home sweet home." Besides the hint of melancholy I find in it, the *tzibbur* always seems strangely quiet. So, I am laboring under a heavy burden of provinciality coming in. This is going to be disagreeable, so I must brace myself.

And yet, one cannot help but be impressed. Fact is that the *davening* in the *Beit Midrash* is most impressive. Be it a weekday *Shacharit* (sparsely attended due to its length—not a good situation in its own right) or *ma'ariv*, the mood is serious and the place is very quiet. *Shabbat*, in which a diverse crowd of Y'ers and J'Sers were brought together, was no exception. I think we can safely say that the *ernskheit*, sense of respect, and general atmosphere of *kavanna*, right here in our own *Beit Midrash*, is the rival of — if not superior to — any other yeshiva (and I've travelled far and wide among Hasidim, Yeshiva and *Yekeshe* circles) that my path has crossed. Clearly something very grand is happening here. Why? What is the source of this most impressive happening? We are doing something right. What is it?

Davening concludes and things would only get better. We know as believing Jews that the spiritual is an objective reality. The atmosphere even in so seemingly innocuous an activity as the "Good Shabbos" exchanged is finer, better, purer when those doing it are *bnai Torah* (to use the *Misnagdic* phrase) and *yivrei shamayim* (to use the Hasidic). *Davening*, learning, and the ordinary conviviality of those who labor in Torah is almost palpably different from that of those who do not. It is this mood generated by *ernster yiden in einen* (serious Jews together) that I have sought and sometimes found throughout my life. And I found it in our *Beit Midrash* that Friday night. Who to praise? Who to thank?

At the *seuda* I spoke of *ahavat Yisrael* and why it need not be a contradiction with a true sense of passionate *kana'ut*. For in fact, true concern for one's fellow Jew produces a sense of outrage at evil and heresy and a burning commitment to their eradication. To clearly define and abhor evil is not to care less about others or empathize less with their particular plight, but, in truth, to care more. In the end there is no conflict between the Satmar Rav, Reb Arjele Roth, and Rav Amram Blau on the one hand and the Belzer Rav, the Skverer Rebbe and the Lubavitcher

traditional anti-Zionism is of the Landau-Ravitsky-Simon *Oz veShalom* variety (with its roots, *Y'avdil*, in Buber-Magnes-Brit *Shalom* visions), I suspect that all the doctrines that Rabbi Lamm presents as key to Centrist Orthodoxy can also co-exist or, in fact, be rooted in true Torah passion (witness Rav Kook, the Wurzburger Rav, etc.). It was this hope for "tough-mindedness and toleration" that I called for at the Friday night *seuda*.

After the meal Rabbi Well and I gave brief presentations to a large crowd of *talmidim*. He spoke of the need for pride in one's Jewish identity while confronting contemporary society. I discussed a Torah approach to social questions, *Gentile* societies and political theory. This topic is a long and painful one, the intricacies of which are not relevant to the matter at hand (The interested reader is directed to an article of mine in the 5749 *Shavuos Jewish Action* for further details). What is relevant took place after these talks. Crowds of earnest young men gathered to discuss a wide range of serious Torah questions with obvious care and concern. Those speaking to me ranged over the topics of Jew-Gentile, Torah U'Madda, *Chassidut*, *Mitnagdut*, yeshiva high school education, general education, *derekh ha-litmid*, the ideal Torah society, the ideal yeshiva, Zionism, the differences between the *Edah* and the *Neturei Karta*, and so on and so forth.

It was close to midnight when I finally had to beg off. I have had such passionate discussions in the past, with the best of Reb Shmuel Feivelson's *talmidim* in Bais Shraga, with the most serious *Chassidische yingerleit* in Skver, in assorted public and private meeting places of people pious, thoughtful, and deeply involved. Those young men I spoke to right here in our very own Ruben Shul (although somewhat ignorant of large segments of *Klal Yisrael*) were full of Torah, devotion to God and to the *Shulchan Arukh*, and the *vital* enthusiasms of youth prior to battling the vile *hergel* which drains our innards (if we be not on constant guard) in later life.

And so it went throughout *Shabbat*. There was the group of NCSY advisors who had me speak in the afternoon to their *baalei teshuva* from upstate New York. I do not know whose sincerity humbled me more, that of the upstate; or of their mentors, mentors obviously sincerely devoted to bringing Jewish souls closer to God.

Shabbat afternoon before the *seuda* came 40-odd fellows gathered around. The topic was *chinukh*, how to improve learning and piety in Modern Orthodox yeshivot. Their involvement was matched by that of the baker's dozen who sat with me after the meal discussing Y.U. in general, its strengths and its faults. What can I say? These were *bnai Torah* and their company was inspiring and delightful.

They are also, by and large, on a higher level of Torah knowledge, halakhic observance and hashkafic profundity than their parents and communities. Their current status is the result of forces to be found away from the affluent suburbs of their homes. These forces are to be found somewhere in the Day School-Yeshiva High School-Eretz Yisrael-Y.U. *shnur* experience they have all undergone. Somewhere a lot is being done right.

I don't know much about the elementary schools, but beginning in high school the educational system of Modern Orthodoxy

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The End Of Innocence

by Sammy Levine

While the entire Garden of Eden story is puzzling, the most cryptic aspect of the narrative is probably the circumstances surrounding the *Eiz Hada'at*, the Tree of Knowledge. In particular, the Torah does not explicitly define man's nature before and after his eating from the Tree. Naturally, such a definition depends on an explanation of precisely what "knowledge of good and bad" the Tree offered as well as an interpretation of various verses that shed light on the story.

The main difficulty with the Tree lies in the notion that man benefits from knowledge; knowledge of good and bad should be an imperative, not a prohibition. Ibn Ezra resolves this problem by explaining "knowledge" as *ta'avat hamishgal*, the sexual drive. Only after they ate from the tree did Adam and Eve's sexual drives begin. Several verses support Ibn Ezra's explanation. Although Adam and Eve were naked, they originally felt no shame (Genesis 2:25). After eating, though, "their eyes were opened and they perceived that they were naked" (3:7). Clearly, the latter verse refers not to physically improved vision but rather to a new psychological awareness.

Ibn Ezra claims that only as a result of that new drive did Adam "know" Eve (4:1). This point is debatable, since, although it appears correct according to the Torah's apparent chronology, the Midrash says that the birth of Cain and Abel preceded even the prohibition of eating from the Tree. Rashi agrees that Eve bore children before the sin, while his supercommentaries suggest various textual proofs for his opinion.

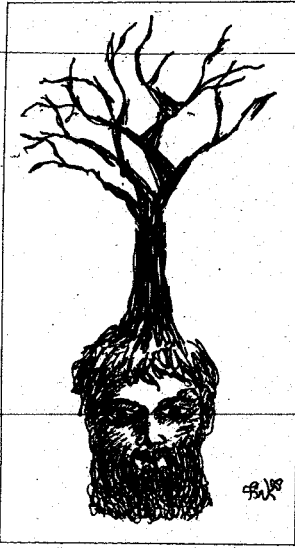
If the knowledge that Adam and Eve gained from the Tree was in fact *ta'avat hamishgal*, the already difficult phrase "as soon as you eat of it [the tree] you shall be like God" (3:5), becomes virtually incomprehensible. Though Ibn Ezra does address this problem, Radak's more expansive comments offer a stronger insight into a resolution. The basis of his answer relies on the multiple meanings of the word "Elohim," which usually describes God. Ibn Ezra and Radak reflect Saadia Gaon who understands it as "angels." While angels themselves do not recognize the *ta'avat hamishgal*, Radak says that they do recognize the quality in man and animals to produce offspring similar to themselves.

Alternatively, Radak accepts the possibility that "Elohim" is meant in the usual sense, but questions the veracity of the statement, noting that the serpent is the speaker. He suggests that the serpent knew this was called "the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil," but concluded incorrectly that one who eats from it would become like God. However, a later verse undermines the possibility that the snake speaks incorrectly, because God seems to lament the fact that, having eaten from the Tree, "man has now become like one with us, knowing good and bad" (3:22). Nevertheless, Ibn Ezra supplements Radak's comment, raising the possibility that God complains not about a past event but speaks of the thoughts that man will have: as a result of his knowledge, man will consider himself a god. Rashi also attributes to God such a concern, writing that He did not want Adam to remain in Eden lest he eat from the Tree of Life and gain a power that would lead him to act like a god.

Radak says that after Adam and Eve gained *ta'avat hamishgal*, they were embarrassed that they could no longer control their impulses; their sexual drives overcame them.

Such a punishment, he says, fits their sin, as they had crossed outside the control of God. God punished them, *midda keneged midda*, by making their bodies perform acts they could not control.

Maimonides (*Moreh Nevuchim* 1:2) offers a different explanation for the negative nature of the Tree of Knowledge. He distinguishes between "emet" and "sheker" meaning truth and falsehood, and "tov v'rah" meaning good and bad. While "emet" refers to what is logically and objectively correct, "tov" denotes that which man's illusions and emotions motivate him to do.



Adam and Eve, according to Maimonides, were purely rational beings before eating from the Tree, basing their actions totally on their intellectual inclinations. Thus, they felt no embarrassment about their nakedness, having no logical, unemotional reason for such a reaction. Taking from the Tree represents man's first break from "emet." Eve fell victim to her emotions, having seen that the tree was "good for eating and a delight to the eyes" (3:6). She performed her first illogical action, one based on a human view of *tov* rather than on *emet*.

Like Radak, Maimonides writes that the punishment for eating from the Tree follows the principle of *midda keneged midda*. Once man decided to follow his emotions and perspectives instead of his intellect, God removed from him the logical view of the world he had previously possessed. Consequently, Maimonides says, God left man "drowning amidst distinguishing between good and evil." In addition, banishment from Eden for the purpose of "working the land" (3:23); corresponds to Adam's inability to properly appreciate the paradise he was given. In fact, God had allowed him to eat from other trees in the garden with the single exception of the Tree of Knowledge. (2:16). After the sin, however, God told Adam "by toil you will eat," and "through the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread" (3:17,19).

With the assumption that the serpent was correct in his prediction to Eve, Maimonides' explanation requires a different translation of the word "Elohim." After all, neither God nor the angels have human emotions, so the serpent could not have been telling Eve that eating from the Tree would change human nature to be like that of either God or angels.

Maimonides defines "Elohim" here as a judge (such usage is found, for example, in Exodus 22:8). Eating from the Tree made Adam and Eve judges in that they would not receive the truth in a clear format, but would instead have to consider various perspectives and then use their own human views and judgement to make a decision.

Since Maimonides does not offer a running commentary on the Bible, he does not address the textual difficulties inherent in his explanation. For example: based on the language describing the Tree from an emotional point of view, Maimonides writes that the Torah stresses the emotional basis for Eve's sin. Yet, the Torah's earlier description of the other trees in Eden also called them "pleasing to the sight and good for food" (2:9), suggesting little difference between the human perception of the trees which were permissible and the Tree of Knowledge. A possible solution relates to the specific language used in the two verses. Maimonides probably stresses the word "ta'avah," which reflects desire more than simply a positive perception. While the other trees were highly attractive, the Tree actually tempted Eve's desires, thus leading to her downfall.

Nachmanides explains in a similar fashion that Adam and Eve felt no love or hate before eating from the Tree, but did what is proper. The title "Tree of Knowledge," then, refers to a willingness to perform a certain action based on the good or evil that appears to result from it. Only after eating from this tree did Adam and Eve have the choice to act on their judgements. Nachmanides suggests a possible scriptural support for his theory from Ecclesiastes (7:29): "God made man simple, but they chose many calculations." Instead of remaining guileless, Adam and Eve relied on their human calculations and emotions.

Based on a midrashic statement that the serpent spoke the truth, Nachmanides rejects Ibn Ezra's and Radak's explanations. He finds the words that ascribe to one eating from the Tree the status of "Elohim" irreconcilable with the notion that the Tree produced in man *ta'avat hamishgal*. Yet, Nachmanides also disagrees with Maimonides' translation of the word "Elohim," opting instead for the usual translation. While God does not have emotions, eating from the Tree gave man God's ability to act towards others according to His Will. God commanded man not to eat from the Tree, then, because, although Adam acquired "a Divine Attribute" as a result, the quality "is detrimental to man because of his inclinations and desires." Unlike God, man cannot control the awesome power of basing his actions on his own perspectives.

Rabbenu Bachya elaborates on Nachmanides' explanation, describing man as "completely intellectual" before eating from the tree but emphasizing the distinction between the physical and spiritual rather than between the

emotional and intellectual. In Eden, man was able to concentrate totally on his spiritual qualities, having minimal physical needs. His body and soul were one, serving together to allow man to "seek knowledge of God." Eating from the Tree increased man's physical desires, changing his propensity towards pleasure to those bodily instead of spiritual.

While Rabbenu Bachya's explanation follows the views of Nachmanides and Maimonides, it also magnifies the underlying difficulty with their views. According to these commentaries, man apparently lacked free will before eating from the Tree. Rabbenu Bachya explicitly writes that man was "forced in his actions." *Akeidat Yitzchak* points out the several problems resulting from such an approach. He first posits that free will comprises part of the essence of man. Citing the *Midrash Rabba*, he says that man's complexity depends on his ability to perform both good and bad actions. Furthermore, if God controlled all of Adam's actions, subsequently punishing him seems unfair. This second question brings to the fore probably the strongest problem with suggesting that man was created without free will: if man was completely good before eating from the Tree, he could not possibly have sinned.

Rabbenu Bachya himself finds no contradiction in the idea that Adam and Eve were "completely intellectual," without evil inclinations, but still sinned, citing midrashic explanations that even angels can sin at times. Nevertheless, some *Acharonim* attempt to resolve the apparent difficulties in his position. Rav Ya'akov Horowitz, in *Sefer Madregat Ha'adam*, suggests that though man's nature was simple and without natural tendencies, like an angel, he differed from angels in that he had the power to choose to no longer be angelic. If he wanted, he could change his own nature to include free will. Thus, God's statement not to eat from the tree may not even have been a command, but simply advice. God told Adam and Eve that because eating from the Tree would embody them with emotions and desires, they should avoid doing so. He knew that they would not be able to properly control these emotions. Rav Yerucham Halevi Leibowitz (*Sefer Da'at Chochma U'Mussar*) offers similarly proper motives for Adam and Eve's actions: because their actions naturally corresponded to God's, they yearned for an even closer connection to Him. It seemed to the first human couple, that this goal could be achieved if they would share His quality of acting according to one's choice. God warned them, however, that though this is a Godly quality, man would err through it.

The questions raised by *Akeidat Yitzchak* may have prompted Ran's explanation in the *Drashot*. Ran begins with an analysis of the punishment Adam and Eve received. He writes that the phrase "as soon as you eat of it, you will die" (2:17) cannot refer to the

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Mysticism, Modernity and Massora

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this guest. Now in many cases usually you say *le-chumra* but in this case you say *le-kula*. Why? Because there are guests there [or] it is before Shabbos.

People say that halakha is dry. In the driest parts it has the human connection, and this is part of a consideration. People are asking, "Why?... I am ready to accept certain hardships, but why?" It goes from questions about *Modeh Ani* to [other] questions. Why so? And when you are speaking about American life, changing constantly, except for very few communities and practically really no communities, the constant change in the attitude, in the behavior. So sometimes you face a situation in which the best thing is to keep quiet because you can't fight it - you can change it very slowly but there are lots of *heterim* that are practiced. The problem is that even though they know that they are not really permitted, they still do it. Take from the beginning of the *Shulchan Aruch* to the end of it [and] you will find such things. I am working on Sotah now. There is a discussion there - this is a problem which I don't know if you care for - mixed singing. This isn't a modern kind of question asked in Riverdale. Now all this needs some[thing] besides *siyatta dishmaya* - it needs as much knowledge as you can acquire. I am [also] speaking about *hashkafa*. One of the finest

books on *hashkafa*, even though it is an older book, is the Talmud. I don't know if you ever thought about it in this way, but it is. You cannot take it just from one quotation.

H. But there are contradictory principles, dichotomous principles within *Shas* itself?

R. Steinsaltz: Ok, so you have to take the whole of it and try to integrate it. Sometimes you get quite good answers, but you have to have a complete view. So I am saying it's also a book about *hashkafa*. So if you ask me about what books I recommend... I say there is a book called *Tanakh* - I highly recommend it. There is a book called *Gemara* - I also recommend it. Because in our complex life it becomes more important, not less important. In many cases we have to go to the first sources in order to get even a glimpse of what we are really dealing with. For example, take the question - a most modern question - artificial insemination. The only sources that we have, and luckily we have some sources, are a piece of *gemara* - there are some other pieces here and there, the last in the 13th century. You have very modern questions and you have to go to the very first sources to get some kind of an attitude.

I remember somebody came to me - a nice strange story. He is sitting on a strange committee created by the President of France to deal with general ethical problems. Now

he is one of the Jewish members. He came and we were talking about what is called a "host mother" - who is considered [the] mother? I told him that it is found in *Masechet Bekhorot*. There is a discussion. Unfortunately, it is a *teyku* in the *gemara* and the Rambam also quotes [it] - but there is a discussion! You have this problem that appears just in recent years and the only way that you can cope with it at albis going back to the *Gemara*. It's a funny situation but this is what I am saying again. Ah, what can I say? *Hafoch bah ve-hafoch bah*, but it needs lots of *hafachim* in order to get something - and even then, the more you do it, there is no way of getting answers to all the questions. Part of it is what we call *anava* - it's not just a spiritual quality, it's also an important tool and the notion that "I don't know and I will have to try as hard as I can to find out" is not just what I call a good thing that I recommend in shul at *seudah shlishit*...

The best we can do is sometimes to work more, sometimes to pray more and to know what I call "our vast amount of ignorance."

And to remember! I think it should be put on a big sign. I saw a quote in the *Gemara*.

[The people] asked *Rabbenu HaKodesh* for a rabbi for their community. He said, "I sent you a man like me, as great as me and his

greatness consists in his ability to say, 'I don't know.' That is the quotation from the *Gemara*. It deals with the whole story but I think it is about *hashkafa* and about *emuna*. It is very relevant.

H: Would you say that someone who tries to adopt an approach which excludes *Kaballa*, does he have a chance of reaching the truth? Does he have the complete religious experience in his life?

R. Steinsaltz: He doesn't have the complete experience. You see, there are special people who can do something and be right but who lack the knowledge [of their actions]. They used to say about the author of the *Nesivos* - he was surely not a Kabbalist - but his statements are also *mechuvan al derech ha-emei*. The point is that there is a complete human being that with the little bit that he knows finds somehow the right way without his knowledge of why he is doing it. He gets the right answer even though he doesn't understand. It is, as they say, a kind of a miracle. It is the miracle of the person who analyzes one leaf and he knows the whole garden. There are cases like this, but they need, instead of knowledge, a great amount of real inspiration. It can be done in a way

it has been done in a way - but as I said, it means putting even a greater burden on this individual.

Letters To The Editor

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Derekh Eretz Kadma La Torah

Sirs,

I believe a few extremely valid and crucial points were neglected in Benjamin Samuels' article "Warriors in Spirit," which appeared in the *Cheshvan* edition of *Hamevaser*. It's easy to list the halakhic views on army service vs. yeshiva deferments, and preface them with, "These staggering figures [of yeshiva deferments] and a generally anti-Charedi attitude... have caused yeshiva deferments to become a major issue in secular and religious Israeli politics." However, the religious issue is not only halakhic. I don't believe Samuels fully takes into account the perspective of non-religious soldiers and their families, people who do not view *Torato umanuto* with the same importance as do the religious community. Unfortunately, the Orthodox community blunts (inadvertently?) the sensitivity which should be shown to *Klal Yisrael* as a whole. Instead, they focus exclusively on the halakhic *mekorot*, ignore the circumstances of modern Israel, and feel little towards her non-Orthodox citizens. This attitude has led to a *chillul Hashem* approaching epic proportions.

It's easy to point to a *Rambam* and say, "Here's a *sevara* for staying in yeshiva and not serving in the army." But this explanation does not satisfy a mother who constantly worries as her eighteen-year-old patrols Gaza or Lebanon. One cannot compare the anguish of a soldier's mother fearing for her son's life to a *talמיד's* mother fretting that her son isn't eating enough.

"What possible excuse does your *halakha* offer for disregarding respecting one's elders, *mipnei seiva takum*?" asked a non-religious friend of mine in Israel. Until age fifty-five, both his father and grandfather will serve up to sixty days a year in reserve units - perhaps

even in Ramalla! Young, healthy, eighteen year old *bnei yeshivot* could help replace the older reservists forced to serve, as well as shorten the length of everyone's reserve duty.

During the recent elections in Israel, many *roshei yeshiva* told their *talmidim* to leave the *beit midrash* and campaign on behalf of the Degel Hatorah party, instead of *Ve-hagita bo yomam va-laila*. For *roshei yeshiva* to ask their students to campaign is their democratic right, provided that "campaigning time" does not detract from their students' Torah study. But in fact they did use study time to campaign, hardly contributing to the *bitachon ha-medina* (security of the state) as their *roshei yeshiva* proudly proclaim they do. This *chillul Hashem*, which disgraces so many non-religious Jews, should be an embarrassment to all religious Jewry.

It is ironic that the Torah itself offers draft exemptions not to people learning Torah but rather to frightened people who would otherwise lower the morale of the fighters. "Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest the courage of his comrades lag like his." (Deut. 20:8) Rashi explains that the soldiers in the time of the Bible were *talmidei chakhamim* who would infuse proper *emuna* into the army. Sadly, today's lack of participation by *bnei yeshivot* reduces the morale of the Israeli army.

In Rav Aharon Lichtenstein's article, "The Ideology of Hesder" (*Techumin* 8), he writes that Hesder is not *be-di'avad*, as many *roshei yeshiva* believe, but rather a *matzav lechatchila*. Hesder as a primary option stems partially from the halakhic necessity of fostering *achdut* and understanding within *Klal Yisrael*.

With religious tensions already strained in Israel, is it really so necessary to invoke *Torato umanuto*? Those who only see army service as weakening Torah learning and thereby harming *Klal Yisrael* only need consider the increase of *achdut* that such a move would

create. Thousands of religious soldiers willing to train and fight side by side with their non-religious counterparts could lead to greater religious tolerance among secularists.

Mr. Samuels concludes his article by noting that the situation in regard to drafting yeshiva students is not likely to change in the near future, and that therefore religious Jews who differ on the issue should learn to live with "pluralistic optimism." This prediction is not entirely accurate. The Israeli political climate is more open to change today than ever before in the state's history, especially in regard to the status of religion. The rising call for electoral reform will weaken the clout of those who fight for large concessions on religious issues. Of more immediate relevance is the recent attempt to pass an Israeli bill of rights. Some of the bills sponsors specifically want it to empower the Israeli Supreme Court to

remove the draft exemption for *bachurei yeshiva*. Religious Israelis must confront these issues and take stands on them because their attitudes will help shape concrete political realities in the near future.

Indeed, the capacity for *kiddush hashem* and *kiruv re'ehokim* within the Israeli army is just as important and valid as the *limud haTorah* of *Torato umanuto*. It may even supersede that *limud* by strengthening the bonds of *Klal Yisrael*. We know that the *Beit haMikdash* was destroyed by the *sinat chinam* within *Klal Yisrael*. The *mesirui nefesh* and *ahavat chinam* of *bnei yeshivot* willing to serve the same type of army service as other members of *Klal Yisrael* would surely be a major *kiddush Hashem* for *Torato Am Yisrael*.
Yossi Klavan
YC 90

Mystical Aliya

Dear Sirs,

Regarding Daniel Schreiber's article in the *Cheshvan* edition of *Hamevaser*, "Aliya: Do We Have a Choice?", or "The Halakhic Dispute on Settling Israel," I should like to add two sources to the already impressive array of *mar'ei mekomot*:

1) Rav Moshe Hagiz (perhaps most famous for his anti-Sabbatean activities, which, unfortunately, extended so far as to suppress R. Moshe Chayim Luzzatto's mystical writings in *Sefat Emet* (Vilna, 5636, 14b) polemicalizes against "...the opinions of several fools whom I heard say... these verses indicate (they think) that God does not want Jews to settle in Israel until He will ingather our exiles. They also support the words of their chirping (*teitzuf*) with the saying of our Rabbis, 'Three oaths God made Israel swear.'

2) Rav Chayim Vital, drawing on mystical sources, wrote quite matter-of-factly in his introduction to *Etz Chayim*, "Our Rabbis

have already said that the time of the *shevua* (oath) extends for a thousand years, as stated in the *B'raita deRabbi Yishmael* in *Pirkey Hekhalot*, based on the verse in Daniel (7:25), "And they will be given in his hand until a time and a times and half a time." So too in the *Zohar* (Genesis *Vayera* 117a) it says, "The length of time is more than that specified by the Sages - a day is the exile of the Jewish people, not more, for it says (Lamentations 1:13), 'He has made me desolate, all the day sick'." (The commentary of the *Sulam* explains that one day of the Lord equals a thousand years).

This would mean that the *shevua* has not been in effect for almost a thousand years. In this regard, you might want to refer to the late Kabbalist Rav Chayim Attia's treatise, *Sod HaShevua*.

Neither of these sources are included in the Satmar Rebbe's anthology, *Vayovel Moshe* (though it does cite other, unrelated passages in R. Moshe Hagiz's *Sefat Emet*).

[Rabbi] Bezalel Naor

[Instructor, RIETS]

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When Something Goes Right

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provides the opportunity for those entrusted to it to opt for a *chayei Torah*. The *rebbeim* and *Roshei Yeshiva* teach by word and deed. A chance is given, a hand is extended. In high school this hand is all too frequently rejected. There, all too often pop-hedonism triumphs. There it is not a case of Torah sanctifying Madda (i.e. knowledge, high culture etc.), but of Torah confronting low culture amidst much noise and immaturity. In Israel, a Torah environment is introduced and the evil enemy arsenal of T.V., movies, music, and "going out" is depleted. Once this has been achieved, slowly a sub-culture of Torah grows. They return here to Yeshiva and for them the *Rebbeim*, the *davening*, the relationships with like-minded *chaverim*, which all *bnai Torah* need, is provided right here on this campus seemingly so diverse. It is for them, or, better stated, in the hope that all *talmidei hayeshiva* be like them, that we exist. Oh, yes, we provide career training for those affluent professions so coveted by the upper class, but, quite frankly, all that is less than worthless unless eternity be first attended to.

I have my doubts and sources of confusion concerning some of what we do here. I often wonder why many basic problems are not more forcefully and clearly confronted, but one must view reality in its totality. This Yeshiva of ours, administrators and *rebbeim*, provide their *talmidim* with the tools necessary for the serious pursuit of Torah and *yira*. (Do some not heed that call? For sure, but then again where else in the world would they

have a place to stumble and fall against a backdrop which encourages them to rise?")

Interestingly, the good that goes on here seems to have little to do with Torah U'Maddaism (a fact which I find most ironic and somewhat sad), a lot to do with Zionism (generally not the lovey-dovey type either, a fact which I find not at all ironic and also somewhat sad), and something to do with tolerance and love (a fact substantiated by the legions of YUers in NCSY, JPSY, HASC, Kiruv, etc., etc. and certainly very grand!). So the message, if somewhat muffled, does come across.

I would like to see a bit more of an attempt to sanctify knowledge, beauty and experience in a conscious, coherent, livable way and a lot more of the "outrage" that Rabbi Lamm called for concerning a carload of things. But this world is one forever imperfect. Institutions and dreams about them are inherently light years apart ("Bama really doesn't always win the SEC!").

But after *Shabbat* at Yeshiva, well, I'll take it. The *davening*, the *mitzvoit*, the learning, the *epskelt*, the caring... I will take it. And although I know very few of the college *Roshei Yeshiva* (and less of the *Roshei Yeshiva* in Eretz Yisrael, the absentee heroes of our tale) I would like to thank them for having given to those entrusted to their care a life of God and Torah, a life which intersected with mine for a few hours on *Shabbat*. Then there is Rabbi Lamm whose empathy, wisdom, and piety are put to innumerable tests, but manage to leave their stamp on this vast enterprise of ours. I don't envy the enormity of his task,

but I do envy the enormity of the *zekhusim* which he assuredly amasses while going about it.

So, who is doing something right here? Well, the people who should be, the *hanhala*, the *Roshei Yeshiva*, the serious *talmidim* and, indeed, the not so serious, for who is to say how *chashuv* before *Hashem* their hesitant practices are, given their own personal and environmental obstacles. Everyone who puts in serious *Beit Midrash* time during and after *seuder*, everyone who comes for *Shabbat* or to a *mesiba* (both of which there must be tons more of!), who becomes close to his *rebbe*, who writes for any of the Torah publications here. These are the good men who produce the spiritual grandeur which we confront. Some day, with God's help many of those who sit in my *shiur* will join their ranks. It is the realization of this fact, often forgotten in the haziness born of daily routine and the pain born of momentary frustrations, that enables me to endure descending once more into the maelstrom of my *shiur* with caring and hope.

This Friday I'll daven in *Shinaver* with some twenty *Va-Yael Moshes* to choose from on the shelf. Maybe *Be-Chomah* will come in the mail, or I'll read *Der Yid* or talk to one of my Satmarer friends who'll denounce the *Sigater Rav* for "softness on Zionism."

Then off to *Rachmistrivka* for *mincha*, a different Hasidic tradition there, one of humility, simplicity, sincere faith and much love. And, I am at home.

Yet, darn it, I am at home at YU, too.

I like those who flourish in it and those who flounder. I like those cadres of sincere *bnai Torah* who when they say the *Rav* do not mean the *Belzer*. I think they are doing just fine because of where they are and I think that this YU which nurtures them (despite its imperfections) is doing something very beautiful for God... So, Rabbi Cheifetz, please feel free, just call anytime. My number is listed. I will just have to make those speakers' fees elsewhere.

The frequent use of the word "tolerance/tolerance" in Rabbi Lamm's writings should not be misunderstood. It is used in a practical as opposed to a doctrinal sense. Civility, respect, empathy, indeed, love are to be brought to those in error. The objective nature of their error is in no way mitigated by the particular methodology we employ in addressing them or by our realization of and sympathy for the subjective factors which led to their intrinsic mistakes. Rabbi Lamm leaves little room for doubt when he writes, "The central point is this: the halakha is heteronomous, it obligates us, it is above us; we are bound by it and must live within its parameters even if doing so proves personally, politically, and even spiritually uncomfortable. It is, after all, the Word of God" (*Moment Magazine* June 1986, p. 24).

He has referred to, clearly differentiating between truth and falsehood as "the most important [point] of all" (*Jewish Observer*, June 1988, p. 15).

The End Of Innocence

Continued from page 8

heavenly retribution for the sin because God reserves a different punishment for them, described after the sin. Rather, Ran explains, the statement that they will die as a result of eating is simply a statement of fact. Closely following Rabbenu Bachya's interpretation, Ran writes that man was originally slated to live for eternity, as the strength of the soul would continually overpower that of emotions. When the Tree unleashed their bodily urges, Adam and Eve were no longer fit to live forever. Thus, death was but a natural result of eating from the Tree, not a punishment for such an action.

Eve sinned, Ran continues, because she failed to properly comprehend the intent of God's statement. She thought that God was warning her that the Tree was physically dangerous, its fruit poisonous. When she saw that the tree was in fact beautiful and pleasing to the senses, she could not believe that such a tree could do her physical damage. Ran defends her logic, citing the opinion of "wise men" that poison cannot have a pleasant taste or smell. Nevertheless, Adam and Eve sinned, because they relied on their own logic; based on a misinterpretation of God's words, they chose to ignore God's command. Their ultimate punishment left them in a state of confusion, as their physical needs and desires would weigh on their future powers of judgement.

Malbim offers a different explanation for Adam and Eve's sin. He writes, similar to Ran, that Adam misunderstood God's command. God used the apparently redundant language of "from the tree of knowledge of good and bad, do not eat from it" (2:17).

Ibn Ezra explains that God used such language to emphasize the command, or perhaps to tell Adam and Eve not to eat even a small amount from the Tree. Adam, however, understood differently, according to the Malbim. He thought that God would permit him to eat the fruit once it was removed from the tree; only from the tree itself could he not eat, while the fruit remained on the tree itself. God used intentionally ambiguous language, Malbim says, to test Adam's response. Adam sinned by relying on his own logical interpretation of God's command rather than accepting its simple meaning, or at least recognizing the possibility that he may have misinterpreted God's word.

Abaranel seems to find the questions raised by *Akeidat Yitzchak* so compelling that he rejects the explanation of good and evil originated by Maimonides, instead agreeing with Radak and Ibn Ezra. He points out that *ta'ava hamishgal* is not inherently improper, as it leads to procreation. God only prohibited Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of the tree, Abaranel says, because he wanted them to touch it and receive a more moderate amount of *ta'ava*. An abundance of this *ta'ava*, however, leaves man imprisoned by his desires and unable to control himself. Hence, it is called Tree of Knowledge of good and evil since the qualities it produces in man are good in moderation but bad when uncontrolled.

While Abaranel agrees with Ran that Eve's mistake led her to eat from the Tree, he differs with regards to the cause of her error. Asserting that poisons can, in fact, appear pleasant, he writes that without actually eating or touching the food, Eve

could not have concluded scientifically that it was not poisonous. Abaranel's explanation of her conclusion is based instead on his novel approach to the role of the serpent in the story. Though a *pshat* reading of the Torah certainly indicates that the serpent spoke to Eve, Abaranel claims that such a conversation never transpired; the Torah simply describes the thoughts in Eve's head which resulted from her seeing the serpent eat from the Tree and remain unharmed. In her mind, the serpent, through his actions, revealed to her that she would not die after eating from the Tree. Abaranel feels that his explanation is textually valid because if the serpent actually spoke, the Torah would have written that God opened his mouth, as in the case of Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:28). Though the Bible does use the verb "to say" in describing the actions between Eve and the serpent, Abaranel brings textual supports to suggest that the serpent revealed some information to Eve, but not through speech.

Additionally, Nachmanides' question on Ibn Ezra and Radak does not bother Abaranel. He explains that the phrase "you shall be like *Elohim*" refers to the fact that just as God creates worlds, man, too, has the ability to create worlds, through procreation. Children are called "good and bad" because their creation and existence are good, but at the same time, raising them entails hardship and difficulty. Alternatively, Abaranel quotes the "wise men of the nations" who explain that man became like God in not depending on the advice of others to decide whether things are good or bad. When God later told the angels that "man has now become like

one with us, knowing good and evil" (3:22), Abaranel says, he was mocking, in a sense, (*malig*), what Adam and Eve thought would result from eating of the fruit.

The idea that God's words reflect a type of mocking equips Abaranel with an explanation of another problematic phrase.

God seems to tell the angels that his reason for expelling man from the Garden is His fear that "he will send forth his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat and live forever" (3:22). Most commentators explain simply that God had originally intended that man should live forever, but after eating from the Tree, man forfeited that eternal physical existence. According to many, the Tree of Life's fruits acted to replenish life; thus, God banished Adam so that he would not be able to replenish his life, having proven himself unworthy of this boon. Abaranel, however, considers the language of the verse odd, as God appears almost apprehensive. Therefore, he says that God mocks Adam's thoughts, as it were, acting as if He fears man's future actions.

In addition to those who understand the story of the Garden of Eden on the level of *pshat*, many *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* offer allegorical explanations, some concurrent with *pshat*. Nachmanides and Rabbenu Bachya discuss Kabbalistic implications, while *Sefer Ha'ikarim* (1:11) and *Akeidat Yitzchak* prefer more philosophical discussions. Though many different explanations exist, often conflicting with one another, they all carry important philosophical and exegetical implications.

The Victory Of Absolute Devotion

by Kevin Taragin

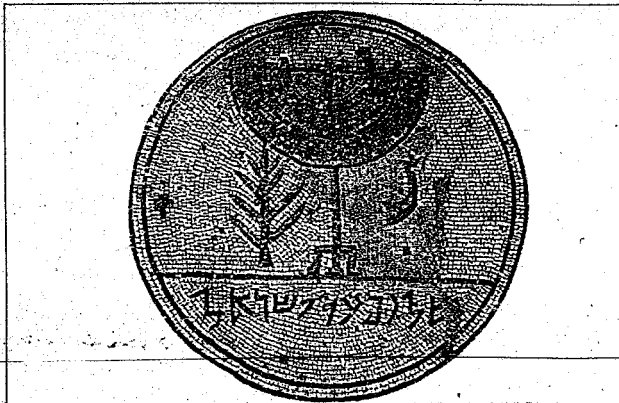
The Greek persecution of the Jews prior to the Hasmonean revolt is unusual both in its severity and in its singular focus. Hellenistic rulers controlled vast empires containing many peoples of different cultures and religions, yet tried to smother only the Jewish religion.

It is possible that something inherent in the nature of Hellenistic philosophy can at once explain Greek antagonism towards Judaism and also the Jews' strong rejection of Hellenism. In the Torah the name Yavan, which is associated with Greece, is traced back to Yefet, Noah's third son (Genesis 10:2). Just as we are accustomed to viewing the characters of the *avot* as prototypes of the national character of Israel, we may also take the Torah's description of Yefet as an overall description of the telos of Greek civilization.

Immediately before the Torah establishes the Yefet-Yavan link, it relates how Shem and Yefet covered their father Noah's nakedness. In contrast to Cham who was cursed in retribution for ridiculing Noah, Shem and Yefet were blessed because they championed their father's honor. Shem received the blessing "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem" (9:26), while Yefet was blessed, "Yaft Elokim le-Yefet." Noah, however, tempered Yefet's blessing by adding, "And he will dwell in the tent of Shem." Although the Torah itself gives no hint as to why Yefet deserved this subordination to Shem, Rashi (9:23) quotes Chazal who explain that Shem received the greater blessing because he had initiated the action, while Yefet had only followed his lead.

This explanation, however, does not answer why Yefet should be subject to subordination. A contrast of the blessings can help clarify that result. Shem's blessing relates him to God; Shem will be the religious man who finds quintessential meaning in life by serving and emulating God. Yefet, on the other hand, is blessed with *yaf*—aesthetics; he will appreciate only what strikes him as aesthetically pleasing. Religion claims the existence of an objective truth which man must strive to understand and apply. Aesthetic definitions, on the other hand, have elements of subjectivity. Is a certain painted canvas objectively "pretty" or "ugly"? Are certain types of music "good" or "bad"? Aesthetic descriptions are never absolute truth, but are always tempered by a person's own impression of an object. Whereas a religious man uses an objective truth to define himself, "aesthetic man" defines his environment via himself. One who believes in an objective truth and seeks to follow it will act immediately when he realizes that an act is demanded by his truth, even though he may not fully understand why it is the truth (*na'aseh ve-nishama*). Aesthetic man acts only if he personally sees beauty or significance in a given act. Religious man *acts*, while aesthetic man *reacts* to personal his personal feelings. Shem saw his father being disgraced and immediately acted on his behalf because it was the proper thing to do. Yefet, though, needed time to digest the information and find a personal meaning in protecting his father—his response was not immediate. Yefet's response was conditional on his internal desire to act.

After his harrowing experience, Noah understood that the characters of his children differed and he blessed them accordingly. "Yaft Elokim le-Yefet" means that a person certainly must use his feelings to



Ancient Synagogue Mosaic in Jericho: Menora, Lulav, Shofar, and the inscription "Shalom at Yisrael."

interpret the world, for only then will he understand how to bring order to a world of chaos and fully appreciate the beauty of creation. However, aesthetics are truly meaningful only when buttressed by an unwavering and sometimes irrational commitment to God—only in "the tent of Shem." Aesthetics are useful as a tool with which to serve God, but when they are the basis for a world view unrelated to God, when moved out of Shem's tent, they can turn a person from his proper role in life.

Pre-Hellenistic man searched for God. The Torah (Genesis 4:29) records that man strived to reach God in antediluvian times (i.e., the generation of Enoch). Even pagans knew that there was a God and tried to serve Him; their problem was only in finding the proper way to do so (see Rambam *Hilkhot Avodat Kohavim* Chapter 1). The Jews, though, were directly given tools, the Torah and its commandments, with which to serve God. The blessing that Noah granted Shem was realized when the Jewish people received the Torah.

The Greeks, Yefet's descendants, were not able to accept a truth about the universe that was not personal. They preferred a philosophy that centered around man. Rather than redefining himself by recognizing his own deficiencies, Greek man chose to create a new homocentric system, one attributing importance only to that which appeals to man. Greek mythology "de-deified" the gods. Whereas pagans worshipped gods representative of the world they found around them, such as the sun, moon, sea, animals and plants, the Greek gods were ideal men. Zeus and Athena were gods in the sense of their immense power but had completely human personalities. They were not portrayed as holy and awesome, but rather as powerful beings. The Greeks feared the power of gods, but were not submissive to the idea of God with values that transcend man.

The Greeks expressed commitment to man's central importance in many of their accomplishments. They formulated the geocentric system of astronomy, with earth as the center of the universe. Euclidian geometry imposes intuitive rules on mathematics, and Greek statisticians revolutionized the organization of statistics. Seeing themselves as the world's focal point, the Greeks then proceeded to define and structure their surroundings. They attempted to make everything understandable in terms of human reason.

When the Greeks turned eastward, they

tried to spread Hellenism to the pagans, all of whom were receptive to some degree. The Jews, though, felt superior to the Greeks. They felt that while the Greeks may have created impressive systems to interpret the world, they had done so at the expense of rejecting the one truth of monotheism and a transcendent God. The Jews had a supreme, objective criterion for judging man's role in the world; the Greeks only had man's own perception of it.

The Jews challenged the legitimacy of Greek philosophy by deeming it only subjective, and the Greeks attempted to squash the challenge by persecuting the Jews. "You Jews don't have a supreme truth. Hellenism is just as valid as Judaism," they claimed. Chazal tell us (Lev. Rabbah 15:9) that the Greeks forced the Jews to write, on the horn of an ox, "We have no portion in the God of Israel." This means that the Greeks did not deny the omnipotence of the gods, but denied the gods' interest in our world, its people and affairs.

A concerted effort was made to belittle the Torah as the exclusive book given by God. By translating it into Greek they showed the Jews that the Torah could be translated just like any other book. On Chanukka in *Al haNissim* we say "ve-zetim be-yad oskei Toratekha"—evidently (*zitim*) were delivered to those who study Your Torah. *Sefer Avudraham* connects the word *zitim* to the verse "Stubborn ones (*zitim*) have mocked

me terribly, but I haven't turned from Your Torah". The *zitim*, or stubborn ones, are people unwilling to see their mistakes. They mocked and belittled me (and from context obviously the Torah as well), but I refused to "turn away" or lose focus of the centrality and unique importance of Torah.

The victorious Jews reinstated their claim that man can only discover the truth if he is willing to "bow" to Divine law at times when he does not fully comprehend it. Mishna Middot 2:3 informs that the Hasmoneans counteracted the thirteen *peratot*, breaches, that the Greeks made in the barrier between Jews and Gentiles (*soreg*) with thirteen *hishchavavot*, prostrations, to drive home this point. When we realize our insignificance with respect to the Divine, we achieve meaning by allowing it to define us, rather than shaping it after our own desires.

II Maccabees recounts that on Chanukka the Jews expressed joy much as they did on Sukkot by carrying leaved reeds (*aravot*) in the Temple. This practice seems very strange. What connection exists between the willow of Sukkot and Chanukka? Historians explain that the Greeks had abolished all forms of *avoda* in the *Beit Mikdash*, and thus the Jews were unable to celebrate Sukkot properly. This explanation is insufficient, because the Jews had been prevented from fulfilling other *mitzvot* as well. But when we understand the theological significance of the victory, the use of the *arava* becomes clear. It symbolizes a simple connection and devotion to God not necessarily based on understanding (see my article on Sukkot - "Happiness Is ..." in the last issue of *Hamevaser*). By taking the *arava*, the Hasmoneans stressed the idea that the Jewish people reaches truth by submitting to God.

We have seen that the conflict between the Jews and Greeks was rooted in intense ideological friction dating back to their forefathers Shem and Yefet. The Jews won more than a military campaign; they proved that neither the Greeks nor other great Gentile nation will ever alter their unwavering dedication to God and His supreme truth. Aesthetic appreciation is important, and of course the immense contribution of the Greeks to civilization cannot be overlooked. But the merit of such achievements are in their uses as tools for those who serve God. They must remain subsidiary of to our underlying, intense devotion to God.

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Bride, Queen And Future King



by Yitzchak Blau

Tefilla combines the fixed and the flexible: every day's prayer has the same basic structure, but on special occasions, the contents of particular *tefillot* change depending upon the mood of the day. The variation occurs primarily in the central core of *davening*, the middle of the *an'eta*, but *piyyutim* also describe each *holiday* in great detail.

Perhaps because of their specificity, most of our special prayers are thematically monolithic. For example, all Yom Kippur *tefillot* revolve around repentance and forgiveness while Passover prayers focus on the exodus from Egypt. In contrast, *Shabbat tefillot* seem thematically inconsistent: the three *Shabbat amidot* (excluding *Mussaf* which discusses the day's sacrifices and not the day's character) bear little resemblance to each other in their unique *Shabbat* section. While all three close with the identical blessing, they begin differently and quote distinct passages from the Torah.

The *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 292) explains that each *tefilla* describes a distinct *Shabbat* theme. On Friday night we recount the *Shabbat* of creation, in our morning prayers we describe the *Shabbat* of the Sinaitic revelation, and at *Mincha* we mention the Messianic Sabbath (Franz Rosenzweig later built his *Star of Redemption* on these themes of creation, revelation, and redemption).

Shabbat's primary theme is recognizing God as the Creator. Thus, our Friday night *tefillot* refer to *Shabbat* as "the purpose of creating the heavens and the earth." At the time of creation, God "blessed" and "sanctified" the Sabbath. Appropriately, we quote verses from Genesis' account of the seventh day of creation.

The second *Shabbat* theme, reflected in the morning prayer, emerges from God's declaration at Mount Sinai that an inherently universal holy day should be reserved for the Jews. *Shabbat* embodies that loving relationship between God and the Jewish people. Our morning prayer states, "And You, Lord our God, did not give [the Sabbath] to the nations of the world...but rather You gave it to Israel Your nation." We cite verses that refer to *Shabbat* as a "sign" between God and the Jewish people.

Shabbat not only incarnates love but helps to generate it as well. A day of concentration on the divine and rest from mundane affairs

induces feelings and expressions of love for God. On *Shabbat*, we are "sanctified and delighted in God's goodness."

Towards the close of *Shabbat*, our *tefillot* become eschatological. The afternoon prayer begins with "You are One and your Name is One," a clear reference to the Messianic statement in Zecharia 14:9. Indeed, Rav Amram Gaon's *siddur* includes an explicit petition for God to reign over us speedily.

Perhaps we cite no verses because we lack clear knowledge of the Messianic Sabbath.

Our sages classified the Sabbath as a "semblance of the world to come" (*Berachot* 57b). On the most fundamental level, this statement means that the sanctified serenity of *Shabbat* resembles what we will experience in the future world. Jewish rationalists might see another dimension here. Both Ibn Ezra and Radak view the Sabbath as a time for intellectual contemplation of God. Accepting a Maimonidean position on the contemplative nature of the world-to-come would produce an exact parallel between *Shabbat* and *olam habba*.

Kabbalists, on the other hand, would view the statement of Chazal that *Shabbat* is "me'ein olam habba" in a very different light.

In the *Zohar*, *Shabbat* foreshadows the

ultimate divine unity. *Tiferet* and *Malchut*, or the male and female principles in the *sephiroth*, temporarily overcome their fragmentation every Sabbath. This unity will become complete in the Messianic era.

Our *tefillot* present the three Sabbath themes sequentially on both a chronological and axiological level. The Sabbath of creation came before the Mount Sinai Sabbath; both obviously precede the future *Shabbat*.

Additionally, the first two themes are a prerequisite for the third. Recognizing God's kingship and effecting a loving relationship with *Klal Yisroel* lead to the Messianic era and will be the standard state of affairs then.

The kabbalists of sixteenth-century Safed recognized these three themes and integrated them into their institution of *Kabbalat Shabbat*. Building on a Talmudic passage in which Rabbi Hanina wrapped himself in a prayer shawl to greet the Sabbath queen (*Shabbat* 119b), they incorporated David's psalms with their own hymns into our greeting of the Sabbath.

Kabbalat Shabbat begins with six chapters from Psalms. These psalms revolve around the declaration of God's rule; the phrase "God reigns" appears in three of the psalms. They also include references to God making the

heavens, or the Sabbath of creation. Some commentators, however, (i.e. Radak) understand these psalms as referring to the Messianic age, the third *Shabbat* theme.

Rav Shlomo Alkabetz's *Lecha Dodi* introduces two of the Sabbath themes. This poem evokes the Song of Songs, the ultimate expression of love between God and the Jewish people. We call to our "dodi," beloved God, to join us in greeting the Sabbath bride.

After two stanzas about the wondrous nature of *Shabbat*, the emphasis changes to a description of the Messianic age. The second and the third themes unite in an account of the future era in which God's joyous love with Israel will resemble the rapture between a groom and a bride.

Psalm 92 follows, and introduces itself as a "song for the Sabbath day." Yet the psalm discusses reward and punishment, making no further explicit mention of the Sabbath. The Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 31a) explains that the hymn refers to the "day that is all *Shabbat*," the Messianic age where justice will be manifested.

Other commentators link this psalm with different *Shabbat* themes. Meiri and Malbim suggest that Providence reminds us that God created and supervises the world. Radak and Ibn Ezra propose that only on the Sabbath do we have the leisure to reflect and understand divine providence.

Abraham Joshua Heschel points out that the earlier two Sabbath themes find expression in the terminology of *Kabbalat Shabbat*. As we refer to the Sabbath as both a bride and a queen, we develop an intimate relationship with God while simultaneously being subservient to His Majesty. The word "kabbala" means both accepting and greeting. We accept God's reign and yet we wait to greet our lover (*The Sabbath* pp. 60-61).

The twin commandments of *kedvat oneg* bear the same dichotomy. We don our best attire and keep a respectful deference before the king. On the other hand, we feel the freedom to indulge in enjoyment as if with a lover.

One *midrash* (*Exodus Rabbah* 25:12) relates that if all of *Klal Yisroel* kept one Sabbath, the Messiah would come. This points to *Shabbat's* importance and value relative to other *mitzvot*. Perhaps on a *derash* level one can add that a collective communal *Shabbat* observed by all Jews would create a state to rival the world to come.

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