



Torah and Politics: Do they Mix?

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POINT OF VIEW

Pikha hi am Zshuv How Could Gold Turnish?

A few years ago, a book entitled *The Brisker Derech* was published, claiming that it could train any novice to apply the "Brisker derech" of *avon* in a few simple steps. Similarly, a well-known *veshiva* has been publishing a *shuv* over the internet entitled "Talmudic Methodology," also claiming to guide its reader in developing a *derech hi limud*. Many students who study in Israel for a year make finding a *derech hi limud* one of their main goals.

While consistency in approach is useful, an overemphasis on this stifles creativity. When *talmidon* aim to copy their *rebbe's* methodology blankly, they approach a *sugya* from the standpoint of "into what pre-existing structure can I fit this?" Rather than considering a *gemara* or *rishon* for its content, they immediately look for a *chakra* to apply to it, and, worse still, chalk it up as a success even if that particular *chakra* does not particularly fit.

Instead, people should, before attempting to find a macro-structure, consider each statement of the *gemara* or *rishon* for what it says. They might consider what problems they may have with it and how they might imagine the logic applying to cases other than that mentioned. If they find themselves forced to question what the *gemara* or *rishon* says, they will then be forced to re-explain it in a way that deals with their new issue. Moreover, they may even develop a new *sevara* which will be useful in their own or someone else's analysis of another *sugya*, too.

As one prominent rabbi pointed out, "Rav Chaim was not a Brisker and Rabbenu Tam was not a Tosafist." Each developed not a methodology, but numerous *chiddushim* that reflected methodology—his own natural way of thinking. Later, another (who was perhaps less naturally creative) would see that this methodology was useful and would appreciate it to propose his own *chiddush*. Unfortunately, it might not have been a true *chiddush*, but only the stale reapplication of someone else's *chiddush*. Besides, the cases to which any given approach naturally fits are bound to run dry.

Another problem with this excessive methodology-centeredness is that, precisely because it suppresses originality, it also removes the most significant motivating factor towards *iyun* learning. We often quote "*vekara hi mi-peninin*," and "*tov li torat pikha me-alfei zahav va-klusef*," a comparison that may also apply to the personalization of Torah. People are usually more interested in their own treasures than in treasure in the abstract sense. If man does not see his own Torah as "*etzem me-atamai u-vasar mi-besari*," he will not truly love it. It is only if "*yu' azov ish et aviv ve-et imo*" (understood through "*shema beni musar avikha ve-al titosh torat imekha*," which is interpreted by Chazal as referring to one's *rabbeim*) that he will come to truly appreciate his own "*etzem me-atamai*."

—D.S.

Editor's Note

We at YU have learned to turn a deaf ear toward those from the Orthodox Right who heap criticisms on us. But perhaps we should pay some attention when they accuse our *veshiva* of failing to inculcate its *talmidim* with adequate respect for Torah and its scholars. There may be more than a grain of truth to this accusation. Does it irk us at all to see a fellow student carrying his lunch on a *gemara*? Would we openly protest if we saw someone studying for a college final in one of the *batei midrash* or heard one of the *rabbeim* being mocked? Most disturbing is that many of us became desensitized *after* we came to YU. Though it's hard to pin the blame on any individual, group, or philosophy, those at YU who attempt to develop a sense of *kevod Shamayyim* inevitably find themselves fighting an uphill battle against campus culture.

But we must still try. As the *Sefer ha-Chinukh*, Ramchal, and countless others have pointed out (based on many sources in *Shas*), *achar ha-ma'asim nimshakh ha-lev*—the surest way to modify one's natural inclinations is to first modify one's actions. Consequently, if we deliberately devote time to acts of *kevod ha-Torah*, our attitudes change accordingly, and what in the past we had to force ourselves to do eventually becomes second nature.

With this in mind, we all certainly should laud S.O.Y. president Jonathan Neiss for initiating a project that was long overdue—the writing of a *Sefer Torah* in memory of HaRav HaGaon Dovid Lifshitz, *zekher tzadik livrakha*. To be sure, it is for the memory of our late Rosh HaYeshiva that we are writing a *Sefer Torah*, but we must not forget that we personally benefit from every bit of enthusiasm with which we perform this *mitzvah*.

—S. M. T.

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BY GABRIEL M. KROSENBER

The Soloveitchik Heritage: A Daughter's Memoir

Over the last decade, with an awakening interest in Jewish history, there have been a plethora of hagiographies published in English. *The Soloveitchik Heritage: A Daughter's Memoir* is one of the latest in this line. Unlike many other recently published hagiographies, this book will be of special interest to the YU student, since it deals, to some extent, with the life of R. Joseph Ber Soloveitchik. Written by Shulamith Soloveitchik Meiselman, the book gives a colorful portrait of the author's ancestry and family. Mrs. Meiselman, the daughter of R. Moshe Soloveitchik (Rosh HaYeshiva, RIETS 1928-1940), places the book's focus primarily on her father.

Excluding the introduction, we can divide *The Soloveitchik Heritage* into three parts. The first part centers on the marriage of R. Moshe Soloveitchik to Peshia Feinstein. The second part focuses on the author's ancestry, jumping back in time to give a sketchy history, beginning with R. Chayyim Volozhiner (1749-1821), and the founding of Yeshivat Etz Chayyim (Volozhin). The third part returns to R. Moshe Soloveitchik, starting from a point in time ten years after his marriage and continuing until his death in 1940. This last section is semi-autobiographical in nature.

In the first section we find a great number of colorful anecdotes. Unfortunately, Mrs. Meiselman's interpretations of these stories are at best *hard to believe*, and at worst, patently absurd. For instance, when the author tells how R. Eliezer Gordon (founder of the Telshe Yeshiva) showed up uninvited at the wedding of R. Moshe Soloveitchik, it seems highly unlikely that he did so because, "he thought his appearance would be excellent public relations for his newspaper." (page 19) At another point in the book, the author attempts to describe the thoughts of a synagogue sexton as he gave ritual lashes (*mal'kut*) to the members of the congregation before Yom Kippur. Mrs. Meiselman, who was a child at the time, claims to have been able to read his mind merely by looking at the expression on his face:

Today, I am the King. I, Avremele Bulechke... am judging you, the rich men of our town. I am smiting you for the sins you have committed against your poor sexton, who chokes every morning over a piece of black bread, while you sit in your luxurious dining rooms and enjoy a fresh bulke with freshly churned butter for breakfast. (148)

We also find exaggerations and two-dimensional descriptions:

Reb Ele and his wife, Guta, had many children. The sons were handsome and enterprising, the daughters were beautiful and vivacious. (1)

As a rule, the author ascribes thought and speech to historic figures, as if she were writing a novel and not a history. She bases much of this dialogue on "conversations... heard in rabbinic homes, [and] in synagogues." (2) The result is often trite and clichéd, as when she describes Peshia's first impression of R. Moshe with the phrase, "tall, dark and handsome." (13)

Through the author's use of all these techniques a clear premise to the hagiography emerges: the secularization of the Soloveitchik family. Although this theme runs through the entire book, in no place is it

more evident than in the early chapters.

During the first fictional conversation the author describes both her parents. In this conversation her father "represents the majesty of Torah" (7) and the stultic mentality her mother, though, is "a modern young woman... fallen under the influence of new ideas... [and] steeped in world literature." (2) In this first part of the book, the author goes to great lengths to establish the difference between her parents' ideologies, particularly in their opinions of secular studies.

In the third chapter we learn of R. Moshe's difficulties in integrating into the Feinstein home. Mrs. Meiselman describes her father's reaction as, "[frage] against the intellectual and social customs of his new milieu, Reb Ele's home. His bride's interest in world literature annoyed him." (24) The author relates that her father was "very unhappy, [because] everything was new and strange." (24) We go on to read colorful stories of the newly married couple and of their inability to relate to one another. This chapter, the last of this first part of the book, leaves the future of the young couple in a state of uncertainty.

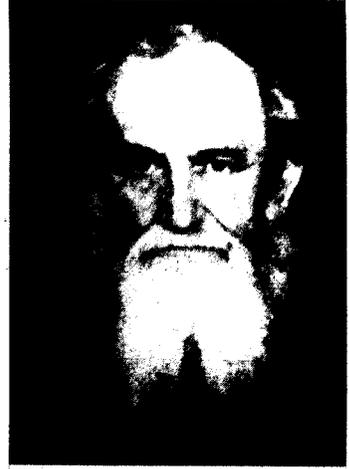
Without any sort of transition, the fourth chapter switches the book's focus to a general discussion of several prominent rabbis of the 18th century, and in particular, to the life of R. Chayyim Volozhiner. We read a simplistic description of the founding of Yeshivat Etz Chayyim, and find a tale about how R. Chayyim met Napoleon.

Most of the second part of the book is riddled with interesting anecdotes about the author's ancestors. In fact the author seems to make these anecdotes her focus. In the fifth chapter, which deals with the life of R. Itzle Volozhiner (R. Chayyim's son), the author gives a brief discussion of Max Lilienthal's role in the Russian government. (Lilienthal was a German *maskil* hired by the government to head the new Jewish education program.) This discussion of Lilienthal seems present only to facilitate relating a tale dealing with R. Itzle and Lilienthal. The history of Lilienthal is far from comprehensive, and deals with only those aspects needed to understand the anecdote. As a rule, when the author describes any actual history, it is solely to give the reader the background necessary to understand an anecdote. Therefore, the very little bit of actual history in the second part of the book is disorganized and fragmented.

The author gives no explanation as to how R. Moshe changed from a prospective Rosh HaYeshiva of Volozhin into a professor of Talmud at a Tachkemoni.

In fact, disorganization is the major problem here. Although the author does make a good attempt to clarify her transitions from the life of one person to the next, her connections lead to some ambiguity. While describing the lives of so many of her ancestors, she tends to jump back and forth through many generations. It is likely that someone who is not already familiar with the lineage of the Soloveitchik family will get lost.

Another element of *The Soloveitchik Heritage* that might lead to confusion is the map of the "pale of settlement" (116-117). The map is not only inaccurate, but it is also inconsistent with the facts found in the text. For example, the text reads, "Bereze [is] a



Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, zt"l

town located between Pruzhana and Brisk." (16) On the map, however, Bereze is to the north of both Pruzhana and Brisk. We also find that the text (41-42) describes Kovno and the city of Williampool (which was later renamed Slobodka) as being directly across a river from one another. Yet the map gives separate locations (!) for Williampool and Slobodka, neither of which are across from Kovno. Even the nomenclature is inconsistent: the map uses the name Brest for a city that was commonly called Brisk in the text.

The final chapter of this second section deals with the issue of secular studies in the lives of the Soloveitchik and Feinstein families. Herein, Mrs. Meiselman attempts to explain what various members of her family thought about secular studies. Apparently trying to make the book appeal to a wider audience, she oversimplifies their views on this and many other complex issues, some as the Brisker method of Talmudic study. Mrs. Meiselman does not seem to realize that by its very nature, a book of this type would not appeal to someone without a religious background. Despite this approach the chapter provides a decent transition to the third part of the book.

Here is where the writing becomes somewhat autobiographical, and we actually find a *Daughter's Memoir*. The majority of this section concerns the six-year period during which R. Moshe was the Chief Rabbi of Khaslavichy. Mrs. Meiselman, who was not yet eight years old when her family left Khaslavichy, gives an account of the events through the eyes of a child, augmented with facts that she must have learned as an adult.

She uses four chapters to describe the major Jewish holidays as practiced by the Jews of Khaslavichy. Although some of their customs were a bit unusual, the majority of what she describes are still mainstream Orthodox Jewish practices. Once again we see that Mrs. Meiselman did not know her audience: Although this book, as we said before, could never appeal to a secular readership, she devotes space to describing how *dreidel* is played. She also explains that "Passover [is] the festival of unleavened bread, of

(continued on page 5)

Ramban's Approach to Aggada in Light of his Statements at the Disputation at Barcelona

BY DONALD EHRSKREICH

In Barcelona, in 1263, an apostate named Pablo Christiani suggested to King James I that a debate be held on the fundamental natures of Judaism and Christianity between him and R. Moses ben Nachman (Ramban). While on the one hand a number of extremely learned church authorities were arrayed against him, Ramban's singular opportunity to speak freely was guaranteed by the King himself. Christiani employed a recently developed tactic in this debate: rather than confine his attacks to interpretation of disputed verses in the Old Testament, he attempted to prove the truth of Christianity from passages within the Talmud itself.

Before examining the interchange between Christiani and Ramban regarding a piece of Aggada, it is necessary to examine the differing Jewish and Christian attitudes towards the genre more generally. Christianity views what in a broad sense corresponds to its Aggada (theological statements and the like) as the central element of religion. Countless interecine wars were fought solely to establish the superiority of one dogma over another. Judaism, on the other hand, (though this is a complex issue in its own right) does not have very many rigid rules of belief. What is quantified, argued, and enforced is law, specifically relating to actions. This discrepancy in emphasis meant that the debaters were arguing at cross purposes.

The Aggada in the Talmud (and elsewhere) had always been viewed as different from the Talmud's Halakic portions long before Ramban. Some Geonim went so far as to call certain *aggadot* foolish. Even in the Talmud itself there are several disparaging remarks made about the Aggada. These remarks range from "no *halakhot* may be learnt from them" to "He who writes it down has no share in the World to Come...". Besides this, the overwhelming trend of the exegetes of the Medieval era tended toward simple interpretation of Biblical texts. The main difference between Halakha and Aggada, though, was one of kind, not degree. In the words of the historian Chaim Maccoby, treating *aggadot* in a strictly authoritative manner in the course of a debate would be like "...quoting a Keats sonnet in support of a theorem in geometry."

Considering the above notes on Aggada, how did Ramban respond to Pablo Christiani's attacks? In one instance, Christiani cites a *midrash* that on the day of the destruction of the Temple the Messiah was born. Ramban responded with a variety of answers, first among them a number of logical flaws in Christiani's interpretation: that Jesus was not born in the same year as the destruction of the Temple and that the coming of the Messiah does not necessarily follow any set number of years from his birth. He added that there were other *aggadot* that contradicted this interpretation proposed by Christiani and there might also be some less literal understanding of this *aggada* "derived from the secrets of the Sages."

Ramban went on to explain his understanding of the nature of Aggada. He stated that the Jews have three books. The first is the Bible, which all must believe in completely; the second is the Talmud, and explanation of the commandments contained in the Bible. The third book is the Midrash, meaning "Sermons." "This is just as if the bishop were to stand up and make a sermon and one of his hearers liked it so much that he wrote it down. And as for this book, the Midrash, if anyone wants to believe in it, well and good, but if someone does not believe in it, there is no



harim."

The above discourse leads to an obvious question: Did Ramban sincerely believe what he said at Barcelona regarding Aggada, or was he merely being calculatedly evasive? The historian Yitzchak Baer felt that Ramban was greatly enamored with Aggada (noting its pronounced presence in Nachmanides's works) and that he spoke of it in a more disrespectful tone than he really felt. Chaim Maccoby, however, pointed out that, unlike R. Yechiel of Paris (in the debate of the Talmuds), Ramban did not feel threatened, and

Did Ramban sincerely believe what he said at Barcelona or was he merely being calculatedly evasive?

the fact that he had other responses to this question demonstrates that there was no reason for him to publicize the unauthoritative character of the Aggada if he did not actually believe this to be true. Ramban's bluntness in the matter could, however, be attributed to the fact that a nuanced understanding of the subject may have been beyond the comprehension of the assembled audience.

Ramban in actuality assigned various levels of authority to different types of Aggada. The analysis of Ramban's treatment of Aggada has established categories and sub-categories based on the measure of strength and authority he accords them. The first category is made up of those instances where, for a variety of reasons, Ramban dismisses the *midrash* in question. It should be noted that in the *parshi'ot* of *lekh lekha, va-yera*, and *chayeyi Sara*, these instances were fairly rare.

One reason Ramban sometimes claims a *midrash* to be superfluous is that he feels that the language of a particular verse employs standard idiomatic word usage, and that therefore a *derash* on an "extra" word is misplaced. One instance of this is in

Bereshit 12:11, where the word "na" (in the phrase "hinei na") is, in a *midrash*, said to indicate modesty. Ramban points out that the phrase is a typical idiomatic convention merely used to refer to anything "present at the time." He completes his analysis by adding that "There is no need for all these matters." In this example, Ramban appears not so much to be denying the truth of the *midrash* as questioning the applicability and connection of its method to this verse.

Another pattern of instances where Ramban cites a *midrash* only to disregard it is when he finds a flaw in the Aggadic piece's logic or a contradiction to the piece from other verses. One illustration of this is in the commentary to Bereshit 13:7, where Ramban points out that a verse elsewhere (12:7) states "to your seed I will give..." meaning that logically, Lot's shepherds could make no claim justifying their use of the land based on future inheritance of it, since they (and Lot) were not descendants of Avraham. In an even more telling sample of this pattern, Ramban on Bereshit 21:9 takes issue with the *midrash*, cited by Rashi, that states that Yishmael was arguing with Yitzchak about inheritance. He points out that to have this type of argument, Yitzchak would have to have been older than the child on his mother's shoulder mentioned in 21:14. Furthermore, Ramban notes that the chronology contained in another piece of Aggada contradicts this one. In these examples, Ramban is clearly stating a problem inherent in the relevant *midrash* that makes it unsuitable as an explanation and, on some level, not true (compare to "I do not believe this *aggada*").

Finally, there are times when Ramban rejects a *midrash* in favor of his own explanation either because the *midrash* is not *peshat*, or even for no (stated) reason at all. In all the instances mentioned where Ramban rejects a *midrash*, it is the case that while he may feel these *midrashim* have meaning, he dismisses the possibility that they are the central explanation of the *pasuk*, and thus does not feel bound to regard them as authoritative.

At the other extreme are those *aggadot* that to which Ramban seems to attach great, perhaps even undue, importance. Chief among these are those that express a generalization or rule that is true (or at least understood to be generally accepted by all exegetes) throughout the Torah. One example of this can be found in Ramban's commentary to Bereshit 18:1, where he takes great pains to establish the premise that the angel Raphael's actions (i.e. healing Avraham and rescuing Lot) did not constitute two missions. This is in keeping with the well-known Aggadic statement that no angel may carry out more than one mission simultaneously. Another instance of Ramban citing and keeping to an Aggadic rule is on verse 17:1 where he mentions the *midrash* that Moshe saw the supernatural through a clear lens, so to speak, while the rest of the prophets saw it through a cloudy lens. From the content and context of the above examples, it is clear that Ramban felt that he, as well as other commentators, had to work within the scope of these Aggadic axioms.

In a related pattern, there are certain facts pertaining to events that occurred in the *chumash* that Ramban seems to regard as objective truth. In some of these instances, these "facts" are used to challenge other exegetes (i.e. Rashi). Commenting on Bereshit 17:26, he notes the commentary of Rashi which states that "on that same day" refers to Avraham turning ninety-nine on the same day he was told that "on a

year from this day" he would have a son. Ramban rejects this notion, arguing from an established view (that of R. Eliezer) that, with the exception of Yitzchak, the Patriarchs were born in the month of Tishrei. Clearly, in this case, there is nothing cited from the *chumash* itself to detract from Rashi's claim. The problem is Rashi's impinging of a Midrashic premise.

Another case of this phenomenon is in the exegesis on 25:34, where Ramban cites the commentary of Ibn Ezra, who explains Yaakov's impoverished state by claiming that Yitzchak lost all his wealth, bequeathing nothing to Yaakov. Ramban derides Ibn Ezra for citing a *midrash* in Bereshit Rabba that Elifaz, the son of Esav, had previously robbed Yaakov of all his possessions, and it was for this reason that Yaakov was now poor. Once again, we find an event recorded in a *midrash* used as a strong point of criticism of a fellow commentator.

Finally, within the broader category of those instances in which Ramban treats Midrash as fairly authoritative, there is one more sub-group which is also connected to the next major division. In these cases, a *midrash* is brought to bear on a particular verse as the sole explanation of that particular verse.

In Bereshit 26:1, in the context of explaining why the *chumash* mentions "besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham," Ramban mentions that Yitzchak was instructed by God not to journey to Egypt. He gives the reason for this injunction as "stated by our Rabbis: 'You are a perfect burnt-offering and residence outside the land of Israel does not befit you.'" Ramban here clearly regards this reason as the authoritative one.

Bereshit 15:10 states that although Abraham split the animals in the *brit ben ha-betarim*, he did not split the birds. The reason Ramban supplies for this discrepancy can be found in a *midrash* in which God instructs Moshe in the laws of sacrifices. These laws mandate that with regard to a sin-offering, the bird's head is not severed from its body. The fact that Ramban chose to cite this particular *midrash* on this particular *pasuk* is telling, since, outside of Aggadic tradition, it has no outward connection to the *pasuk*.

In a similar case found in Bereshit 20:2, Ramban seeks to explain why the king of Gerar wants to kidnap Sara (in light of her age). He cites a *midrash* claiming that Sara's beauty was returned to her when she was visited by the angels. Here, when confronted with a logical problem in the story, Ramban quotes an *aggada* to solve the problem.

The common denominator of these three cases is that Ramban takes a piece of Aggadic material and seemingly views it as no more than an untold part of the story.

The next major category lies somewhere between the extremes of the two previously mentioned major categories. In these cases, he does not regard the *midrashim* he cites as being as central to the meaning of the *pasuk* as those just discussed. On the other hand, Ramban does not dismiss them as he does those in the first grouping. When dealing with these cases, he tends to utilize Aggadic material as either a support for his explanation or as an alternative to elucidations brought by him or other commentators.

On Bereshit 12:8, "...and he called in the name of Hashem," Ramban comments that Abraham engaged in spreading the name of God among the inhabitants of the area. Ramban uses the *midrash* in Bereshit Rabba, which states that the above verse refers to Abraham causing "the name of the Holy One...to be in the mouth of all people." Similarly, in discussing the "visit" by God to Abraham at the beginning of *parshat va-yera*, Ramban depicts these visits as a kind of heavenly reward. To bolster this assertion, he quotes the *midrash* which states that the purpose of this visit was "to comfort the sick" (as Abraham was recovering from his circumcision). Finally, re-

garding *pasuk* 21:1, Ramban claims that the phrase "pakad Hashem" denotes "divine remembrance" (of a divine promise). Again he cites an *aggada* to support him: *pasukim* mentioning *pkidaton* are equivalent to *pasukim* mentioning *drone* (*chironot*). In these cases, the primary role of the *midrash* cited is not as the basis of Ramban's explanation, but as a fortification of it.

In *parshat va-yera* (19:3), Ramban explains that the angels' initial reluctance to enter Lot's house was due to the suspicion cast on his righteousness. In addition to this, he quotes a *midrash* that proclaims that one can refuse an offer from a lesser person, but not from a greater one. Similarly, with regard to *pasuk* 23:19, which concludes the story of Abraham's purchase of *me'arat ha-machpela*, he cites an *aggada* saying that the reason for this episode's inclusion [in the Torah] is that it was another test for Abraham. Lastly, regarding Bereshit 22:2, concerning the meaning of the word "Moria," Ramban cites the opinions of Rashi, Onkelos, and an *aggada*. In deciding between the elucidations of Onkelos and the *midrash*, Ramban chooses the *midrash* as most compatible with the word in question. In the preceding three examples, while still quoting the *aggada*, Ramban views the relevant portion of Aggadic material as being of equal authority to his own explanations and those of his medieval contemporaries.

The final major category consists of those instances in which a cited *midrash* could be viewed as containing a difficulty, and yet Ramban would take pains to resolve it even though many times the view did not coincide with his own. In his commentary at the beginning of *parshat chayvei Sara* (23:2), Ramban cites the opinions of Rashi (*Be'er Sheva*) and a *midrash* (*Har ha-Moria*) to explain where Abraham was coming from when he traveled to bury Sara. Though he proves Rashi's view through *pesukim*, he works to harmonize this explanation with the *midrash* by saying that Abraham originally left from *Har ha-Moria* and, on the way, stopped off at *Be'er Sheva*.

A *midrash* relating to Yitzchak's request to "feel" his son explains that Yitzchak became suspicious because Yaakov had mentioned the name of God. Ramban notes that Yitzchak did not disapprove of his older son and, therefore, would not have discovered Yaakov on account of mentioning God's name. Though Ramban ultimately says he prefers "*peshat*" here, he nevertheless explains that perhaps Esav, as a hunter, was often in impure situations and was not in position to mention God's name. While this explanation does not seem entirely harmonious with the intent of the *midrash*, which certainly seems to be disparaging Esav, Ramban feels bound to account for the *midrash*.

In another instance, on the *pasuk* "Kadesh will be called *En Mishpat*" (14:7) a *midrash* explains that this was due to the "waters of discord" (*mei meriva*). Ramban states that this is impossible, as the *Kadesh* of *mei meriva* is *Kadesh Barne'a* in the desert. He goes on to say that the *midrash* must have meant that a place called *Kadesh* will be called *En Mishpat*. By this explanation, Ramban has salvaged the *midrash*, but at the cost of severing it from the *pasuk* it seeks to illuminate.

In the previous three examples, Ramban seems quite concerned with maintaining the integrity of the *midrash* under observation. It is noteworthy that this concern seems centered on the Aggadic piece, irrespective of its connection to the *pasuk* at hand.

Within these four *parshiot* of Ramban's commentary to the Torah, four major categories presented themselves. In the first group discussed, Ramban seemed to view the *aggadot* as highly authoritative, dictating both to him and to his fellow exegetes. In direct contrast to this is the second division, where Ramban has little use for the relevant *midrashim*. The third category is a middle ground between the first two, in which Ramban accorded the *aggadot* some

weight, but not necessarily an authoritative or sole interpretive opinion. In the last category, Ramban defined the *midrash* merely as a point of view, not particularly a revealed authority.

How did Ramban regard the *midrashim* that he regarded with such respect? In *Parshat Va-yera*, he writes that there are some *aggadot* that Ramban did not feel one must believe, because they are only regarded as a subjective truth. On this note, it is important to point out that these *aggadot* he believed in do not necessarily fit neatly into a rationalist perspective. There were other *midrashim* he agreed with but did not view as authoritative and that therefore in principle did not greatly differ from those *aggadot* he rejected. Thus in the final analysis, while Ramban did not view the corpus of Aggadic material as binding, his stand on the subject was much more nuanced than the one he publicly proclaimed at the Disputation at Barcelona. ♦

(Soloveitchik, continued from page 3)

our redemption from slavery, from the house of bondage in Egypt." (133) Her tendency to explain even the most rudimentary Jewish topics makes the book tedious to read.

The last part of the book attempts to stress two points: the secularization of the Soloveitchik family and the greatness of R. Joseph Ber Soloveitchik as a rabbinic scholar.

"Secular studies," one of the author's favorite phrases, pops up frequently here. It is clear that the author is greatly moved by a modern approach to secular culture. In two places in *The Soloveitchik Heritage*, the author treats *maskilim* with the same awe she shows for her own rabbinic ancestors. In this last section there still exists the conflict seen at the beginning of the book between the outlooks of R. Moshe Soloveitchik and Pesha Feinstein. It is implied that R. Moshe stance starts to change when he is shown "that his oldest sons were...reading secular books," (177) though when the change actually occurs, and what may be his new stance, is not clear. Mrs. Meiselman gives no explanation as to how R. Moshe changed from a prospective Rosh HaYeshiva of Volozhin into a professor of Talmud at a Tachkemoni (a Jewish college with a rabbinical department, run by the Mizrahi). We are left disappointed that the moment of transition is not described, since the premise of the book would seem to hinge on this change.

In contrast, the topic of R. Joseph Ber Soloveitchik is not at all ambiguous. The author seems to be in awe of her older brother. To illustrate his great scholarship, she includes stories of a type like those found in the Artsroll "history" series. The author presents both of her parents as dedicating every spare moment to the education of R. Joseph Ber. The following quote from R. Moshe is typical:

My whole life has been spent...providing my son with the necessary tools for becoming the spokesman for Orthodox Jewry...I have taught my son everything my sainted father, Reb Chayyim, taught me. My son Joseph Dov is now the world's greatest Talmud scholar. (236)

The book concludes with a dramatic scene depicting R. Joseph Ber taking his father's position at RIETS.

Despite its flaws, *The Soloveitchik Heritage* proves to be interesting and readable, and does give the English-reading audience a venue to learn about a rabbinic family that has had a profound effect on the Jewish world of today. Unfortunately, little of the book is actually a memoir written from firsthand knowledge, and the rest is far from objective and lacks proof of any sort for many of its claims. ♦

The Sword and the Storehouse: Perspectives on Gehinom in Chazal

BY ASHER FRIEDMAN

Just outside Jerusalem's walls, not far from the Temple Mount, lies a steep, stony valley. A quiet street runs along the bottom, occupied from time to time by Arab children playing soccer, and, less frequently, by the occasional automobile. Seemingly, nothing is out of the ordinary. Yet, somewhere in this valley, flames flicker, smoke billows, and the dead bemoan their fate. For this valley is *Gei ben Hinom*, and somewhere, concealed among the palm trees, yawns wide the mouth of *Gehinom*. The Talmud (Succah 32b) identifies its precise location: "R. Marvun quoted R. Yehoshua ben Levi... two date palms grow in the valley of *ben Hinom*, and smoke rises up from in between them... and this is the entrance to *Gehinom*."

One wonders how this quiet valley initially came to be identified with Hell. *Gei ben Hinom* is first mentioned in Yehoshua as a segment of the border between the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Later, it became prominent as a center for idolatry, as seen in Yirmiyahu when the prophet chastises the Jews for their betrayal of God. "And they have built the *bamot* of *Tofet*, which is in the valley of *ben Hinom*, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command them (7:31)." This passage alludes to the cult of *Molekh* which, according to Tanchuma Babai, *parshat va-etchanan*, involved passing children into the hands of a flaming idol. The screaming of worshippers and the beating of tambourines drowned out the cries of the tormented children. Yirmiyahu prophesied a dreadful end for the valley and its congregants when he said, "Days are coming, says the Lord, when it shall no more be called... *Gei ben Hinom*, but *Gei ha-Harega* (the valley of slaughter)." (7:32)

It is not surprising that a place marred by sin, painful death, flames, and prophecies of destruction was associated with the ultimate place of punishment for sinners. Indeed, Erubin 19a states that *Gei ben Hinom* is identified with Hell, "for, it is a valley as deep as *Gehinom*, and all descend into it because of the dealings of *hinom*." Commentators interpret *hinom* as an homiletic equivalent of *chinam*, futility. Thus, the Talmud makes the following analogy: as idol worshippers descend into the deep valley of *Gei ben Hinom* to worship idols, so too they ultimately descend into the deep valley of *Gehinom* to be punished.

While the entrance to *Gehinom* is identified most closely with the valley of *ben Hinom*, the sages suggest that there are other ways to get there. Our text in Erubin lists three alternate entrances. "R. Yirmiya b. Elazar said: There are three openings to *Gehinom*: one in the desert, one in the ocean, and one

in Jerusalem." A much later *agadda* (Agaddat Bereshit 20:3) stresses this as well. "sinners flee from here and end up here, and cannot find a place to run." This also effectively emphasizes that *Gehinom* cannot be escaped by taking refuge in sea, wasteland, or inhabited territory. The various sources detailing the locations of the entrances to *Gehinom* all seem to suggest that it is a subterranean cavern. This view is consistent with verses throughout Tanakh that refer to Hell as an underground abode of the dead. In perhaps the most dramatic example of a subterranean location in Tanakh, Korach and his followers are swallowed alive by the mouth of *she'ol* (Bamidbar 16:23-35).

Nevertheless, sources in Chazal suggest higher sites for *Gehinom* as well. Tamid 37b proposes two possible locations: "*Gehinom* is above the firmament, and there are those who say behind the mountains of darkness." The first part of the passage can be related to Shabbat 152b stating that as punishment after death an "angel stands at one end of the world and another at the other end, and they sling the souls back and forth." Along these same lines Shemot Rabbah 38:3 states that: "A land of gloom (*efata*), as darkness itself... this is *Gehinom*, where the sinners fly like a bird (*of*)." In contrast to the previous passages we now find Hell situated above ground. Saul Lieberman (*Texts and Studies* 238) explains that the "mountains of darkness" mentioned in Tamid were believed to be located at the edge of the earth, perhaps in Africa. Chazal place the "mountains of darkness" beyond the known, inhabited world, and therefore, the wicked would be just as isolated from the land of the living as if they were hidden underground.

All of the sources mentioned above concur that *Gehinom* is an actual geographic location, in which evildoers receive punishment after death. But two other, and fundamentally different, conceptions of *Gehinom* appear in Bereshit Rabbah 6:6. The first establishes *Gehinom* as a chronological reality, while not identifying it with any specific place. "The globe of the sun has a sheath, as it says, 'He has set a tent for the sun...' (Tehillim 19:5) ... But in the future, God will strip it of its sheath, and it

will consume the wicked in flames, as it says, 'and the day that is coming shall burn them up' (Malakki 3:19)." R. Yannai and R. Shimon b. Lakish both say: There is no [geographic] *Gehinom*. Instead, it is a day that consumes sinners in flames. The reason for this is seen in the verse "For, behold, that day is coming; it burns like a furnace (ibid)." These two Palestinian *Amoraim* clearly consider *Gehinom* an event, and not a place.

The same *midrash* quotes a differing Tannaic view: "R. Yehuda b. R. Ilai says, it [*Gehinom*] is not a day, nor is it a place. Instead, it is a flame that comes

forth from the bodies of sinners and consumes them. What is the reason? 'You shall conceive chaff; you shall bring forth stubble; your breath is a fire that shall devour you.' (Yeshayahu 33:11)" Here, *Gehinom*, instead of inhabiting a specific time or place, comprises a process of self-consumption. The sinner's own actions turn and devour him. A different manifestation of *Gehinom* as self-consumption can be found in Nedarim 22a: "Whoever becomes angry, all torments of *Gehinom* rule over him, as it says, 'Remove anger from your heart, and pass away evil from your flesh.' And there is no evil other than *Gehinom*." Here the sin is equated with *Gehinom* itself. "anger" is the parallel to "evil" in the verse, and "evil" is interpreted to mean *Gehinom*.

Despite the existence of another approach, the majority of references to *Gehinom* in the Talmud and Midrash appear to treat it as a distinct geographic re-

Descriptions range... from the luminous light of creation to the darkness of deepest dejection.

ality. Among the sages who share this opinion, there is debate regarding Hell's date of creation. Bereshit Rabbah 4:6 states, regarding the Torah's account of the second day of creation, "Why is it not written 'it was good'? R. Yochanan in the name of R. Yosi b. R. Chalafita said, because on that day *Gehinom* was created." Another position is found in a *mishnah* (Avot 5:6), which states that, "the mouth of the earth was created on the sixth day, at twilight." Contradicting both prior views, Nedarim 39b includes *Gehinom* among the items created by God before the creation of the world. The *gemara* in Pesachim 54a attempts to resolve the contradiction. "Rather, its cavern was [created] before the creation of the world, and its fire on the second day." The *mishnah* in Avot does not pose a problem; it simply refers to the opening of *Gehinom*, and not to its creation.

Nevertheless, this resolution in Pesachim does not settle a more fundamental dispute regarding the nature of *Gehinom*. While R. Yochanan in the *midrash* mentioned above maintains that the existence of *Gehinom* is an evil, R. Elazar takes a strikingly positive attitude, applying the words found later in the *parsha*, "it was very good," (Bereshit 1:31) to *Gehinom*. A philosophical basis for this dispute can be found in two attempts to explain the function of *Gehinom*. The first appears in Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah (6:14), "And on that day [God] created *Gehinom*, about which 'good' is not written, comparable to [a man] of flesh and blood who acquired servants. He buys them and then says, 'Make me swords.' They reply to him, 'Why?' He replies to them, 'So that if you rebel, you will hear the call for judgement.' So says the Holy One: 'I created *Gehinom* about which 'it was good' is not written, so that if men sin, they will descend into it.'" The conception portrayed here of *Gehinom* is one of active punishment intended to keep order among rebellious creations. Clearly, "it was good" can not be applied to a creation intended only to deal with insurgency and evil deeds.

An altogether different perspective on *Gehinom* appears in Bereshit Rabbah (9:11): "R. Zera said: 'And behold, it was very good,' this is *Gehinom*. *Gehinom* is very good? Strange! It is comparable to a king of

(continued on page 8)



H A M I L T A S E R

B O O K
R E V I E W

BY EZRA SCHWARTZ

R. Shimon Schwab, heir to R. Samson Raphael Hirsch's rabbinical position, expressed his views about truthful historiography:

"What ethical purpose is gained by preserving a realistic historic picture?... Rather than write the history of our forebears, every generation has to put a veil over the human failings of its elders and glorify all the rest which is great and beautiful. That means we have to do without a real history book... We do not need realism, we need inspiration from our forefathers in order to pass it on to posterity."

My initial presumption was that the ArtScroll History Series' *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch: Architect of Torah Judaism for the Modern World*, would meet R. Schwab's prescription and attempt to be an inspirational rather than realistic work. Thus, I read R. Elyahu Meir Klugman's biography of R. Hirsch with keen skepticism. I expected to find the innumerable distortions and omissions characteristic of a hagiographic work. I was pleasantly surprised, however.

On the whole, R. Klugman's portrayal of R. Hirsch is accurate. His meticulous research into the minute details of R. Hirsch's life and writings has yielded unique chapters covering R. Hirsch's Halakhic *responsa*, personality, and early polemics against Reform Judaism, topics that had been scarcely covered by other historians. As a result the book received very favorable reviews. (For example, see this past summer's issue of *Jewish Action*.)

But R. Klugman still maintains an interpretational bias, slanting the evidence to make R. Hirsch appear more like the stereotypical *gadol*, painting him as a rabbinic sage, an erudite Talmudic scholar, and a defender of "authentic" Judaism. One has to look at the cover of R. Klugman's book, which portrays R. Hirsch as an elderly, saintly-looking, white-bearded sage, to anticipate the direction the author will take in interpreting R. Hirsch's life. It is interesting to compare this with the cover picture of Noah Rosenbloom's volume on R. Hirsch, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, which depicts a young and trim-bearded R. Hirsch dressed in contemporary German garb. R. Klugman seems to believe that recounting the biography of a rabbinic sage, such as R. Hirsch, is not mere arid scholarship. Rather, R. Hirsch's life-story is intended to



A Gadol for the Nineties

Artscroll's *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch: Architect of Torah Judaism for the Modern World*

serve as a model, to teach the reader how to react upon encountering situations similar to those R. Hirsch faced. (iii)

R. Klugman's contention that R. Hirsch was a significant *posek* occupies a major portion of his book. In fact, he dedicates an entire chapter to R. Hirsch's Halakhic decisions, just to combat the widely accepted notion that R. Hirsch's Talmudic scholarship was unimpressive. (Rosenbloom 60, 90) R. Klugman not only cites numerous Halakhic decisions rendered by R. Hirsch, but also goes out of his way to show that R. Hirsch took a more stringent Halakhic position in one case. (289) Also, we are told of the great deference R. Hirsch paid to older rabbinic leaders. For example, although R. Hirsch personally felt there was no obligation for all the local Orthodox organizations to unite under one umbrella, he ruled otherwise because Maharam Shik, one of the leading Hungarian rabbis, supported such an umbrella organization. (292) R. Klugman similarly suggests reverence for senior rabbinic authority as an explanation for R. Hirsch's 1839 deletion of *Kol Nidrei*. This event has classically been cited as proof that R. Hirsch maintained a more liberal Halakhic attitude and acted as a moderate reformer. (Rosenbloom 69) R. Klugman's reinterpretation frames R. Hirsch as the traditional *gadol* who acted out of deference to the position of his *rebbe*, Chacham Isaac Bernays, who opposed the recitation of *Kol Nidrei*.

Although R. Klugman goes to great lengths to prove that R. Hirsch was a *posek* of stature, the evidence brought is still far from convincing. One problem is that very few of R. Hirsch's *responsa* are extant. R. Klugman suggests that this can be explained by the undocumented story that most of R. Hirsch's *responsa* and correspondence were burned by one of his daughters. According to this legend, R. Hirsch's daughter maintained that this act was in compliance with her father's dying wish. (288)

But even if we do prove that R. Hirsch penned many Halakhic decisions, that still does not prove his stature as a *posek*. The authoritative *posek* does not just issue Halakhic rulings, he also finds his rulings carefully adhered to. As far as we can determine from R. Hirsch's most famous Halakhic decision, his 1876 ruling that mandated separation (*Austritt*) from the Reform-controlled Jewish community, his rulings were not widely accepted. (156) The overwhelming majority, perhaps even as many as 90%, of Frankfurt Jews did not follow R. Hirsch on this issue, one that he considered as self-evident as the religious injunction against converting to Christianity. R. Hirsch composed long open letters to the Wurzbberger Rav, R. Seligmann Baer Bamberger, in which he set out his Halakhic position, which required separation, and in which he strongly condemned R. Bamberger for interfering with the internal affairs of another rabbi's community. These letters were published in the most prestigious German Jewish periodicals and were widely disseminated. (167-170) Still, the populace paid them almost no heed. Thus, we have cause to doubt that R. Hirsch was widely acclaimed and accepted as a *posek*.

R. Klugman, for his part, tries to mitigate the significance of the lack of allegiance to this decision of R. Hirsch's by conjecturing that had R. Hirsch made his Halakhic reasoning public before the Wurzbberger Rav came to Frankfurt, the latter would have found it much more difficult to interfere and oppose *Austritt*.



(167) Moreover, the author asserts that "the Kehilla continued to grow and flourish and apart from this one matter [secession], [and] R. Hirsch's stature in his Kehilla was in no way diminished." (173) This assertion is contradicted, though, by R. Hirsch's own statement regarding his aborted efforts on behalf of the beleaguered Russian Jewish community following the 1880 pogroms. In a statement obviously referring to the *Austritt* controversy, R. Hirsch mordantly declared that 90% of German Jewry would pay no heed to a declaration bearing his name. Therefore, he re-

R. Klugman's work is not entirely bereft of distortions and omissions, particularly when it comes to R. Hirsch's family and lineage.

ferred to call on all German congregations to observe a public fast day to call attention to the plight of Russian Jewry. (195)

To his credit, R. Klugman cites much evidence that R. Bamberger was not, in fact, a total opponent of secession. R. Bamberger had, after all, supported secession in Vienna in 1872, where conditions were not as unfavorable as those in Frankfurt in 1876 (in R. Klugman's opinion). (164) Moreover, the Wurzbberger Rav had listed a number of criteria to be met so that secession would not be required. Among these was a condition that Orthodox members of the *Grossgemeinde*, the united religious community, not participate in elections or sit on the governing council of the Frankfurt community. R. Klugman concludes that since these conditions were not met, it is logical to assume, in retrospect, that even R. Bamberger would have supported secession. (179)

Throughout the book, R. Klugman reinterprets historic events based on his knowledge of their outcomes, knowledge that obviously would have been unavailable to the participants. In the heat of the *Austritt* controversy, R. Hirsch ruled that it would be better to be buried in a Christian cemetery than in the *Grossgemeinde's* burial grounds. The fact that no members of R. Hirsch's *Kehilla* died until their own cemetery was constructed, is construed by R. Klugman

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(Gehinom, continued from page 6)

flesh and blood who had an orchard into which he brought workers, and built a storehouse at the entrance. He said, "Anyone who works strenuously in the labors of the orchard may enter the storehouse, anyone who does not work strenuously may not enter." ... Anyone who does not store up *mitzvot* and good deeds, here is *Gehinom*." This opinion portrays the punishment of Hell as privative in essence. It involves a lack of reward, and responsibility is placed in the hands of man to decide what he receives. *Gehinom* is not evil from its inception; according to this view man is the creator of his own punishment. Therefore, *Gehinom* can be called "very good" along with the rest of creation.

It is noteworthy that in the conception of *Gehinom* as "very good," reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked are identical from the outset, and only attain their distinctly benevolent or malevolent characters based on human action. A variant of the previously quoted *agadda* regarding the sun's sheath emphasizes this point: "R. Shimon b. Lakish said, there is no [place called] *Gehinom* in the World to Come; rather God removed the sun from its sheath. The righteous are healed by it, and the sinners are punished by it." (Nedarim 8b) Possibly, *Gehinom* is called "very good" since its source is the very energy that serves to reward the righteous—the energy itself is "very good," but the evildoers convert it into punishment. We can find a similar notion in the previously quoted *mishnah* in *Avot*. While the cavern and fire of *Gehinom* had already been created, its mouth opened, making it operational, only on the sixth day of creation at twilight (after the sin of Adam and Chava). While *Gehinom* potentially existed, sin was necessary to make it a functional reality. Only then did it become the dolorous destination of the dead.

Every aspect of *Gehinom* seems to be subject to some ambiguity, and the types of suffering experienced there are no exception. Descriptions range from sweltering heat to numbing cold, from the luminous light of creation to the darkness of deepest dejection. While, by all accounts *Gehinom* does in some sense exist as a means to divine justice, this may be the only point of agreement. The *Rishonim* inherited the task of synthesizing these disparate viewpoints.

The apparent tranquility of the valley in Jerusalem belies the cacophony of shrill shrieks uttered by the wicked suffering below. No pillar of smoke rises above the rocky terrain, and no adventurous soul has found his way to the mouth of *Gehinom* and back. Our only way of knowing the nature of Hell is the words of Chazal. Our task is to ensure that we don't find out first-hand. ♦

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Rabbinical Political Endorsements

BY RABBI YOSEF BLAU

As we approach a presidential election we can expect rabbinical endorsements and condemnations of candidates. Possibly by analogy with Israel's religious parties, the Jewish press will have full-page advertisements filled with the names of rabbis who support a particular candidate. This process has already begun in the primaries with long lists of those who favored one candidate for surrogate judge balanced by a list of other rabbis supporting a different candidate.

I seriously question whether this is a proper role for rabbis and wonder which Halakhic principles and considerations of *hashkafa* apply. There was an attempt during the height of the New Deal to equate Torah values with liberalism, recently followed by the counter-argument that Judaism favors the new conservatism. Both attempts to force the Torah into an American political mode are unconvincing. The Torah is concerned with the welfare of the poor and preserving their dignity by helping them earn their own livelihood. Whether a particular welfare reform bill helps accomplish these goals reflects judgments having nothing to do with Halakha. Whether the national, state, or local governments are best able to establish criteria or evaluate programs is a valid question, but not one that our sources answer.

Gratitude is a fundamental Torah value and since I see President Clinton as an unusual friend of Israel and the Jewish people, I may feel that this is a point in his favor. Nevertheless, others have equal right to disagree with my premise and to view the president's relationship with Israel as harmful. If they are correct, there is no gratitude to be expressed. Should Senator Dole's present position of support for the Netanyahu government be trusted in light of his earlier record?

What role should a secular government play in promoting morality? Analyzing an apparently clear issue such as abortion, the difference between the Jewish and Christian attitudes toward the relative weight given to the life of the mother and fetus creates a problem. The "partial birth" abortion that is sometimes used to protect the health of the mother would then be required according to Halakha and still be opposed by Catholics and others. Since we are a small minority unable to impose our standards, whether we should prefer the government not taking any stand or one that is often but not always compatible with ours, is a difficult choice.

Should we support or oppose anti-discrimination laws for homosexuals and lesbians? We do not want to show any approval of such behavior yet are well aware of the danger involved in allowing discrimination against any group

in society disapproved of by the majority. There is a strong Halakhic differentiation between homosexual and lesbian behavior, a distinction that probably leaves most observant Jews uneasy. Should that be factored into our perspective? Moreover, can the issue of cultural acceptance even be seriously addressed on the government level?

How should we deal with the personal morality of our political leadership? Marital infidelity must be condemned. Yet many observant Jews were willing to overlook the issue entirely in supporting a candidate for Israeli Prime Minister. Do we want a president who apparently acted improperly in his marriage, yet stayed with it, or one who replaced his wife with a younger and wealthier woman?

How do we apply Jewish self-interest? School vouchers that apply to religious schools will help day-school enrollment. Simultaneously they would aid Catholic and other Christian schools and hurt public education. Conceivably, Jewish students would be attracted to attend and conversions would occur. What about the effect of work requirements for welfare recipients and the resulting difficulties for Kollel families who are supported by welfare?

Everyone should and will take a position on all these issues, but how does a rabbi's knowledge and background give him greater insight than anyone else? Considering the real risk that political endorsements will reduce respect for the rabbinate and increase skepticism about the moral base of the choices made, it seems the wise choice for rabbis to save their political preferences for the ballot box. ♦



Voting Booth and Public Square

Notes from the Counter-culture

BY RABBI SHALOM CARMY

In 1988 I lent my name to a rabbinical advertisement endorsing Robert Dole for the Republican presidential nomination. I did so for two reasons: (1) I distrust Bush; (2) I deplore the popular notion that all American Jews belong on the left of the political spectrum. Signing the ad was one way of contesting that impression. Bush was elected; his administration's attitude towards Israel was harsher than any save Carter's, and Senator Dole did his loyal share as Bush's hatchet man. When I remonstrated with my erstwhile candidate, reminding him of my support, the response I received was (as you can guess) a form letter. So much for putting your trust in princes.

And yet, though the behavior of statesmen is hard to anticipate and foolhardy to rely upon, we are called upon as citizens to do our best. In

what follows, I will focus on three areas where the choice of a president is likely to make a difference. I don't intend to minimize the importance of other questions. How the economy is managed, for instance, is a matter of great practical and moral significance. We all know which of the major parties is more inclined to come up with wasteful, demoralizing plans for the redistribution of income, just as we all know which one is more tempted to mortgage the environment for dubious short-term benefits like the panacea of lower taxes. I leave the weighing of such considerations to others, in part because of their complexity, in part because presidents have limited power to transform social and economic structures: the legislative branch has its own mind, the bureaucracy is entrenched, and no chief executive since Lyndon Johnson has ridden roughshod over either. In the end, it is the "System" that generally wins.

I

Surrounded by Jewish advisers, President Clinton has identified himself with the government of Israel more closely than any of his predecessors. Had the Peres coalition remained in office, all would have been well between Israel and the reelected Clinton. The United States would have lubricated an accelerated peace process with money and, when the time came, by stationing GI's on the Golan. But the current Israeli government, elected with no encouragement from the Americans, is less captivated by dreams of diplomatic glory attained via one-sided concessions. Even those who, like me, are prepared to justify territorial compromise for the sake of peace, should be unhappy about the aggressive American stance that now seems inescapable.

There is little reason to expect better from a President Dole and his team of experts. For better or for worse, they would be less inclined to undertake direct American involvement. At best, with less emotional investment in the momentum of the "peace process," one might look forward to a period of benign neglect.

II

The public educational establishment in the United States is sponsored by the government. Imag-

ine the schools confining themselves to the "three R's." Even then, requiring children to spend the better part of twelve years in an institutional setting confers enormous power on those who run the system. In truth the schools do much more (and often less) than offer dry academic instruction. Religiously "neutral" festivities, that, in effect, redefine Xmas/Hanukkah (and here comes Kwanza?) as a syncretistic mishmash, combining feel-good sentimentality, intellectually vacuous ethnic celebration and spree shopping, are a travesty of traditional piety, and are funded by the taxpayers. When New Age types promote Halloween as a representation of common spirituality, it is not the charity of private donors that buys the lovely costumes. Far easier for them to dip their hands in your pockets and

in mind, for they are Caesar and unto them must be rendered that which is rendered unto Caesar. Progressive moralists who wish to insinuate their views of social and sexual morality into the minds of pupils, speak in the name of universal values education, for theirs are the schools and the purse strings, the power and the glory. They are liberal, in the sense that they do not pass laws prohibiting parents who have the wherewithal from educating their children at their own expense. But they are ever vigilant against any encroachment upon their stranglehold on public money. Even the study of arithmetic or spelling, when it takes place outside their control, furthers religious indoctrination, in their opinion, and breaches the high wall of separation between church and state.

Religious believers are, of course, used to inequality. Generations of Jewish and Catholic parents have tried to educate their children as they believed. A tall family may spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on elementary and high school education. Meanwhile they are called upon to shoulder dutifully the burden of paying for such projects as schools for homosexual teenagers, frankly designed to foster gay and lesbian pride, which the secularists regard as urgently needed, but not quite urgent enough to fund voluntarily. By now the subversion of traditional moral norms has given pious Protestants a taste of what it's like to be embattled, and driven them to fight for their own educational freedom. The Republicans have fastened on educational freedom as a shared rallying point for economic and social conservatives.

Jews are generally presumed to be wealthy and thus able to afford Yeshiva education in addition to financing the secular system for which they have no use. If they are not, then, by the implicit logic of the secularist position, they have no business indulging the expensive pastime of serious religious commitment. But a moral and intellectual alternative to the government-controlled schools should not remain a luxury reserved for the rich. Religious parents and students should not be relegated to second-class status by those who are happy to marginalize them. Achieving greater educational equality, through a voucher arrangement, may well be an idea whose time has come, and if so, it is not one minute too soon.

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III

Breaking the monopoly of the public educational establishment cannot be accomplished by the stroke of an executive pen. The constitutional obstacle to our defining the permissible interaction between the law and religion has become increasingly narrow and intractable: which is to say, more and more dependent on the composition of the courts. And presidents have much to say about judicial appointments.

The power of the courts to modify crucial dimensions of our public and social existence goes well beyond religious freedom issues. In coming years we shall face many life and death decisions directly affecting individuals and shaping the outlook of our society. Besides freedom of religion and education, the major areas of confrontation are likely to be sexuality and the family, medical care and euthanasia.

When we contemplate the ever-widening conflict between traditional morality and its relentless subversion, we are often tempted to adopt the comfortable attitude of "live and let live" (or in the case of euthanasia, live and let die). We, the religious counter-culture, will live according to our convictions, and the rest of the world be damned. Unfortunately, this solution will no longer work. Homosexual activists, to take one dramatic example, are not satisfied with grudging toleration. They demand, as their right in a democracy, that others recognize their "lifestyle" as a legitimate one. To the degree that they successfully mold the law and the zeitgeist, we are increasingly constrained to murmur our politically correct "Amen." We can't withstand this tendency unless we resolve to exercise our own democratic right to further our own ideas. The expanding role of medical regulation suggests the danger of similar impositions in these affairs as well.

IV

In 1952 the Israeli poet Nathan Alterman observed the American Jewish voter who, amid the political season's hoopla, solemnly sits in party hat "like an old man in kindergarten." Why the doleful visage? Israel and the Arabs? Other Americans have their foreign policy too. No, says the poet: the problem is that while the crowds exult in "I like Ike (or Adlai)," the Jew wonders instead "Does Ike like me?" It is a sad mark of the status of the Jew in *galut* that we are still

A moral and intellectual alternative to the government-controlled schools should not remain a luxury reserved for the rich.

more preoccupied with whether Clinton and Dole and Gore and Kemp like us than with how we like their policies.

Do not place your trust in princes, counsels the Psalmist: history is the record of aborted intentions and retracted promises. Do not pledge yourself unreservedly to their ideologies and schemes: in a fallen world, the Torah's truth will never coincide with the ambitions of man. But do not ignore the public square of which the voting booth is a small segment. Consider the far-reaching impact of that public square on the religious destiny that guides our existence as individuals, as a parochial community, as citizens and as human beings. We abandon it to others at our peril. ♦

Ayyin ha-Ra

More than Meets the Eye?

BY YOSEF ZIEFFER

Judaism looks unkindly on superstition. Witches, soothsayers, and the like find no place in our tradition. A religion believing in God's omnipotence and providence, Judaism leaves no room for competing divine presences. For this reason, folk practices and beliefs from other cultures, whether they be rooted in luck, superstition, or spirits, are not tolerated. Nevertheless, when an action of belief within our own heritage appears to veer in this direction, we are justifiably hesitant to condemn it. To many, the concept of *ayyin ha-ra* falls in this category. How should the scrutinizing religious mind address this phenomenon? In what capacity does it exist in Judaism? Unfortunately, misunderstandings in this area abound.

The term *ayyin ha-ra* itself begs definition. The popular translation, "the evil eye," does not satisfy our needs. An examination of the grammatical structure shows that *ra* does not modify *ayyin*. Rather, the accurate translation reads "the eye of evil." This already identifies a major misconception. Many folk cultures throughout the world, from the Mediterranean to Africa to Central America, believed that the eye contained, at least in certain situations, inherent evil powers. Such an understanding does not seem consistent with the terminology we use. Yet, even accepting the translation of "eye of evil," we are still left with questions: Who is classified as evil? What importance lies in the eye?

In order to construct an accurate picture of this concept, we must deal with the early related sources first. The first clear usage of *ayyin ha-ra* lies in the Mishnah. In Pirkei Avot 2:11, R. Yehoshua states that "*ayyin ha-ra, yetzer ha-ra, and sin'at ha-beri'ot* remove man from the world." If *ayyin ha-ra* refers to some supernatural cause or jinx, this *mishnah* assumes a problematic nature. Action and judgement, not whims of a spirit, determine man's fate. Further, the other two subjects in the *mishnah* are personal character traits. It follows that *ayyin ha-ra* should be the same. R. Yonah, in his commentary on Avot, provides us with an operative definition. He identifies *ayyin ha-ra* as follows: "One, who is not happy with his portion, and gazes at his friend who is wealthier than he, [and wonders] when he shall become wealthy like him...and an air rises from these thoughts, and burns the items that he has desired...and his insides burn as well, as he wishes for that which he is unable to get, and his spirit becomes short and he is removed from the world." R. Yonah equates *ayyin ha-ra* with the fiery passion of envy. Thus, the evil is one who is jealous, and the emphasis on the eye becomes clear,

for it is the organ through which one becomes envious of another. Rambam, in his commentary on this *mishnah*, explains similarly. He writes that the "diligent [pursuit] of money, abundance of lust, and bitterness of the soul...brings man to despise what his eyes see...and he prefers the company of animals and loneliness...and he will die from bitterness before his time." While R. Yonah speaks in psychological and emotional terms, Rambam describes an even more drastic state, including isolation and exclusion from society. The thesis, however, remains the same. *Ayyin ha-ra* originates internally, and all consequences stem from man's inability to control his greed. While this definition is attractive, both in this specific context as well as in terms of addressing the reservations noted earlier, we must still see whether this fits in other instances as well.

There are two main occurrences of *ayyin ha-ra* in the Babylonian Talmud. In Berachot 20a, the *gemara* explains a *pasuk* from the end of Bereshit. In his blessing to Menashe and Ephraim, Yaakov Avinu says...*ve-yidgu la-rov be-kerev ha-aretz*. This is interpreted in the following manner: just like the fish in the sea, whom water conceals and *ayyin ha-ra* does not affect, so too shall be the children of Yosef, and *ayyin ha-ra* shall not rule over them. (The analogy is based on the word *ve-yidgu*, which originates from the root of "*dag*," Hebrew for "fish.") An alternative interpretation is offered as well: *ayyin ha-ra* does not rule over any eye that does not want to eat from that which does not belong to it. Rashi explains that "not eating" refers to not getting pleasure from his master's wife. This explanation is fitting for the children of Yosef, for he had exhibited this exact restraint in the episode with Potifar's wife.

The other occurrence of *ayyin ha-ra* in the *Bavli* is Sotah 36b. The Benei Yosef, upon receiving their portion in the land of Israel, go to Yehoshua with a complaint. They argue that due to their large numbers, they deserve a larger percentage of the country. Yehoshua responds with a cryptic statement.

"If you are so many people," he says, "go and hide yourselves in the forest, in order that *ayyin ha-ra* shall not rule over you." The Benei Yosef respond by quoting the *pasuk* explained in Berachot, by saying that as the children of Yosef, they are immune to the consequences and influences of *ayyin ha-ra*. Why did Yehoshua advise them to flee to the forests? Further, why did Yaakov bless Yosef's children with this privileged status of not being subject to *ayyin ha-ra*? Based on our previously established definition, both questions are answered. In the time of Yehoshua, if their numbers were so much greater than the other tribes, the Benei Yosef would be a likely target for the jealousy of the rest of the na-

tion. Therefore, Yehoshua advises that they not flaunt their total population. Similarly, Yaakov's blessing becomes clear. All of Yosef's problems with his brothers resulted from jealousy. He was unable to display his good fortune in a non-provoking manner, thus inciting the anger and envy of his brothers. Therefore, the most meaningful blessing Yaakov could bestow on his favorite son is the antidote to this problem. So far, the definition of *ayyin ha-ra* as jealousy remains appropriate. A related instance occurs in Bava Metzia 107a, where the *Bavli* says that it is forbidden for one to stand by (and look at) the field of his friend, when that field is in full bloom. According to Rashi, the reason for this is *ayyin ha-ra*. This relates to the larger topic of *hezek re'iya*, damages inflicted by means of sight. Clearly, the suggested definition of *ayyin ha-ra* fits into this setting.

This approach finds expression in Halakha as well. In Orach Chayyim §141:6, the Shulchan Arukh states that because of *ayyin ha-ra*, neither a father and son nor two brothers may receive consecutive *aliyot* to the Torah. Apparently, we are careful to avoid inciting the congregation's envy, and therefore we insure that one family not be recognized more than the rest. While one might argue that the "jealousy" of a supernatural entity is what we attempt to avoid, and not that of other humans, nothing in the source or surrounding commentaries suggests this.

Not all sources point in this direction. The *Tur* in Orach Chayyim §305, as well as the Shulchan Arukh (*ibid.* §305:11), say that a horse may not walk in a public sector on shabbat, with a fox's tail hanging from between its eyes "so that *ayyin ha-ra* does not affect it." Apparently, this ornament on horses was a common defense against *ayyin ha-ra*. This situation suggests a new definition for our term. Human jealousy will not likely subside based on a fox's tail. Similarly, in Orach Chayyim §303, the Shulchan Arukh permits women to wear a certain knot (while in a public domain on shabbat), whose purpose lay in combating *ayyin ha-ra*. What new status did *ayyin ha-ra* attain?

It seems clear that this new understanding more closely resembles the one commonly associated with *ayyin ha-ra*. Neither of these references demand or recommend the protections mentioned. Rather, we are supplied with a glimpse of the societal norms of the time. The author's acceptance and awareness of these practices is crucial, both in terms of his providing Halakhic decisions to accommodate them and in terms of his not attempting to refute them. Nevertheless, he does not go so far as to provide an operative definition of *ayyin ha-ra* as understood by his contemporaries. For such a definition, we must turn elsewhere. It appears that many followed the example of the Shulchan Arukh, and refrained from clearly identifying the character of *ayyin ha-ra*. Two figures did define it, and each approach bears significance.

Maharal, in his *Netivot Olam* (*Netiv Ayyin Tov*), quotes a *derasha* on the *pasuk* "*ve-hesir Hashem mimkha kol choli*." According to Rav, this "*choli*" (sickness) is the *ayyin-ayyin ha-ra*. Maharal explains that *ayyin ha-ra* has "the power of burning fires" and man "is hurt by this damaging force." Nevertheless, he does not stray far from our previous definition, quoting the *mishnah* in Avot, and associating *ayyin ha-ra* with the hatred

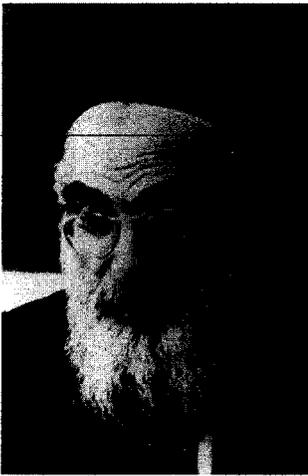
(continued on page 12)



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H A M E V A S E R

Ayin ha-ra (continued from page 10)

of others. He suggests that man protect both himself and his money from *ayin ha-ra*, and says that blessing falls only upon that which remains concealed from the eye. If we understand the aspect of the metaphorically, we once again find an interpretation consistent with the theme of jealousy. Moreover, even if the fire mentioned is taken literally, *ayin ha-ra* still originates from the individual, not from without.

A more radical view is taken by R. Menashe b. Yisrael (1004-1057) in his *Nishmat Chayyim* (*emunas sachish*: 27), and is echoed in the Sefer Chassidim. He says that he will "tell in writing, the truth, that these spirits (*enoch*) are the enemies of man, and seek his death and disaster." Following this, he records various *mitvasim* dealing with Satan and his schemes against man. Further on, he writes that "on the issue of *ayin ha-ra*, men have not been able to give an adequate answer or explanation." His answer is that *ayin ha-ra* comes from the demons (*shedim*) who desire to injure man, and "just as with men, if one has good fortune in the face of his enemy, immediately that adversary is filled with anger and displays his wrath, for the *evin* in his heart is like a burning fire." Thus, the definition of jealousy has shifted from focusing on man to centering around demons and spirits. For the first time outside of

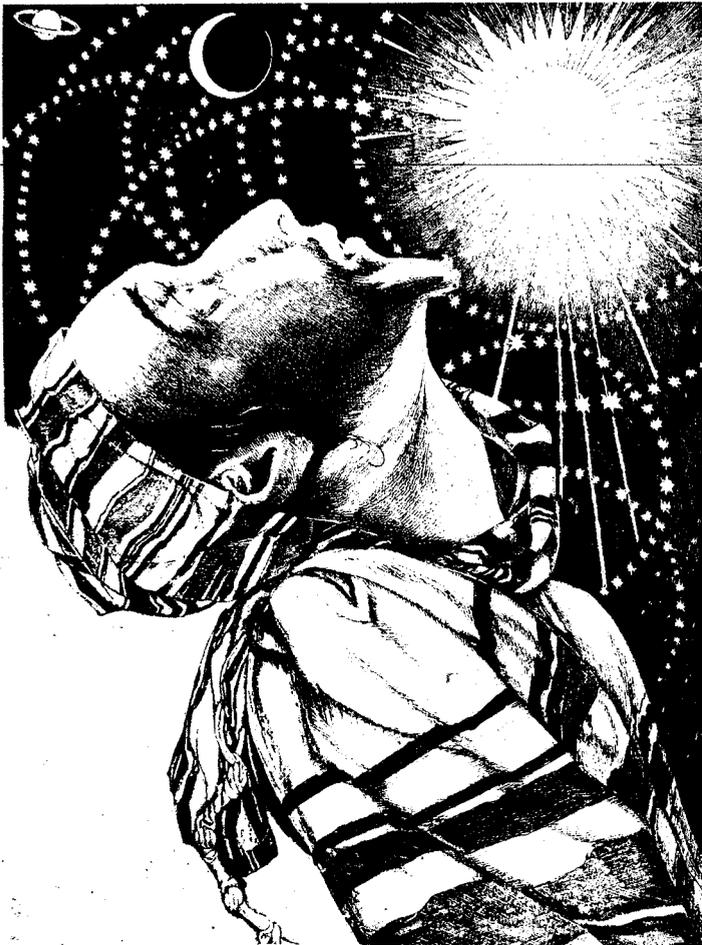
Mishnaic and Aggadic sources, we have a clear association of *ayin ha-ra* with such beings. The words of Menashe b. Yisrael do not leave the same room for interpretation found in Maharal. Through which influences did he come to give such an explanation? Joshua Trachtenberg, in his *Azash Mink and Superstition*, traces the different approaches to *ayin ha-ra*. He describes two types of phenomena that come under this name. The first type relates to powers inherent in the eye itself. This he attributes to "the natural reaction of simple people to the qualities that often illuminate the eyes of men of strong personalities," and "the superstitious imagination tends to run away with itself." The second type of *ayin ha-ra* involves "the pagan conviction that the gods and the spirits are essentially man's adversaries." Trachtenberg associates this approach with R. Menashe b. Yisrael, and later describes him as reflecting the Christian opinion in this area. While it may be inappropriate to term his opinion as "Christian," it would nevertheless be safe to assume that Menashe b. Yisrael was affected by his society, and represents the prevalent approach to *ayin ha-ra* and dealing with trouble and tragedy in general. This also explains the practices mentioned in the Shulchan Arukh. Trachtenberg argues that this understanding of *ayin ha-ra* originated in Babylon. He quotes *aggadot* from the *Bavli* that speak of rabbis who, through their eyes, turned people into "piles of bones," or caused things to "burst into flames." Fur-

ther, such a concept does not appear in the *Jerusalem* and the *Mishnah*, where *ayin ha-ra* only represents the power of envy. Nonetheless, tracing this newer understanding back to Babylon is debatable, as we have shown that even the Babylonian sources (excluding *aggadot*) relate to jealousy as well. However, what we can extract from Trachtenberg is that the source for a "demonic" approach to *ayin ha-ra* originates in other cultures.

Nevertheless, we do not discard this interpretation. The Shulchan Arukh, as we have seen, fully accepts certain related practices as part of daily life. Further, modern day *posekim* readily use *ayin ha-ra* in Halakic decisions. R. Moshe Feinstein in *Iggerot Moshe* (Even ha-Ezer §4:89) discusses the issue of two sisters getting married at the same time. Rama, in *Even ha-Ezer* §62:2, forbade two simultaneous marriages, and R. Feinstein writes that "although his reasoning is not known, it is logical [to assume] that it is from *ayin ha-ra*, although other reasons are also possible." This instance of *ayin ha-ra* could easily concur with the explanation of envy. In another section of *Iggerot Moshe* (Even ha-Ezer §3:26), however, *ayin ha-ra* appears again. In a situation where the mothers of a husband and wife share the same name, and only one remains alive, a baby girl should not be named after the deceased grandmother, in order to maintain the honor of the living grandmother. R. Feinstein writes further that "one must certainly consider *ayin ha-ra*, but need not be overly stringent about it." The reason for this leniency is the general rule that "one who does not care [about these things], they do not influence him." He finishes by saying that only in truly extraordinary matters need one concern himself about this, but not in mundane everyday occurrence. Thus, R. Feinstein acknowledges this understanding of *ayin ha-ra*, yet does not emphasize it in practice.

R. Ovadya Yosef deals with *ayin ha-ra* in his *Yabiya Omer*. In the fourth volume (Even ha-Ezer §10), he responds to a question regarding the permissibility of two brothers marrying two sisters. Such an arrangement is forbidden according to *Tzava*'at R. Yehuda he-Chassid, but the questioner inquires about being lenient in this area. (The nature of the will comes under some debate. It is not clear whether the author intended for it to serve as *halakha pesuka*, or whether it was aimed only at the immediate recipients.) R. Yosef answers that the marriage may take place, and concludes that "in modern times, one need not worry about *ayin ha-ra* in a situation of requirements for a *mitzva*." (He goes on to say that especially in this situation *ayin ha-ra* should not be an obstacle, because "in these times, marriages for Yeshiva students are particularly difficult, and finding suitable mates is as difficult as splitting the Red Sea.") He states that there is sufficient basis in modern times to be lenient regarding *ayin ha-ra*, much more so than in Talmudic times. In general, he says, issues of evil spirits have become void in modern times.

We have seen that the original meaning of *ayin ha-ra* relates to jealousy. The seriousness with which the sages treated this signifies both the extent to which they condemned envy, as well as their acute perception of human nature and interpersonal relations. The gravity of coveting the property of others is antithetical to Torah values, and the difference between jealousy and piety can be as great as life and death. Over time, *ayin ha-ra* assumed other meanings, which apparently became acceptable within the Jewish community. While these applications of *ayin ha-ra* are legitimate, an understanding of the historical context and evolution of the term remains crucial to a true understanding of its uses. ♦



Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen!
Abneht du den Schöpfer, Welt!
Such' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!
Über Sternen muß er wohnen.

(Hirsch, continued from page 7)

as a "miraculous" event that proved the wisdom of R. Hirsch's decision. (159) In the 1860's, R. Hirsch requested permission from Frankfort's senate to construct an *eruv*. The senate refused R. Hirsch's request, declaring that they did not wish their city to appear enclosed and confined. Within a year, Frankfort ceased to be an independent city. R. Klugman argues (with no proof) that this was a direct "result" of failure to comply with R. Hirsch's request. (317)

R. Klugman is more successful in proving that R. Hirsch was held in high regard by his peers than he is at proving R. Hirsch's stature as a *posek*. We read many stories and anecdotes of personal meetings between R. Hirsch and other great Torah luminaries. He mentions the great respect R. Yisrael Salanter had for R. Hirsch and his *Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel* and the profound influence which R. Hirsch's first work had on Sarah Schenirer, the founder of the Bais Yaakov movement in Poland. (66-67). Even the erudite rabbis of Moravia, whom many historians believe were major opponents of R. Hirsch, are all quoted praising him. To this end, we are treated to the proud testimony of the *Ketav Sofer*. "We, the *rabbonim* of Hungary, have to consider ourselves very fortunate that he [R. Hirsch] holds us to be his superiors as scholars, for if he were only aware of the extent of his own scholarship, we would have no rest from him." (99-102) These efforts to portray R. Hirsch as an accepted *gadol* are too well founded and documented to be dismissed for lack of evidence.

R. Klugman's work is not entirely bereft of distortions and omissions, particularly when it comes to R. Hirsch's family and lineage. The affinity of his grandfather, Mendel Frankfurter, for Moses Mendelssohn, cited by as unbiased a historian as R. Mordechai Breuer (printed in *Guardians of Our Heritage 1724-1953*, p. 265), is conspicuously absent from R. Klugman's work. Moreover, when R. Klugman discusses Frankfurter's ethical will, he omits the part where Frankfurter exhorts his family to read the works of Wessley, the illustrious *maskil*. R. Klugman takes to calling R. Hirsch's uncle "Moshe" Mendelssohn, rather than Moses Mendelssohn, to hide the family's affiliation with the famous enlightened Jewish philosopher, after whom R. Hirsch's uncle was named. (325) Moreover, R. Klugman does not explain why the young Hirsch attended a non-Jewish *gymnasium* rather than his grandfather's own *Talmud Torah*.

Although R. Klugman strongly argues that R. Hirsch's support for secular studies was not a temporary accommodation (*hora'at sha'a*), he still maintains that their institution and the proportion of hours allotted to each discipline were government-imposed. (216) Thus, we are told how R. Hirsch fought a constant battle to increase the amount of Hebrew studies in the curriculum of the *Realschule*. Moreover, we are told that the secular studies offered were of a commercial orientation and did not include the study of Latin and Greek. (225-228) He gives the impression that R. Hirsch did not consider the pursuit of secular knowledge to be an end in itself, but only a means to achieve prominence in the commercial world. (204) If this were really the case, we would have trouble understanding why, when R. Hirsch and the young Heinrich Graetz studied together, they devoted equal time to Torah and secular subjects, including such non-utilitarian disciplines as Latin and Greek. R. Klugman's description of the time Graetz spent in the Hirsch home mentions only how they studied *gemara* and *Tehillim* together and read some Kant and Heine. His stories are only of R. Hirsch's objection to some of the books Graetz read. He gives no breakdown of the time allotted to each discipline. (242-245) Rosenbloom (70-72), though, gives the exact breakdown of the curriculum (as it is found in Graetz's di-

ary), and he attributes the proportion of time to dedicate to each field to Wessley from whom R. Hirsch reportedly stole the ideals of *Torah im derekh eretz*.

R. Hirsch's ideology of *Torah im derekh eretz* (simply put, this means that the principles of Torah must be applied to every cultural milieu) is interpreted by R. Klugman along very traditional lines. Thus, according to R. Klugman's understanding, *Torah im derekh eretz* represents the absolute dominance of Torah over every other realm of life. In this respect, *Austrait and Torah im derekh eretz* are really two sides of the same coin. "Thus, it is incorrect to speak of Torah with anything else. There is no synthesis, there is no tension, there is no reconciliation, there is no balance, there is only domination." It seems clear that this definition was drawn to contrast *Torah im derekh*

What would be wrong with accepting R. Hirsch for who he was?

eretz with the rival ideology *Torah U'Madda*, which claims to combine two equally correct approaches into a larger truth. (202-204) Once again, although R. Klugman's view of R. Hirsch's ideology can be inferred from his writings, it is in no way undeniable. Clearly, ample quotations from his writings suggest a philosophy claiming a symbiotic relationship between the two disciplines. (see Mordechai Eliav, "Various Approaches to *Torah im derekh eretz*," *Tradition* vol. 26, p. 99-108)

Another point characteristically "ArtScroll-ish" in nature is R. Klugman's tendency to wax nostalgic about Jewish life in the "*alter heim*" (old home). This is clearly demonstrated in his description of Jewish rural life in Oldenberg, in which R. Hirsch held his first rabbinical position.

"The Jews of Germany were, for the most part, scrupulous in their performance of *mitzvos* and *minhagim*, without seeking a special atmosphere of holiness, and public fast days were observed with great earnestness as days for self-examination and repentance. Straight-forward and unpretentious by nature, the villagers revered Torah scholars. Rarely did the Reform movement make much of an impression on them." (48)

In reality, life in the villages was quite different. Breuer and Rosenbloom both describe religious life there as having been gloomy. The townspeople possessed Reform aspirations, and were ignorant and becoming assimilated. R. Hirsch's predecessor, R. Dr. Nathan Adler, had been compelled to impose fines on members of the congregation in order to get the necessary quorum for prayer on Shabbat, festivals, and fast days. (Breuer 268, 296; Rosenbloom 64) Moreover, the fact that R. Hirsch's successor in Oldenberg was the radical reformer R. Bernard Wechsler is conspicuously absent from R. Klugman's work. The election of a Reform Rabbi indicates that although R. Hirsch had written masterful polemics while in Oldenberg, including the publications of *The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel*, *Horeb*, and *The Wrestlings of Naftali*, he had not been able to influence his own community. (Rosenbloom 76; Breuer 272) It is not hard to guess why

these facts could be omitted from an ArtScroll biography of R. Hirsch.

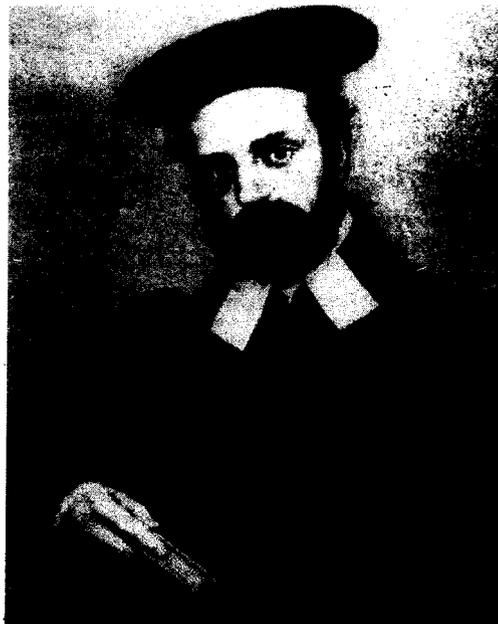
We should note that the fact that ArtScroll would publish a biography of R. Hirsch in 1996 may reflect the current state of right wing Orthodoxy in America. Many American Orthodox Jews have *de facto* accepted his educational ideology as evidenced by the multitude of yeshivas that offer a basic secular education, and the growing number that accommodate individuals who pursue even more advanced studies. Moreover, the modern day Agudath Israel of America has basically adopted his approach to *Wissenschaft* (*hat sich den Judentum* and Reform Judaism, referring to his stance to join the Synagogue Council of America).

R. Klugman's book is written with clarity of style (though the language is not scholarly) and lacks many of the ills that often plague biographic works. Yet in the author's attempt to instruct, he often closes himself to interpretations that might cast R. Hirsch in a more liberal light. If R. Klugman had mentioned the enlightenment tendencies of R. Hirsch's father and grandfather, that would in no way have minimized R. Hirsch's stature as a leader of Orthodox Jewry. Quite the contrary, the ability to rise above one's humble beginnings should be a true hallmark of a *zaddik*. Moreover, the concerted (and ineffective) attempt to portray R. Hirsch as a *posek* arises out of the mistaken notion that all Torah luminaries must be masters of Halakha. What would be wrong with accepting R. Hirsch for who he was? He was, after all, a masterful commentator on the Torah, a brilliant polemicist against Reform Judaism, and a great innovator in the field of Jewish education. These qualities of R. Hirsch – not his *responsa* – are the most relevant today. These are the qualities that could have been focused on, especially in a didactic work such as R. Klugman's. ♦

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Yitzhak and Yishmael: Aesthetics and the Aesthetic

community and career.

There must be a deeper meaning. What was the nature of the breach? Where is the definition of evil? How are we to understand this passage? Which insights does it offer for understanding good and bad, reward and punishment, destiny and desolation? Perhaps the existentialist school of thought will provide some illumination. Founded by Soren Kierkegaard more than a century ago, existentialist writings are often obscure, yet their points are well taken. Like other schools of philosophy, existentialists seek to provide a meaning for life. In fact they distinguish between three levels or spheres: the Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious. Let us explore each in turn.

For the most part, humanity lives within the Aesthetic sphere. Life finds its meaning in a variety of goals, the pursuit of pleasure, the avoidance of pain, the development of employment with which to generate income, with which to raise and support a family. Such a life is the attainment of the "picture postcard" in modern day "virtuous" family values. Life is lived so that life may be enjoyed. Life is both an end in itself, and a means of generating yet more life. The aesthetic state of consciousness is consumed by the pragmatic reality and the demands necessary to perpetuate itself. Certain only of the concrete outcome that is family and the regeneration of society, aestheticians marry early, procreate, and provide for their families. Indeed, rituals may be performed to maintain perspective on the life-cycle, the yearly, monthly, and daily successions. Within the Jewish Orthodox community we would expect to find these beings involved in the establishment and maintenance of communities, synagogues, schools, and other institutions which promote and feed the needs of that circle of life. While these people are constantly too busy to stop for life, because they are engaged in the business of life, such a reality is one of relative comfort, peace and simplicity. In short it's nice (if you can get it).

Factually, Yishmael led such a life. Born the only child to the father of monotheism, to Avraham, an individual of considerable influence and wealth, Yishmael is set to inherit a legacy of destiny. He has but to wait his turn, follow the ritualistic demands of God, (albeit true, circumcision is physically painful) and claim his place in a history he did not earn. Avraham, Hagar, and Yishmael form the Aesthetic dream. They are life and the regeneration of life. Their mission is complete.

Yet for some the Aesthetic is both unfulfilled and unfulfilling. These individuals find it difficult if not impossible to meet the expectations of the Aesthetic paradigm. Circumstances beyond their control combine to frustrate their attempt to play out the lifestyle they prefer. (Note: It is unclear as to whether the limitations a person voluntarily adopts may have the effect described below.) Perhaps they are caught up in the throes of history. These are people born either before or after their time and place. Dissention, war, even holocaust may prevent them from fulfilling their possibilities. It robs them of the opportunity to become who they could be. It breaks their spirit, making them humble in the realization that they must do what they can despite that there is much they simply cannot accomplish. The same may be said of those affected by tortuous illness or disease. It is the cancer-stricken child who can never grow old, the athlete who cannot control his muscles, or the woman who remains unable to conceive.

In essence, what becomes the mission of these people? Of those whom we might describe as being truly mission impossible. What values can they find? What use are they save to serve the Aesthetic in some auxiliary fashion? Is there any intrinsic worth to their essential beings?

Kierkegaard suggests that the answer is yes. He posits that only through these forces of pain, stemming from our limitations of mortal beings, can we be pressed into higher states of consciousness. Through the wrenching realization that life will end, or that the quality of life is frangible, humanity may realize that such are not to be taken for granted. Instead, each sensation is felt more deeply. Colors are richer, scents stronger, sounds more vivid, and most importantly thoughts more intense. These thoughts, perspectives on perspectives, theories, philosophies, etc. all emanate from the despair of being unwilling or unable to fulfill one's destiny. Through a rising tide of despair, one comes to a point where he passionately wills himself to be his true self, and paradoxically by losing himself, gains himself. (See generally Kierkegaard's work, *"Either/or."*) This is the Ethical sphere. Once past this point, the individual will judge himself in every action by this new found consciousness.

Even further along is the Religious sphere which emanates when the individual is subject to constant self-scrutiny and self-judgment from which there is no reprieve. It requires total and complete self-sacrifice. It represents another leap. Ironically, Kierkegaard suggests the example of Avraham in the story of the *akeda*. That, however, is beyond the scope of our discussion.

Clearly one can already infer that Sarah was the first to be pushed into the Ethical sphere. For ninety years she stood barren. She watched as others paired off and easily conceived children. These were occupants of the Aesthetic sphere. Some of these people were less deserving. They may have been younger, or meaner, less spiritual, or of lower, maid-servant class. Yet they conceived and lived merry lives while she was condemned to wait, and wait, and wait. Such was her despair, her "Ethical consciousness," her "Religious consciousness." It is no wonder that she became worthy of being a Matriarch.

Thus our heritage begins here. It is her legacy that is crucial. Her son, Yitzhak, a product of such thought and introspection, is to be the bridge to the future. Yishmael, whose very birth served to exacerbate the pain and desolation of Sarah, attempts to reject these developments. He not only claims a superior standing, but also is *"metzachek,"* taunts Yitzhak, and by extension, Sarah. This is truly a heinous crime. Who could taunt the painful reality of someone who hopes against hope, only to fail through forces beyond human control? Who could add to that agony? The anguish runs deep. It is the wretched torment felt only by those who have had their life's work negated, their mission aborted, without recourse, without restraint, only to be laughed at. Even Avraham cannot comprehend her grief. At this point and in regard to this, he too is stuck in the Aesthetic sphere. Therefore God instructs him, "All that Sarah tells you, listen to her voice." Listen to her voice of despair. She knows that pain.

Ironically, it is the prodigal son, Yishmael, who is next to be pushed to this level. Cast into the desert, he nearly dies. Yet God listens to his voice. He has mastered this level, and in turn fathers a great people. Finally, the vintage events of the *akeda* unfold, bringing Avraham and Yitzhak into that realm.

Thus, there is no accident. This chapter has many lessons. It provides a new standard for good and evil, right and wrong. It demonstrates how closely these lines can become, how blurred the distinctions appear. What at first seemed benign, was actually depraved, and vice versa. While the majority saw fit to follow one path, the individual who swam against the tide proved upright. Finally, those who wait, who suffer, who contemplate, buffered from society and the achievement of their goals, may learn, though reluctantly, about the world, themselves, good and evil, and how they are not always what they seem. ♦

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Op-Ed: Who's Afraid of the Southern Baptists?

By DANIEL YOLKUT

The third week in June was a remarkably quiet week for the American Jewish establishment. Israel wasn't threatened with immediate destruction, any Jew who desired to leave Russia had only to skip over the rubble left from the Berlin wall, and Ethiopian Jews were more or less happily integrating itself into Israeli society. Pat Buchanan effectively dropped out of the race for President, and the Klan hadn't torched any synagogues lately. It was the kind of week where even the most vigilant watchdog group could contentedly curl itself up in front of the fireplace for an afternoon nap, confident in the knowledge that the Jewish people was secure. And then on June 13, 1996, disaster struck in New Orleans. *The New York Times* reported that the Southern Baptist conference, a group of whom most American Jews were blissfully ignorant, had voted to actively missionize America's Jews. The proposal cited a number of texts from Christian Scripture that clearly mandate the need to spread the message of salvation to Jesus' own people. Shortly before, the Southern Baptists charged a new missionary with spreading the gospel specifically to Jewish audiences.

Almost immediately, the wheels in the great machine of American Jewry whirled furiously, churning out angry statements of condemnation, expressing horror at the decision. Tommy Baer, the international president of B'nai B'rith, penned an open letter to the Southern Baptist Convention in which he attacked the Southern Baptists for delivering what he described as "a thoroughly retrograde step in relations between Southern Baptists and Jews," and described the planned conversion program as "demeaning." The ADL's Abe Foxman called the move "an affront to the memories of those murdered by intolerance," and the United Synagogue called on such prominent Southern Baptists as Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and Trent Lott to "speak publicly and forcefully against this destructive resolution."

There are certainly a number of factors that led to this strident defense mounted by the American Jewish community. Conversion to Christianity still carries communal memories of Jews burnt at the stake,

murdered, robbed and raped in order to bring them into Christ's Kingdom of Heaven. This gut reaction, which seems to embrace Jews across the spectrum of religious belief and observance, is what leads otherwise sober Jewish leaders to use rhetoric like "spiritual genocide," or to call up the specter of the Holocaust, all of which probably bewildered those Southern Baptists who issued a statement that did not contain a hint of violence. There is, however, more at play here. In essence, the real issue is that secular American Jews, like most educated, secular Americans, just don't get religion.

In popular media, religion is a warm, fuzzy feeling induced by a placebo swallowed at Christmas-time and washed down with a tall glass of egg nog, or, for those of Jewish descent, eaten with a chocolate covered matzo on Passover. At best, religion is seen as an important source of morality—but whichever religion you practice is pretty much irrelevant. Dwight Eisenhower is quoted as having said that he didn't care which church you belonged to as long as you went there. This prevailing attitude has led to an interesting phenomenon to which Americans constantly refer unthinkingly, something they call the Judeo-Christian (or increasingly, Judeo-Christian-Islamic) heritage, and no one bothers to notice that this glorious heritage takes radically different and essentially irreconcilable positions on such minor issues as salvation, damnation, and the fate of the world.

Most of the American Jewish World is a product of this banal theological milieu. Therefore, they, like most Americans, simply can't comprehend the idea of a real religious obligation, whether it comes from Southern Baptists, Orthodox Jews, or Islamic fundamentalists. The Southern Baptists' resolution, then, was a blow against tolerance, and the Jewish leaders condemning them cannot fathom what would lead the Southern Baptists to do such a thing. However, to someone who moves in a world where religion is not just nice, but a driving imperative, the Southern Baptists declaration makes perfect sense.

Contrary to the somewhat bizarre assertion of B'nai B'rith's Tommy Baer, the New Testament as a totality simply does not consider Judaism an acceptable alternative to faith in Christ. Instead, Paul's

epistles, in particular *romans* that the only path to salvation is through acceptance to Jesus. And to the Southern Baptist, this is not a game. The "Revealed Word of God" tells them that *love*, for whom God reserves a special love, will nonetheless be condemned to hellfire if they do not accept their message. Their resolution is neither inflammatory nor shocking but a logical consequence of New Testament doctrine. And even if it wasn't, matters of dogma are the internal matters of each religious group and do not require the stamp of approval from such distinguished outside theologians as Tommy Baer.

America is based on a concept of free market, the idea that after agreeing to certain basic ground rules, everyone is on an equal playing field to try and sell their product. The first amendment elegantly extends this concept into the realm of the mind: everyone can believe, preach, write and publish as they please, provided that they do not disobey the civil laws regulating interpersonal relationships. That is why America has been a place where Judaism could thrive free of the fear of the Crusades, Inquisitions, pogroms, and other excesses of Christian love that Jews became so intimately familiar with in Europe, and the Southern Baptists resolution is another perfect example of how the system is supposed to work. The Southern Baptists are simply doing what we all are here to do: follow the dictates of our respective religions in a non-violent, non-coercive manner, and for Southern Baptists that means proclaiming the gospel of Jesus to the Jewish people. What the Jewish establishment should really be concerned about is why they feel that this new sales drive by the Southern Baptists might put them out of business. They should wonder why they are so offended that someone else dares target their exclusive market—and if it is because they fear that their product can't compete, maybe they shouldn't be in this line of work in the first place. And so while the B'nai B'rith's, United Synagogues, and the ADL's work themselves into a collective tizzy, I smile across the great American marketplace of religion at my Southern Baptist compatriot, both of us confident that in the end, the best man will win. ♦

Op-Ed: Counter-point

By BENJAMIN BALINT

In defending the Southern Baptist resolution to actively missionize Jews, Daniel Yolkut follows in the footsteps of Jacob Neusner and continues along the weary road of obsequiously apologizing for the rash exclusivism and insensitive brazenness of other faiths.

Religious intolerance is no matter of small consequence. We must not forget that abstract theologies impact upon concrete realities. At the heart of every religious war lies a theological war. At the heart of every actual conflict lies an ideological conflict; a clash of incompatible convictions. At the root of religious battles, assassinations, fanatical attacks, or other cruelties which fragment the human community, lies the imperious and arrogant assertion that "I am right, you are wrong. Therefore I am superior." This is precisely the false premise which lies latent in the Southern Baptist resolution, which places them firmly within the haughty ranks of those Christians who uphold the doctrine of "extra ecclesiam nulla salus"—outside the church there is no salvation. Is there really such a clear-cut line of demarcation between the missionizing

of Jews and the Crusades and Jihads which pepper our history? Do not both spring from the same religious fervor which Yolkut so eloquently applauds?

Yolkut bemoans the superficiality of modern religion. Yet he himself metaphorically describes the world as a "marketplace of religion," replete with "sales drives" and "products;" as if I choose my religion the same way I choose Cheerios rather than Frosted Flakes. Incidentally, how indeed does one select a religion to adopt in this capitalism of convictions; this drugstore of denominations? To the exclusivist, who declares "I am right, you are wrong," the issue at hand is clear-cut, explainable and perfectly understandable. The exclusivist trivializes God.

Exclusivists like the Baptists lull themselves into complacency by passively applauding their religion's truth, by basking in the self-assurance that their particular religion represents the ideal. In sharp contrast, the true religionist, whose tolerance for others is based on deep conviction rather than indifference, asks not Is the religion true, but Is it true for me; have I grappled with its teachings and internalized its essence? He thinks not in terms of which religion do I belong to, but rather which religion belongs

to me. He sees religious truths not propositionally, but humanly. He concerns himself not with objective, scientific truth, but with existential, experiential truth. With Kierkegaard, he exclaims, "What is truth but to live for an idea?" With Buber, he affirms that, "human truth becomes real when one tries to translate one's relationship to truth into the reality of one's life." For him, religion is not a matter of dry institutions and formal dogmas, abstract, remote, and impersonal, but of a dynamic, personal, living faith which engages his whole being, which transforms him. The true religionist wants to live his religion, not merely subscribe to it. His soul thirsts for a *living* God. As such, he is far from being preoccupied with forcibly imposing his own rigid dogma onto authentic religionists outside his tradition. What is true psychologically is true theologically as well: Only the weak and insecure busily concern themselves with trying to persuade others of the validity of their own position. The Southern Baptists have shown their weakness. ♦

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Yitzchak and Yishmael: an Existential Analysis

BY BESSAMIN B. BERLIN

I would give almost anything I have to reverse the course of my life during the past year. But history does not turn back for any man. I have learned a great deal about the world. I have learned a great deal about myself. I have learned of Good and Evil; they are not always what they seem.

Charles van Doren

By now we must feel as though we had run the gauntlet. We end the month of Tisbri, the genesis of a new year, having once again completed the myriad of ritualistic and liturgical practices provided by the wisdom and perspicacity of two millennia of rabbinical leadership. The breathtaking process that was designed to instill in anyone even slightly devoted, a sense of awe, fear, and repudiation, the Day of Judgment, wherein each passed as sheep before the rod of the shepherd, the moments of mounting emotion culminating in the *simcha* of Sukkot, were replete with introspection, solitude, solicitude, and *selichot*.

After a brief preamble, the initial of the *asevet yemei teshuva*, the day of the coronation of the King, the first of the New Year, Rosh Hashana arrived. It cannot be accidental that the Torah selection for the first morning includes the story of the birth of Yitzchak and the ensuing separation of Yishmael. Time after time, we begin the year by reading from this story, as the practical implications of the events persist to affect our personal and public lives. What messages may we garner from the narrative?

God, we are told, redeems his promise to Abraham and Sarah with the conception and birth of Yitzchak. Abraham celebrates, and joy abounds. Nevertheless, not all is entirely well when Sarah observes Yishmael engaging in an activity that is not to her liking. The text limits its description of this diversion to one word: *metzachek*.

Rashi stretches to find a definition for this term. Comparing the linguistic form to others similar in Tanakh, Rashi concludes that the term can refer to any one of the "Big Three," i.e. *avoda zara*, *shefikhat damim*, and *giluy aravot*. Somewhat unsatisfying, this

glass fails to provide a specific interpretation leaving us with a vague notion of some "high crime." Moreover, none of the three sins correlate to the argument that Sarah presents to Avraham, specifically, "that Yishmael must not be allowed to inherit alongside Yitzchak." Finally, some argue that it is unfathomable to contemplate these activities taking place in the household of a *tzaddik* of Avraham's stature.

Ramban suggests an alternative explanation. Quoting a *gemara* in Rosh Hashana 18b (also quoted in the Tosefta at Sotah 6:6) in the name of R. Shimon b. Yochai that the "*tzachok*" mentioned here is a reference to inheritance, Yishmael, according to this explanation, was teaching Yitzchak the *halakha* of *yerusha* which dictates that the *bekhor*, the eldest, receive *pi shenayim*, a double portion of the inheritance.

This elucidation seems both textually agreeable and intellectually sensible. In response to the taunt of Yishmael regarding the significance his legacy, Sarah protests, "For the son of this *ama* shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak," clearly addressing the issue, and describing his reduced status as an illegitimate heir.

Moreover, Sarah and Yishmael both seem to have valid points of view. Until this point, Yishmael has been the only child. He is the focal point, the bridge to the future, the sole heir apparent. Suddenly, surprisingly, even miraculously, another brother appears. Sibling rivalry is to be expected. Not only must he now share the limelight, there is the suggestion that Yitzchak is superior, and that Yishmael will no longer serve as the link to the future of the Jewish people. In light of the circumstances, Yishmael lays out his legal position. He reminds Yitzchak and all those around him that the heritage belongs to the first born, and that he, Yishmael, was to claim that right.

Consequently, Sarah is concerned as she endeavors for Yitzchak to be the second of the forefathers. Presenting her counter-position, she instructs Avraham to separate himself from the *ama*, thereby isolating the child Yishmael, so that he will be "unable to inherit alongside her son, Yitzchak."

Avraham recognizes the horrible consequences that could flow from such conduct, including the near

death of his first born son Yishmael, and the ensuing enmity between the two powerful populations of Jews and Arabs. The father of monotheism is repulsed by the concept, and is loathe to take action. Only after the Almighty intercedes, who instructs Avraham to "listen to all that Sarah speaks," is the deed accomplished and the course of history set into motion.

Seemingly, Ramban's account ties up all loose ends and makes for a clean and neat exegesis. Yet, while rational, this presentation begs certain ethical, moral, and religious questions, the most poignant of which is this: What did Yishmael do wrong?

This section is the basis for thousands of years of pain and sorrow, of war and destruction, of vengeance and retribution. The bitterness that flows from this dramatic event persists until this day. The world shakes in the effort to find a lasting peace, and is cognizant of the fragility of such reconciliation. This reality cannot be lost on us as the story is read globally on the "day of the birth of world."

This episode represents the birth of our heritage, the basis of our claim to Zion and Jerusalem, the keystone of our history. It is not even conceivable that it's all a big mistake. It was not lightly that Avraham heeded the directive of God. Our claim to the *yerusha* must be clear and unequivocal, not shrouded in doubt, for on that basis we hold Yishmael in contempt from the very depths of our beings. If we are willing to war, to fight, to kill, to live, and to die to protect our heritage, the claim must be solid.

How then may we understand this episode? Upon inspection it may appear that Ishmael was innocent. Jostling about the legal profession notwithstanding, it seems incredulous that the heinous crime which resulted in his castigation was the presentation of a legal argument. Teaching a legitimate Torah law cannot be the infraction. For if it were, if the world turned in our favor on the premise of such an act, if Yishmael were dispatched to the desert, where he could naturally be expected to perish, on the support of what otherwise might be called *limud ha-Torah* at best—sibling rivalry at worst, then we can scarcely condemn his descendants for their years of animosity.

(continued on page 14)

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