Kol Hamevaser is a magazine of Jewish thought dedicated to sparking the discussion of Jewish issues on the Yeshiva University campus. It will serve as a forum for the introduction and development of new ideas. The major contributors to Kol Hamevaser will be the undergraduate population, along with regular input from RIETS Roshei Yeshiva, YU Professors, educators from Yeshivot and Seminaries in Israel, and outside experts. In addition to the regular editions, Kol Hamevaser will be sponsoring in-depth special issues, speakers, discussion groups, shabbatonim, and regular web activity. We hope to facilitate the religious and intellectual growth of Yeshiva University and the larger Jewish community.

Kol Hamevaser is a student publication supported by The Commentator. Views expressed in Kol Hamevaser are those of the writers exclusively.

We would like to thank the entire staff of Kol Hamevaser and all other contributors for all of their hard work and dedication. In addition, we would like to express our hakarat ha-tov to Zev Eleff and the staff of the Commentator, whose support made Kol Hamevaser possible.

-David Lasher and Mattan Erder
Outgoing Managing Editors

About Kol Hamevaser
“And You Expect to Possess the Land?”

BY GILAH KLETENIK

At the start of high school, I was Israel activism exemplified. As an upstart freshman, I even co-founded our school’s Israel club. I sent many a letter berating “anti-Israel bias” to the New York Times and emailed even more letters urging elected officials in Washington to support the Jewish state. I was raised in a Zionist home, experienced summers at a Bnei Akiva camp and even spent a year in Israel with my family during middle school. So my deep concern for Israel was natural and the positions I took on the issues only typical of a Modern Orthodox Jew.

The rhetoric I spewed in my advocacy efforts is familiar to us all. At the dinner table, in the classroom and at community meetings with congresspersons, I was wont to make such impassioned and blanket statements as “the Palestinians don’t want peace” and “a greater Israel, is a more secure Israel.” I held these beliefs to be true with great intensity and considered them the obvious expression of my firmly held religious convictions and deepseated love for my people. Today, my perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more nuanced, but no less informed by my Judaism.

In retrospect, I’m not quite certain when my positions began evolving into what they are today, but I do know that the shift was gradual, painful. And, while the particulars of my journey are obscure, I nevertheless recall a fateful moment when I realized that the words coming out of my mouth were incongruent with the values in my head. It was then that I began to internalize my dishonesty, and gained the courage to admit that I could no longer, in good conscience, defend and justify a country whose actions I considered morally questionable.

How could I advocate for a country that occupies another nation, a government that deprives citizens of their natural rights? It was difficult for me to confess that the country I loved dearly, and the state that meant so much to my people, was also a guilty player in the unending conflict. And more, it was hard to realize that the numerous settlements I had come to believe crucial not only from a religious perspective, but also from a security perspective, were in fact roadblocks to peace and that many were even built on Palestinian land. Even tougher was coming to terms with the fact that what we perceived as “security” necessities, often only engendered more hatred and distrust of Israel within Palestinian society. I began to understand that these policies were in a sense counter-productive; only generating the need for more roadblocks, curfews and walls. Above all though, what was most right, but the need, especially in the aftermath of the Holocaust, for the Jewish people to defend itself. But, when Israel, the country of the Jews, a people that has endured thousands of years of persecution and the victim of countless injustices acts immorally, does this not call into question the very legitimacy of its existence? On a practical level, it’s clear that these policies have only come to hurt Israel, fanning the flames of the cycle of violence and further distancing the possibility of peace. This reality not only hurts Israel’s image abroad, but might even be the country’s undoing.

Furthermore, religious Jews that we are, we turn to the Torah for ultimate legitimacy, which it seems we are increasingly losing: “Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying: ‘Son of man, they that inhabit those waste places in the land of Israel speak saying: ‘Abraham was one, and he inherited the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us for inheritance.’ Wherefore say unto them: ‘Thus said the Lord God: Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes unto your fetishes, and shed blood – yet you expect to possess the land? You have relied on your sword, you have committed abominations, and you defile every one his neighbor’s wife; and you expect to possess the land?’”

It is impossible to go back in time and undo past injustices; we can’t reverse our driving out of over 700,000 Palestinian refugees and neither can we fully dismantle over 250,000 Jewish settlers and their communities in the West Bank – not to say the least of the East Jerusalem corridor and the Golan. While we can’t make up for the mistakes of yesterday, we can surely approach today with greater sophistication and sensitivity – to recognize that one can be both a victim and a perpetra-

Letter to the Editor

Dear Kol Hamevaser,

In his article in the previous installment of Kol Hamevaser, Ben Greenfield argues that God does not communicate with us through the language of history. In particular, after considering the difficulty in formulating a coherent and defensible interpretation of the recent Mercaz haRav attack, he exhorts his readers to “cease to pretend that His omnipotent command of history implies a revelatory communiqué through history.” While Mr. Greenfield’s point is well-taken – it is hubris of the highest degree to for one to claim knowledge of what is going on in God’s “head” – I think he fails to make an important, if not somewhat obvious, distinction.

While the true meaning of most events will continue to be shrouded by inherent difficulty and uncertainty of interpretation, other acts of God, which fall under the rubric of prophetic revelation quite clearly proclaim “harshen.” For example, if after several generations of warning God decides to destroy the Beis Hamikdash and exile His wayward people, it is safe to assume that He is angry and that Klal Yisrael should begin to contemplate changing ways. On the other extreme, and more contemporarily, I quote Israeli Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Yehuda Amital, who bemoans that ours is “a generation with an impaired sense of history.” “The prophet says, ‘Old men and old women shall yet again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand because of his old age; and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets’ (Zechariah 8:4-5)...After two thousand years, children play in the streets of Jerusalem! Can this be a natural phenomenon, after two thousand years?” (Commitment and Complexity: Jewish Wisdom in an Age of Upheaval. Ktav Publishing House. Newark, 2008. pp. 56-57) While this sign may not directly impel us to do any one specific action, it certainly seems to tell us that it is time to hear the voice of our beloved knocking and get a move on.

Forgive me for waxing poetic (an unnecessary apology on the pages of Kol Hamevaser), but I also feel that Mr. Greenfield’s thesis fails to address the grander scope of Jewish History. When we turn on “the ten o’clock news,” we see much more than “tame, indisputable lessons.” Who can fail to perceive in the continued survival of the Jews, that certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces,” the hand of God plucking us out from the fire? Perhaps it is impossible to tell why God allowed a terrorist to murder a few yeshiva boys, but isn’t it eminently clear that He has prevented other terrorists from murdering us all?

Sincerely,

Julian Horowitz, YC ’11
Continuing the Discussion: Emunah

An Interview with Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm: Continued

BY ARI LAMM

What role does Am Yisrael’s status as the am ha-nivhar play within our belief system?

The doctrine of am hanivhar - the election or chosenness of Israel — has been glorified and condemned, but mostly misunderstood, for the greater part of our history. Some have dismissed it with contempt and infamously compared it to the Nazi idea of the Herrenvolk; others have exaggerated its particularity as thoroughly genetic in nature; and yet others have diluted it to just about the point of making the notion both pointless and meaningless. Few other ikkarim, major principles of Judaism, have been subjected to such distortion.

The comparison to the foul ideology of Aryan racial superiority is a vicious canard that has been with us since the Enlightenment, but ratcheted up since the appearance of mass anti-Semitism in the twentieth century. The non-ideological discomfort that some modern Jews feel is more of a social nature — “what will my non-Jewish neighbors think of me/us when they hear of this boast?” and underscores a good deal of the embarrassment with the am hanivhar idea. And not far removed from this concern is its enfeeblement and eventual excision from the prayer book and educational material by many liberal- modernist Jewish groups.

Equally fallacious, if less deplorable, is the interpretation of chosenness in some Haredi and other, especially Hasidic, circles, namely, that Jews are religiously and spiritually superior to the rest of mankind and that this pre-eminence is genetically determined. Placing the concept on a biological basis is good for the collective ego but is poor scholarship and is untrue to our sacred texts. A critique of all these views will become explicit in the following paragraphs.

The doctrine of election is accepted by all great Jewish thinkers but not necessarily to the same degree. Thus, for instance, Rambam and a number of other Sephardic scholars of the Middle Ages accepted it, but did not give it the prominence accorded it by other Jewish thinkers. Rambam does not include it in his Ani Ma’amim. Other prominent sages, from Yehudah Halevi to the Maharal to the Tanya to Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, expanded on the doctrine of chosenness and gave it an especially high place in the hierarchy of Jewish precepts. But even those who did not emphasize it to the same extent obviously approved of it; else how did they recite the Kiddush or the blessing before the Shema?

Moreover, and the Torah itself speaks of the Divine choosing of Abraham and, at Sinai, the people of Israel.

There are several questions that beg to be answered: Among them: Who chose whom at Sinai? Why was this choice made in the first place? What about all the other nations of the world? Can strangers “join the club” if they were not originally Jewish?

The first to be chosen by God to bring His message to mankind was Abraham. His loyalty, his faith and his self-sacrifice made him the chosen one, and his children after him (the “seed of Abraham”) were to carry on this tradition despite all difficulties. At the Revelation at Sinai, the Divine Voice informed our ancestors that we are chosen to be a “holy nation” and His segulah or “special treasure,” and that He desired us and chose us not because we were numerous or great, for we were the smallest of all the peoples. Rather, we were chosen because He loved us and had promised our forefathers that He would redeem us from slavery. He wishes us to know at all times that He is faithful and keeps His promise made to our forebears in the covenant with them, and extends His Love for their descendants “unto a thousand generations” (Dt.: 7:6-8).

There is nothing in these sacred texts that implies genetic or racial superiority of the “seed of Abraham,” nor that other peoples are inferior or less deserving of Divine compassion, nor that we were destined to rule the world or be given any special privileges other than observing the Torah and the mitzvot. On the contrary, chosenness implies a commitment to serve Him and thus become the teachers — willingly or unwillingly — to the rest of humankind. For in addition to declaring us a “holy nation,” we were simultaneously commissioned to be a “kingdom of priests,” a goy kadosh — a term which implies, as Ezekiel would later announced (22:26), that as a priest-people we were to teach the world the difference “between the holy and the profane, the pure and the impure.” The best term to describe this Divine mission is the French nobilesse oblige. God loves all humans and therefore provided a single people to undertake the noble and historic task of bringing God to them and them to God.

Who chose whom at Sinai? The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 2a, b) records two famous versions of the giving of the Torah. One has the Almighty offering the Torah to various of the ancient peoples, all of whom objected to certain basic commandments; only Israel accepted the Torah in toto. The second has God coercing Israel to accept by threatening to bury them under that falling mountain. The difference between them is this: The first tells us that the Jews chose God; the second, that God chose the Jews.

I believe that both versions must be read together; both, paradoxically, are equally and simultaneously true. There was and is a mutual “choosing.” When we are born, we are inducted into the Covenant of Avraham and confirmed as members of the Chosen People — whether we like it or not. We are the chosen, not the choosers. But as we learn and mature, we come into our role not by coercion or habit but by will and love and eagerness. Jews who reject the “yoke of Torah” are condemned to being the subject of Divine duress. They are, no matter how much they try, Jews by birth only. They often suffer from their Jewish identity — anti-Semitism and confusion about the State of Israel and spiritual rootlessness — and do not taste of the glory of Jewishness. Only when we turn around and choose Him and His Torah, of our own free will, do we experience the dignity and delight of being Jewish.

Choosing God is as important as His choosing us.

Finally, “Israel” is not described anywhere as a racial genetic group, thus excluding all the rest of mankind from the opportunity to serve Him as part of the “holy nation” and “kingdom of priests.” Were this so, we would never be permitted to accept proselytes from other nations. Those who advocate such a narrow view must explain why, according to the Midrash, Abraham and Sara were the first to enlist pagans as gerim, and why the Tradition affirms that the souls of proselytes of all generations were present at the Revelation — “those who are here standing with us this day... and those who are not with our here this day” (Dt. 29:14) — a phrase that intends not only future generations of Jews from birth but also true proselytes (Tosefia, Sotah 7:3).

Furthermore, there are references to yir’ei Hashem, God-fearing people, especially in Tehilim. Who are these people? Ibn Ezra in four places in his commentary to Psalms, identifies them as Gentiles who fear God. So too does R. David Altschuler, in his Metzudot David and R. Yaakov Tzevi Meklenberg in his Ha-Ketav ve’Ha-Kabbalah.

What binds the generations of Jews together is not biology but a culture of faith that is transmitted not by genes but by a shared history and a shared destiny, a faith of commitment and to act in a manner that will lead to a life of holiness. Those bonds are powerful, and they are not impenetrable to those who yearn to accept upon themselves the mitzvot and the nobilesse oblige.

A few decades ago a scholar wrote a dissertation at Columbia University in which he conclusively demonstrated that, amongst the Tannaim, the more a Tanna emphasized the “doctrine of election,” the more pronounced was his universalism. Not only is there no conflict between the two but, surprisingly, chosenness affirms universalism.

The more Jewish you are, the more do you — and should you — care for the rest of the world.

“Academic” approaches to the study of Jewish texts — from Tanakh, to Gemara, to responsa literature — are sometimes perceived as being in conflict with certain aspects of Emunah. How would Rav Lamm assess this perception of academic Jewish studies? What sort of role should “academic” methodologies play...
In answer to your question, I do not believe that academic approaches to sacred texts are necessarily in conflict with emunah. After all, our faith is challenged and often attenuated by hunger, luxury, persecution, the ubiquity of sexual temptation, and so on. Popular culture is usually in conflict with some of our received teachings and is menacing to our way of life. Yet we do not and should not condemn all of contemporary culture, even when it is in occasional conflict with principles of Judaism. Scientism (the worship of science) is deplorable, but science must be treated with respect. Popular literature is usually of no importance to a serious ben Torah, but truly great literature is serious and should not be dismissed although certainly it need not be accepted as authoritative. As for potential problems posed by academic approaches, we should not minimize them, but put them into perspective. People of genuine emunah were and are almost always faced with challenges. It was true in the ancient world and is true today in our contemporary world. Yet we managed to survive without banning all human thinking from our learning and teaching-at least not in our Torah UMadda circles. Avoiding a challenge may be temporarily soothing, but ultimately self-defeating.

Essentially, academic approaches should be subsumed under “Madda” which, in turn, can be divided into two parts: first, that which has no direct bearing on Talmud Torah, but which impinges on one’s religious consciousness. This can sometimes prove deleterious to our spiritual sensitivities, but equally can reinforce and deepen our faith and virat shumayim. Example: contemplation of the vastness and the overwhelming complexity of the cosmos may make us question the significance of individual human beings and the ultimate meaningfulness of life itself. But more often, this becomes the spur to ahavat ha-Shem and a rousing affirmation of the wisdom of the Creator and the justification of our faith in Him - which is what Rambam explicitly writes in his Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah. The second aspect is that which concerns itself not with our overall faith commitments but with specific parts of Talmud Torah. Here too the brunt of such academic interpretations of halakhic texts can be harmful or helpful. It is worth examining each in turn.

Let us say that in the course of academic research you conclude that the Gemara was mistaken, as a result of which the pesak Halakha should be reversed (assuming, of course, that the process of so deciding is compelling). We are then indeed faced with a problem of considerable significance. Should we continue practicing the traditionally accepted Halakha and be false to our conscience, or should we change our conduct and fly in the face of centuries of sanctified practice? Which prevails: truth or tradition? This is an extremely important question in such stark either/or terms. Halakhic truth differs from historic or factual or conventional truth or any other kind of truth. (It is, I believe, wrong and even immature to aver that there is only one truth and no other.) Proof: Tanur Shel Ahnai (B.M. 59b): the Talmud records a debate amongst the Tannaim as to the purity or impurity of a kind of earthen oven. R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus declared it tahor, while R. Yehoshua considered it tamei. Whereupon the former invoked all kinds of supernatural miracles to support his halakhic decision. R. Yehoshua dismissed all of them, including the final “proof” of R. Eliezer, namely, the Bat Kol which favored R. Eliezer. In other words, halakhic truth, decided by majority vote of great but ultimately fallible human beings, prevails over a direct revelation of the divine will!

Halakhic tradition is decided by the halakhic process, not by some external (even divine) standard. That being the case, even if our research leads us to conclude that technical errors crept into the Mesechor in the course of history, we can live with such “error.” This is no different than, in my own learning, having I found myself puzzled in trying to penetrate a sugya which I considered opaque, and found so-called “academic Judaica” to be of great help. An alternate reading found in a Ms. cited in the Dikdukei Soferim can help elucidate many a passage that is otherwise puzzling or even incomprehensible. While personally I do not as a matter of practice spend much time on variant readings, they do prove most helpful in many cases. There is no one methodology or derekh that is inherently superior to others; it is all a matter of intellectual conviction, taste, orientation, and personal choice. Hence, everyone is entitled to use whatever satisfies him in attempting to understand sefar Hashem zu Halakhah. But there is no reason, other than habit or intellectual comfort, to fail to make use of parallel sources such as Yerushalmi, Tosafot, the halakhic Midrashim, etc.

I am convinced that this form of academic assistance in learning too is a form of Mada; it is using non-traditional methods to assist us in understanding Torah. Indeed, an excellent example of this can be found in the Rambam in a famous teshuvah in which he refers to “secular wisdom” as rakkachot ve’tabbachot ve’o’hot - a location denoting servants or helpers, preparing the way for Torah. Opponents of Torah UMadda quite erroneously point to this responsum to argue that the Rambam regretted his high estimation of philosophy and science in the hierarchy of disciplines contained in the Pardees, thus undermining the usual conception of Maimonidean espousal of a positive view towards Torah UMadda, reducing all worldly knowledge to the rank of mere instruments, devoid of any inherent value.

However, I believe this is simply not so. (In my Torah UMadda, chapter 4, I point out that some of the most significant authorities on Rambam, such as the late R. Kapach, have questioned the authenticity of this letter. Moreover, the overwhelming weight of Rambam’s writing solidly supports the autonomous role that chokhmah plays in Maimonidean thought. In all probability, therefore, he is offering a wistful remark as to what gives him personally the most spiritual pleasure - it is Torah, in which he delights and that is certainly no surprise. I assume that all of me, me included, feel that we derive our greatest intellectual fulfillment and spiritual enjoyment from the study of Torah even though we do not denigrate the independent role of Madda in our lives.) What the Rambam is doing is saying that the “other wisdoms” serve two functions: on one level, they have innate value because they explain the world which the Almighty created, and this contemplation leads us to a genuine religious experience; this is Torah UMadda in its broadest sense. And second, they serve specifically to enhance the study of Torah. This latter function fits nicely into the rubric of academic study as propaedeutic to our Talmud Torah, enriching it - and us. In this sense, of course, academic study of sacred texts can certainly be considered as helpful.

A word of caution: When the ben Torah undertakes to study any academic discipline, whether scientific or humanistic, he should bear in mind that each discipline must be pursued truthfully, that is, without prejudice to its principles or conclusions. Each discipline deserves to be studied with an open and honest mind. Only afterwards should we look back and see how this conforms with our understanding of Judaism - halakhic or aggadic. But we must treat each non-Torah discipline according to its own methodology.

Finally, just as in learning Torah we must bear in mind the importance of human dignity, kedushah, the accomplishment of intellectual comfort, to fail to make use of parallel sources such as Yerushalmi, Tosafot, the halakhic Midrashim, etc. In all cases, we must accept as a foregone conclusion that while a great deal of what we study in the academic world may be helpful in support of religion, much of it is certainly antagonistic. While it is important for all of us to have a “taste” of those worlds, we must leave deep involvement in such disciplines to those who are ready to devote their time and energy to fully explore them and to remember that their first obligation is to Torah and their ultimate commitment is to the Almighty, and not to submit to the latest fashionable apikoros.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm is the Rosh ha-Yeshiva of RIETS and Chancellor of Yeshiva University

Ari Lamm is the interviewer for Kol Hamevasser
Have we ever stopped to think about the connection between who we are today and our experiences during early childhood? About how a poignant feeling or instinct we had in early life continued to resonate within us, consciously or subconsciously, only to manifest itself again many years later? How the nature of our earliest relationships with our parents and siblings became inextricably linked with our self-image? Or how a private act of kindness performed as a child can unexpectedly provide solace for us many years later?

These issues are largely the domain of psychoanalysts who posit that our adult “personalities” - our feelings, tastes, attitudes, interests and personalities - can be traced to childhood experiences. While there are some who invest vast resources of time and money in therapy as a means of gaining deeper insights into the underlying origin of their “here and now” reality, most of us are content living our daily lives without the need to discover underlying patterns from the distant past.

Yet sometimes we stumble upon a particular incident where the impact of a person’s early personal history is so powerful that to overlook it would be to miss an important part of the story. I believe that such an example can be found in the Torah at the conclusion of Parshas Behaaloscha (Bemidbar Chapter 12) in the episode dealing with Miriam’s slander against her younger brother, Moshe. (I say that link it to an earlier episode in Miriam’s childhood. The first is the topic of Miriam’s slander; the second is Hashem’s introductory remarks before issuing Miriam’s sentence of seclusion.

In addition to devaluating Moshe’s level of prophecy, Miriam also spoke “about the Kushite woman” to whom Moshe was married - who, as we know, was Yisro’s daughter, Tzipora. As Rashi explains, Miriam was critical of Moshe’s separating from Tzipora. Moshe had done so in order to remain “on call” for prophecy at all times. Though Hashem had sanctioned Moshe’s decision, this was not known to Miriam.

In effect, Miriam’s critique of Moshe had two components: first, she underestimated Moshe’s status as a prophet; second, she considered it wrong for Moshe to deprive himself of a normal family life. And these two components were interrelated. Because Miriam failed to appreciate the uniqueness of Moshe’s prophecy, she saw no justification in Moshe’s separating from Tzipora. Moshe had been done so in order to remain “on call” for prophecy at all times. Though Hashem had sanctioned Moshe’s decision, this was not known to Miriam.

In the wake of the divine rebuke, Miriam and Aharon were faulted for the error, it was primary judged for the misdeed.

The essence of Miriam’s slander was that she equated Moshe’s level of prophecy with that of her own: “Was it only to Moses that Hashem spoke? Did he not speak to us as well?” For this insensitive remark, Miriam was chastised by Hashem who made it unequivocally clear that Moshe’s prophecy was in a class of its own - qualitatively different than that of other prophets.

In the wake of the divine rebuke, Miriam was stricken with tzara’as (a skin ailment which was inflicted upon slanderers during biblical times). Aharon turned to Moshe and implored him to pray on behalf of their sister and Moshe obliged. Hashem responded by ordering Miriam to be secluded outside the camp for seven days. The people postponed their journey for a week until Miriam could rejoin them.

There are two critical aspects to the story: a mishap that found itself rooted in Miriam’s earlier episode in Midrash: “Were her father to spit in her face, would you not be humiliated for seven days? Let her be quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and then she may be brought in’ (v. 14).

Simply stated, Hashem offered a logical justification for His sentence - just as a rebuke by his biological father would put her to shame for a week’s time, so does the divine rebuke - by the Heavenly Father - deserve no less. But why, we may ask, did Hashem use the metaphor of a father’s rebuke? Is this analogy merely hypothetical? According to various midrashic and talmudic sources it is not. It is something that Miriam actually experienced in her own life.

If we flash back to little Miriam - age five and a half - we would find her during one of the cruellest, darkest periods of the Egyptian exile. (Even the name Miriam is synonymous with the Hebrew word for bitter.) The Jewish sojourners in Egypt had been transformed into slaves. Originally recruited into building large storage houses for Pharaoh, they gradually found themselves subjected to a daily regimen of back breaking field labor. Their lot grew bitterer by the day and their spirits were demoralized. To make matters worse, Pharaoh had just issued a royal edict ordering every newborn Jewish male to be cast into the Nile. At this depressing juncture, Miriam’s father, Amram, a prominent leader in the community, made a fateful decision to divorce his wife, Yocheved. Amram reasoned: What purpose could there be in bringing children into a world where they might be forcibly drowned! His decision sent shockwaves through the community and many others followed suit. But soon afterwards, Amram was rebuked by his daughter Miriam who argued: “Father, your edict is more drastic than that of Pharaoh! Pharaoh’s edict was directed against the Jewish males, yours is directed at the males and females, for you are not allowing either gender to be born.”

Whereupon, Amram reversed his decision and reunited with his wife. This, in turn, led all those who had divorced their wives to return to their former marital relationships.

What was it that prompted young Miriam to boldly challenge her father? On one level, it must have been a powerful instinct about the profound importance of family life. Miriam understood that the family is the symbol of Jewish continuity, and that even extraordinary circumstances do not justify breaking up the family unit.

But there was another factor as well - an actual prophecy that Miriam received at this young age – a prophecy informing her that her mother was destined to give birth to a son who would eventually become the redeemer of Israel. Indeed, it was out of this “reunion” between Amram and Yocheved that Moshe Rabeinu was born. This is why Miriam is referred to elsewhere (in parshas Beshalach) as “Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon” - because her first prophecy came to her at a time when was still merely the sister of Aharon prior to the birth of Moshe.

It should now be obvious how Miriam’s critique of Moshe’s separation from Tzipora and her equating of Moshe’s prophecy with her own find their roots in the events of Miriam’s childhood. As we can see, both of these issues were intertwined with the events leading up to Moshe’s birth. It was then that Miriam championed the cause of the family in persuading her father to reunite with Yocheved. And it was then that Miriam began her own career as a prophet in predicting the birth of her brother.

No wonder that Miriam felt justified in critiquing Moshe’s level of prophecy - because her first prophecy came to her at a time when still merely the sister of Aharon prior to the birth of Moshe.

By Rabbi Elchanan Adler
that of her father’s love and acceptance. When baby Moshe was born, the entire house filled with a spiritual light. Amram then turned to his daughter and gave her a warm kiss on the forehead, saying: “My daughter, it seems that your prophecy will indeed be realized.” But a short three months later when the baby could no longer remain in hiding, Moshe was placed in a wicker basket to virtual abandonment and concealed among the reeds of at the bank of the river. At that point, Amram turned again to his daughter - this time in great disappointment - slapped her face, and cynically asked: “My daughter, what has happened to your ‘so called’ prophecy?”

As little Moshe lay in his basket upon the water, a pair of watchful eyes gazed anxiously from afar, waiting to learn the fate of the newborn baby. “Vateisatav achoso merachok le ‘deah ma yei’ase lo” – “And his sister stationed herself at a distance to know what would be done to him” (Shemos 2:4).

Miriam, Moshe’s eldest sister - the human being perhaps most responsible for this baby’s existence - stood “merachok” - from a distance - not just distant from the baby in a physical sense - but distant from her father who had snubbed her - distant from her own self who had felt so certain that this baby needed to be born ... “ledeh ah ma yei’ase lo” - to know not just what would become of the baby but what would become of her prophecy which now hung precariously in the balance. Miriam knew that the fate of this baby was inextricably linked with that of her own - her belief in the preservation of the family unit, her career as a prophet, and her reconciliation with her father. So Miriam waited as only a loving sister could.

And suddenly Moshe’s life was miraculously saved by the most unlikely of sources - Pharaoh’s daughter, Basya. When Basya requested a Jewish woman to nurse the baby, Miriam suddenly emerged and offered the services of the baby’s own mother, Yocheved. Miriam had now found peace with herself and with her father. Her prophecy was authentic after all... her faith in the power of the family values in this case was misplaced. Her equating of Moshe’s prophecy with that of her own was fallacious. But her instincts as a young girl were still valid. All that she did to bring Moshe into the world was still appreciated - her standing up to her father... her prophecy... her watchful devotion as a sister.... She may not have risen to be a prophet in the caliber of Moshe but she was a prophet nonetheless... And her passionate desire to preserve the family was a positive one. It was just that Moshe was exceptional. Miriam remained beloved even at this vulnerable time. All of this was being conveyed to Miriam’s through the nation’s postponement of its journey.

It is truly remarkable to see how Miriam’s current experience had opened up a window to her past. On the one hand, the divine punishment reawakened old wounds - images of paternal rejection - “Were her father to spit in her face.” At the same time, she was also provided with an opportunity for healing her past - “and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in.”

As we go about the business of our daily lives, we all carry within ourselves imprints of our youth. We are, after all, an accumulation of our personal histories. We are, at times, included to harbor early feelings and to react to events prompted by those feelings. Every so often, we become aware of these forces through powerful experiences that reawaken our past. Sometimes, these experiences - like Miriam’s - open old wounds that may be painful. But as with Miriam, the suffering is meant to help us expand our wisdom and consciousness. It is this very process that allows for healing. As we struggle through the hurt of old wounds, we can, hopefully, come to realize that despite our disappointments, we still remain worthy of Hashem’s love - that making a mistake doesn’t mean that our instincts were all bad or all wrong. Life is about living and learning... and about healing the past.

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Shivat Tsiyon, Prophecy and Rav Kook

BY YOSEF BRONSTEIN

There are many positive elements that one can point to when describing the uniqueness of living in Erets Yisrael. Some focus on one’s ability to fulfill a larger scope of the gamut of mitsvot, others point to the very living in the Land as a mitzvah, a third group mentions an internal, objective holiness that G-d endows it with, while still others will emphasize the higher level of hashgahah that one lives under in the Land. However, there is another aspect that is developed in certain schools of thought upon which I would like to elaborate from both a theoretical and practical perspective - the Land as imbuing one with the ability to transcend the limitations of the intellect.

If I understand correctly, the roots of this theory begin with the Tannaic assertion that one is only privy to prophecy in Erets Yisrael.

Prophecy is clearly a phenomenon that surpasses the restrictions of the intellect and requires a strong imaginative faculty (as even the rationalist Rambam admitted) and it would therefore be tempting to link this limited geographic area to its effect on the imagination. However, Rambam himself marginalized the concept of the limitation of prophecy to Erets Yisrael by maintaining that if not for the troubles of the galut a person would be able to perfect himself in the Diaspora to the level required for prophecy. Even the Kuzari, which has a much more fundamentalist approach to the restriction, does not explicitly tie the uniqueness of Erets Yisrael to the Land’s effect on the potential prophet’s mental faculties.

However, for some this connection actually exists. Rav Kook, for example, describes the “imagination of Erets Yisrael” as being “clear, clean and pure, especially fit for the revelation of the Divine Truth ... prepared for the explanation of prophecy and its lights, for the brightness of ru’ah ha-kodesh and its shining.” This is as opposed to the imagination of Huts La-Arets which is “murky, mixed with darkness ... and cannot serve as the basis for the bounty of the divine light that rises from all of the lowliness of the worlds and their confines.” In other words, the Land is endowed with the ability to allow its inhabitants to experience a purer form of imagination that in turn capacitates them to see beyond the confines of physical reality.

It is important to stress that Rav Kook did not stop on the level of a theoretical connection between Erets Yisrael, imagination and prophecy. Rather, the beginnings of the return of Am Yisrael to Erets Yisrael that he was witnessing and advancing indicated to him that prophecy was once again becoming a reality. He asserts with daring certainty that “the shoots of prophecy are sprouting and the sons of prophets are stirring, the spirit of prophecy is about in the Land,” affirming that in his own times the divine spirit was slowly returning. It is clear that Rav Kook viewed himself as partially tapping into that nascent spirit since the above quotation in the original manuscript is preceded by an attempt by Rav Kook to locate the sources of his own ideas and theories. One of his prime disciples, Rav David Cohen, the Nazir of Sherutayim, took his mentor’s notion to its extreme but logical conclusion and spent many years preparing himself to becomes a full-fledged prophet. In a diary entry written on the boat taking him to Erets Yisrael, the Nazir wrote “the spirit, the ru’ah ha-kodesh and the revelation of His word in the future is my ultimate goal in the Holy Land... this is inexorable.” Even if one would disagree with the Nazir’s sense of the immanence of prophecy and contend that his methods, which included fasting, vows of silence and other acts of perishut, were extreme and too early, one can still affirm that his general aspiration of the return of prophecy is laudable.

While Rav Kook writes of his yearning from the perspective of one who is viscerally suffering from the lack of full spirituality in the current state of affairs, I think that for many of us a semi-halakhic argument would be more understandable. The Gemara in Shabbat (31a) relates that one of the questions that a person will be asked upon arriving at the Heavenly Tribunal is “Tsippita liyshu’ah (Did you long for the redemption)?” Mefaresim point out that “tsippiyah” connotes a more active anticipation than other parallel verbs, and Rashi defines “yeshu’ah” as “kiyum divrei nevi’im (the fulfillment of the words of the prophets)”. As the prophet Yo’el speaks of a prophetistic renaissance as part of his eschatological vision, yearning for the return of prophecy should fall under the mandate of “tsippiyah liyshu’ah.” I think that it is no coincidence that the fulfillment of this charge requires the activation of the imagination in order to properly envision the Messianic age in the mind’s eye. It is as if we are showing our desire for the return.
Holy Land, Holy People

BY LEAH KANNER

“Look at the beautiful palm trees!” my mother exclaimed. But to my almost-twelve-year-old eyes, it was all wrong. Palm trees belonged in California; here things were supposed to be different. As our taxi wound its way between the offending trees and out of the airport, the paved highways and modern buildings only added to my distress. Where was Erets Yisrael, artsenu ha-kedosha, the land I had learned about and dreamed of visiting? My only solace during that early morning drive from Ben Gurion Airport to Jerusalem was the view of the kever of Shmu’el ha-Navi perched upon a hilltop. At last, a landmark that I recognized, right out of a drawing in the Sefer Shmuei I used in school. However, only the next day, when we visited the Old City, was I truly satisfied. This was the Israel I had seen in my mind’s eye: the stone buildings and narrow alleyways left no room for mistake. Finally, I knew that I was in a place unlike any other, a place where I could imagine walking in the footprints my ancestors had worn into these same cobblestones.

As I think back to those first impressions, I realize that at that point I saw the uniqueness of Erets Yisrael as solely dependent upon its history. Therefore, only when I could see remants of that past did I feel like I was in a land of holiness. During that trip, I learned from various experiences to expand my conception of sanctity, and find it not only in the history of the land, but also in the people who call it home. One such “Mi ke-amka Yisrael” story occurred when we realized our new camera was missing from our car about twenty minutes after leaving Kever Rabbi Akiva. We returned, and as my father began looking around, he saw my anxiety mirrored on the face of a man running over and saying, “Is this camera yours?” and his subsequent relief matched by that same man’s instinctive reaction, “Thank God that I was able to fulfill the mitsvah of hashavat avedah!”

I think that these two ideas, holiness of place and of person, can be traced back to the conceptions of Ramban and Rambam of kedushat Erets Yisrael.

Ramban is known for his emphasis on the primacy of the land of Israel in Jewish thought and practice. He considers living in Israel a commandment that is obligatory even in a time of exile, and states that the ideal place to perform all commandments is the land of Israel.

Although Rambam does not explicitly list living in Israel among the commandments, he does not ignore the land or its sanctity in his halakhic writings. In fact, the omission of mitsvot yishuv ha-aretz may be attributed to a technicality of its being subsumed under the prohibition against settling in Egypt, as the two are discussed together in Rambam’s Mishneh Torah.

According to this approach, we can use the reason specified by Rambam for the prohibition of living in Egypt to shed light on his conception of living in Israel. This reason given is “because its actions are more corrupt than those of other nations.” Conversely, it would make sense that the implied reason to live in Israel would be, “because its actions are better than those of other nations.”

In his commentary on the Torah, Ramban emphasizes the uniqueness of Erets Yisrael as a land that is “nahalat Hashem” and attributes the gravity of punishment in some situations to the fact that the sin was committed in Israel.

He does not distinguish between different periods in Jewish history with regard to the land’s sanctity, and seems to think of kedushah as an intrinsic property of the land that lasts forever. Rambam, on the other hand, sees the land of Israel in a more utilitarian light. Based on his rationalist approach, he is wary of attributing intrinsic differences to different countries in a given region, or claiming that God’s presence is more directly in one place than another. Therefore, he focuses on the fact that Israel, in its ideal state, is populated by those who keep the Torah and observe the commandments, and therefore, it is the best place to do so.

While Ramban thinks that Israel is the best place for a Jew to perform the mitsvot because it is holy, Rambam thinks that its holiness stems from the fact that it is the best place for a Jew to perform the mitsvot. Therefore, we could say that Rambam, seeing the holiness as intrinsic to the land, might focus on the inanimate manifestations of its holiness, while Rambam would place more emphasis upon the people who can impact its holiness through their actions.

Yehuda Amichai underscores the conflict between these two sources of holiness in his poem, “Tourists.” He tells of a tour guide who drew attention to a person only in order to point out, “a bit to the right of his head there’s an arch from the Roman period.” Then offering his commentary, Amichai berates the tour guide for emphasizing the place at the expense of the person saying, “redemption will come only when they are told: You see over there the arch from the Roman period?”

Never mind: but next to it, a bit to the left and lower, sits a man who bought fruit and vegetables for his home.” To Amichai, it is the person who is primary.

I prefer to think of these two sources of holiness as complementary, since in my mind, neither is complete on its own. It should also be noted that the distinction made earlier between the ideas of Ramban and Rambam is merely a difference in focus; it would be difficult to claim that either of them sees the two sources of holiness as mutually exclusive like Amichai does. Relegating the land’s sanctity to a function of the past makes it independent of our ac-

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1. See Sotah 14a, Rashbam to Bava Batra 91a c.v. ein yotse ‘in, Gilyonei Ha-Shas to 110b, and Rav Ovadyah Yosef’s article in Torah She-Be’al Peh 11.
2. Ramban’s additions to Sefer Ha-Mitsvot of Rambam, Mitsvah 4
4. Ramban to Leviticus 18:25 and Penet Yehoshua to Ketubot 110b c.v. tanu rabbanan.
5. Though I present them as four distinct factors, I think that it is reasonable to assume that if thought about, there is much overlap between them.
7. 2:36
8. Ibid.
9. 2:13-14
10. Orot Erets Yisrael, keta 5. The rough and imprecise translations throughout the article are my own.
11. Orot Ha-Kodesh I, pg. 157
12. Shemonah Kevatsim 4:17
13. Mishnat Ha-Nazir, pg. 42
14. However, I recently heard from mori ve-rabbi Rav Rosensweig that notions of nevi’ah are not really part of the worldview of the Halakhic Man as described by Rav Soloveitchik.
15. I have heard this from several rabbinic figures but cannot currently locate a specific source.
16. Chapter 3
17. Orot Ha-Kodesh III, pg. 355

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of the ideal form of imagination that enables prophecy by using our limited imaginations to envision such a reality.

The goal of this essay is twofold. First, I want to raise awareness about a potential ramification of Shivat Tziyon that I do not think is emphasized in our community. Second, Rav Kook thought that the percolation of these ideas in a public forum is not only helpful for their clarification but also contributes to the realization of the ultimate goal of redemption, as tsippiyah liyshu’ah is not only symptomatic of an assured future but actually has a causal relationship with it.

It is in that spirit that I have written this essay.

To conclude, I would like to cite the Ran’s comments on the query of tsippiyah liyshu’ah. While Rashi formulates it as “kivun divei nevi’im” the Ran adds in one powerful word – “be-yamekha” (in your lifetime). Ve-khen yehi ratson.

Kol Hamevaser

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Volume 1, Issue 8
The professional Jewish educator whose expertise transcends the PR hype fed to Anglo-Jewish media is fully aware of the negative attitude in some circles toward the study of Hebrew. The dichotomy “we teach/they teach” is trumpeted with satisfaction and pride, as in “We teach Yiddishkeit and not Ivrit” — the final “t” exaggerated to mock a Sephardic Hebrew accent. The tone faintly echoes that of the Old Yishuv in Palestine, an era in which young halutzim (pioneers) during the early waves of aliyah were dismissed by some as “Hebrew-speaking goyim.”

The claim “we teach Yiddishkeit” clearly implies that the Ivrit be-Ivrit approach — with its emphasis on Hebrew and its systematic study as an autonomous discipline — is inimical to the study of sacred texts (limudei kodesh). Thus, an antithetical relationship is struck between the study of Hebrew and the study of Judaism. Liberate yourself from Hebrew and you fortify the ranks of the Torah army.

To be sure, there are a good number of Orthodox schools that stress the study of Hebrew and integrate it into the Jewish curriculum, but of late, these institutions have been placed on the defensive. For the decisive vote belongs to those who regard Hebrew as deterring the growth of Yiddishkeit, better known in English as Torah-true Judaism. These circles view themselves as the guardians and watchdogs of Jewish education — and their influence in restricting the study of Hebrew is considerable.

B.

Reservations concerning the study of Hebrew reveal a strange paradox and reflect the anomaly of Jewish cultural life in the United States. On the one hand, this milieu vaunts the fact that its schools teach “real Judaism,” rather than courses about Judaism. In other words, texts in the original Hebrew are examined, as opposed to lengthy introductions and surveys (in English) surrounding Judaism. They declare with pride that the Bible is taught in their schools from Genesis to Deuteronomy as the genuine Hebrew article, in contrast to other schools where the Hebrew writ is dwarfed by lectures on the Bible’s historical antecedents or by comparative analyses with ancient Eastern cultures and their impact. As for the students themselves, they may never even get to see or read Hebrew Scripture with their own eyes.

The success these religious circles can claim in educating students to remain fully committed Jews is the source of their pride and open militancy. Undoubtedly, graduates of institutions with a “right-wing” agenda possess a profound religious awareness and identify viscerally with the Jewish people. One rarely finds radical leftists or disseminators of pro-Palestinian propaganda in their midst, which is far more common among “alienated” Jews. This point is often raised as proof that “Look, we don’t teach Ivrit but our graduates are far more Jewish than their peers who are enrolled in schools that invest heavily in teaching Hebrew.” Yet that argument misses the point.

Learning classical Hebrew text without the fundamental and systematic study of Hebrew is self-defeating. If Orthodox Jews had supported the ideological premise that religious texts can be studied in translation, the problem would be solved. Instead, of shenayim miqra ve-ehad targum (lit. , reading the Scriptural portion of the week twice in Hebrew and once in translation), everything would be translated, which is the practice in some circles to this day. Such was the case for the Jews of Alexandria de facto if not de jure, who managed to create an impressive exegetical and cultural monument on the basis of translated text. The irony is that these institutions of Jewish education see themselves as the heirs of Slabodka and Volozhin, basing their educational philosophy upon the “Ivrit” and the thorough preparation of a page of Talmud. Consequently, even studying from a Soncino Talmud is tantamount to heresy.

Willy nilly, a covenant is stuck with the Hebrew language as a result of this guiding educational philosophy. Nevertheless, misgivings about Hebrew — dating back to the days of the Berlin Haskalah — one would have thought had dissipated by now, resurface from time to time. Rather than grapple with Hebrew and adopt it wholeheartedly because it is the sacred tongue in which the holiest texts were rendered, some educators ‘hung it. It is hard to imagine how depth or mastery are attainable in limudei kodesh without a solid linguistic base.

So long as Orthodox education is modeled on the “Ivrit” and “shenayim miqra,” those schooled in that system cannot do without a proper linguistic background. Lamdanut, or real scholarship, is impossible if the linguistic foundation is systemically flawed.

Religious educational institutions that minimize Hebrew often justify their approach with the theological argument that they are not in the business of teaching modern secular Hebrew, which they deem an indulgence or at best
an amusing distraction. Words like *gelidah* and *kadur regel* (Hebrew for ice cream and soccer) and the lexicon of everyday Hebrew are of no interest because the primary subject matter is *limudei qodesh*. Even those who would reject this approach because they identify with Hebrew and the Zionist dream that adopted Hebrew for practical use, will admit, if only out of respect for democracy and freedom of choice, that everyone is entitled to an opinion, including the foregoing one. But the reality is that the discomfort with secular Hebrew leads to the suppression of language study as a discipline crucial to the comprehension of the written word, a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Because the Hebrew of *gelidah* and *kadur regel* is suspect, administrators of some schools have built a wall around the language and neglect their dual obligation to impart strong language skills to students and to simultaneously and unconditionally insist upon the study of text in the original tongue. Hence, the paradox: How can one achieve real depth in a genre of Torah learning seeped in traditions of *hakha garsinan*, *ve-dog*, and *zeti u-lemad*—when the students lack the tools to comprehend, deduce, or extrapolate meaning from the words of the argument? If the fury has been unleashed against the *parparaot*, why the attack against the *miqraot*?

C.

The dismissal of careful reading and interpretation necessarily lowers the standard and the *lomdu* prized by leaders in Jewish education. It’s difficult to take the self-congratulatory “we teach” posture seriously if what’s being taught is sacred text with classical commentary and novellae and when any greenhorn knows that the students’ ability to decipher unvocalized, rabbinic text is poor.

The scores on a single surprise quiz generally suffice to expose this self-congratulation for what it is. The achievements, such as they are, are meager. There is no yeshiva that can honestly bask in the glory that its graduates know how to translate a Biblical verse properly and read Rashi adequately. Nor should the failure of the after-school Talmud Torah network be used as a comparison to measure the success of the yeshiva world. Those who boast that their students know how to translate a verse of Biblical Hebrew after twelve years of study are virtually advertising the bankruptcy of the system. Such accomplishments are the fruit of rote and repetition, a professionally useless education. A decline of standards in Jewish education is consequently inevitable because the method is at fault, much like the deterioration in the public school system, primarily in major cities.

The worst part of the deficit is that it prevents students from learning on their own. Effectiveness, albeit hard to measure, is the very touchstone of Jewish education. Academic achievement is assessed first and foremost by the ability of students to study independently, i.e., to read, analyze, and comprehend material at the proper level. Would anyone deny that textual comprehension is one of the aims of a yeshiva education? Yet how many high school graduates meet that criterion? How many can read a book in *halakhah* in the original and understand it well, let alone a more esoteric text of *piyyutim*?

There seems to be no correlation between the quantity of hours or years devoted to studying religious texts and the level of linguistic achievement. Small wonder that the translation text on a deeper level, which makes for an “improved religious experience.” In truth, this conclusion was consistent with the observation that Hebrew is an obstacle. Thus, in order to reinforce the religious experience, a new ritual based on the lingua franca of the time, usually German, was established.

The fruits of this “non-Hebrew Judaism” and the poverty of its religious experience are a lesson that Jewish history has been learning since the close of the eighteenth century, both in Europe and the United States. To their credit, let it be said that at least they were consistent. In contrast, the Orthodox milieu rejects “non-Hebrew Judaism” and its lifestyle and cleaves to the *kotzo shel yod*, the Hebrew letter of the Law. That being the case, why do they insistently remain betwixt and between? Those who predicate Jewish survival on the dictum *ve-shinantam le-vanekha* — the Biblical command that requires parents to speak, teach, and verbally drill their children so that they will love G-d — must transmit the verbal skills, or the *darkhei shinun*, that inform the fully committed Jew.

The paradox of Torah education is that it ridicules the assimilated Jews who can’t read a word of Hebrew at the same time that it mocks the study of Hebrew, owing to the fear, dating from the Mendelssohn era, that language is an untrustworthy child, the idolatry of maskilim and grammarians. Apparently these misgivings persist to this day. But rather than shun semantics and syntax, it would be wiser to embrace them and apply them to the study of sacred texts.

Sometimes another excuse is used, one that lays the blame on the shoulders of young teachers — the yeshiva graduates and “field workers” who interact with the real world of Jewish pedagogy — who, it is claimed, are unable to teach students the basics of Hebrew. They are not trained to think linguistically because the yeshivas will not validate linguistic study of Hebrew sources.

Textual comprehension in this milieu is usually gained by reading the text over and over during many long hours at the desk, which is an admission of failure. Yet that’s the way it is and it is up to the prime movers in religious education to do something about it — to train teachers how to teach Hebrew. Just as English instructors shouldn’t be allowed in class unless they know the language, and math teachers shouldn’t teach unless they know their algebra and geometry, instructors of *limudei qodesh* should not teach the subject unless their mastery of the sacred tongue is thorough.

A paradoxical attitude to the study of Hebrew characterizes a significant segment of the Conservative movement as well. Strangely, their rationale is similar to that of the yeshiva world, although the terminology differs. The yeshiva world favors expressions like Torah—true Judaism and *Jiidischeit*, whereas the Conservatives prefer the expressions “Jewish Heritage” and “Jewish Ethical Values.” These educators likewise maintain that Hebrew gets in the way of teaching and absorbing Jewish values. They claim that with the limited time at their disposal, not only can’t they devote hours to the study of Hebrew as a language but they can’t teach *limudei qodesh* in the original either. For the most part, that is the argument of after-school Talmud Torah teachers. Although their time is certainly limited, the perception that Hebrew is some technical or decorative fixture is a complete distortion of the basic values of Judaism. Anyone who has tried to teach Jewish values in any context other than the right one — in Hebrew garb — ends up teaching neither Hebrew nor ethics.

So long as translation served as a bridge between the Jewish experience and the external world, the Jewish framework was not weakened. Without a doubt, when translation ceased to be external but was internalized as an organic part of the religious experience, it became a factor in the forces of assimilation.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, leaders of Reform Jewry have spoken from the lofty peaks of justice and prophetic morality. Their speeches, however, end on the other side of the mountain, sans Jewish ethics, sans prophecy, and in distant, alien pastures. All that is left of their intellectual and historical opus is the dry bones of ideology. The religious and social history of European Jewry bears this out. What happened in Western Europe has been happening in the United States in the last few generations.

One cannot transmit Jewish values by making noble speeches about “Judaismus” in German or even in new English translations (notwithstanding their innovation and fine technique). Similarly, one ignores the essentiality of Hebrew at one’s own peril. At the very least, it behooves the decision makers and policymakers in the world of Jewish education to face the facts.

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*This article was originally published in B'itaron 9-10 (Winter/Spring 1981), pp. 80-83

1. Talmudic terms that mean “this is the way it should be read,” “examine” and “corrobore for yourself.”

2. *Parparaot*, literally “dessert”; by extension, something sweet but insubstantial. *Miqraot*, literally the “texts to be read.”
By Ari Lamm

Editor’s note: In the course of his interview with Ari Lamm, Rabbi Charlop made extensive reference to two letters that his grandfather, R. Yakov Moshe Charlop wrote to R. Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Kook, and to a letter that his father, R. Yechiel Michael Charlop received from several Rabbincic leaders of the old Yishuv. R. Charlop was gracious enough to share these letters with us. They can be found on the pages following this interview.

We would like to thank R. Charlop for presenting these letters to the readership of Kol Hamevaser.

As the grandson of a renowned talmid haver of R. Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Kook, could Rav Charlop share his perspective on the legacy of his grandfather, the legacy of Rav Kook, as well as on the broader issue of the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in our lives?

I have been asked whether we should still retain “Reshit Tzemihat Ge’ulatenu” (the beginning of the redemption) in the Tefillah li-Sh’lom Medinas Yisrael. I remember that R. Moshe Tzvi Neria z’t’l, who was very close to my grandfather, Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop z’t’l, and was one of his premier talmidim, excised Reshit Tzemihat Ge’ulatenu from the Tefillah le-Medinat Yisrael after the Oslo Agreement, and Israel began retreating, or at least advocating retreat from parts of Judea and Samaria. However, I don’t feel that I can stop saying it, or that anyone should stop saying it, even in the face of disappointment and foreboding.

May 4, 1948 (5 Iyyar 5708) is indelibly impressed on my memory: How the Bronxites trumpeted the fact that there were more Jews in the Bronx (660,000), than there were in the newly founded State of Israel (600,000).

Today, the Bronx has barely 35,000 Jews, while Israel (ba’kh) has a population of over 7.2 million, about 5.5 million of who are Jewish. I think that by all current calculations and statistics, Israel has, in the last year, superseded America as the world’s largest Jewish community. It has been the center of a kibbutz galayos the likes of which we have never seen before. After the Babylonian captivity about 40,000 Jews heeded the call to return to Israel and rebuild the Temple. And in the centuries that followed, we do not hear of great masses of Jews that came later. The Jewish population in Eretz Yisroel at its height, more than 400 hundred years later, hardly reached 5 million.

...And now, after only 60 years, we have reached that number and perhaps surpassed it.

In light of this, in light of tremendous economic and scientific progress, and most importantly, in light of the tremendous resurgence of authentic Torah learning, one wonders whether at any time, even during the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods, has there been so much Torah learning – at least quantitatively if not qualitatively.

...Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop z’t’sl, son of that Gaon ha-Ge’onim R. Yechezkel Leib Diskin z’t’l, a small complement of young, outstanding talmidei hakhamim was formed – attached to the Yeshivas Ohel Moshe in the Old City. Its chief purpose was to keep these talmidim from starving in those desperate days, and thereby ensuring the survival and perpetuation of Talmod Torah.

My father, R. Yechiel Michal Charlop z’t’l, only sixteen years old then, was selected to give the chabura to these budding Torah luminaries. Among this group, in addition to my father, were several other talmidim of my zeide, R. Yaakov Moshe Charlop – including R. Amram Blau z’t’l, R. David Ha-Levi Jungreis z’t’l, and R. Yaakov Yerucham Ha-Levi Katzenellenbogen z’t’l, figures whom later generations would never think to identify as talmidim of my zeide, or colleagues of my father.

Indeed, around 1924, my father – then serving miles and miles away from Jerusalem as rabbi in Omaha, Nebraska – received what must be reckoned today, in the passing of decades and generations, a memorable letter from Rav Dovid ha-Levi Jungreis, who later became the Rav and av beis din of the Edah HaChareidis of Jerusalem. Appended to the letter were personal, handwritten messages by R. Amram Blau, who was to become the head of the Neturei Karta and the fiercest antagonist of Zionism, and R. Yaakov Yerucham Halevi Katzenellenbogen, whose role was no less noteworthy as a no-holds-barred opponent of that movement of Jewish national rebirth. The letter was published, not long ago for the first time, in the Torah journal Moriah. In the introduction to this letter, the editors of Moriah describe the senders – Rabbis Jungreis, Blau and Katzenellenbogen – as talmidim of R. Yaakov Moshe, as we indicated before.

The letter was in response to one written by my father, commenting on an article recently published by R. Jungreis. As a postscript to this letter R. Amram Blau, incredibly, asks my father, whom he refers to as yedid nefshi, to help him (and presumably Rabbis Jungreis and Katzenellenbogen) in building a moshav outside Jerusalem devoted to Talmod Torah and working the land – Torah ve-Avodah.

As a counterpoint to this correspondence is an even more remarkable postscript in one of my zeide’s letters to Rav Kook in which he describes a series of private meetings between himself and Professor Chaim Weitzmann. These meetings took place either immediately or shortly after the British broke the grip of the failing Ottoman Empire and General Allenby marched into Jerusalem. My grandfather tells of urging Professor Weitzmann to go see Rav Kook upon his return to London (where, at the time Rav Kook served as rabbi), and strongly encourages Rav Kook to make every effort to see Weitzman. In that selfsame letter, my zeide recounts the discussion he had with Professor Weitzmann focusing upon the bedrock need for Eretz Yisroel to be a land of kedusha, to which Weitzman responded “ani dogel la-zeh,” “I [too] stand for this!”

These letters carried great hopes and, most importantly, the glimmering possibilities of their fulfillment. Can you imagine those who eventually became the Neturei Karta building moshavim in Medinas Yisroel for the purpose of Talmod Torah and working the land? Can you imagine Professor Weitzmann being dogel for a land of kedusha? Yet somehow, all of this went tragically awry, and it is a bekhi le-doros – a lament, a cry, for the generations.

Nevertheless, I still believe that we are living in a time of extraordinary nissim embodying, albeit not always as robustly as we might wish, the aschalta de-ge’ulah. My grandfather already used the term aschalta de-ge’ulah in a letter he wrote several days after the United Nations voted on the partition plan. He was upset by the partition, because the very idea of partition, the very idea that Jerusalem or any other part of Eretz Yisroel is not ours, was anathema to him. Nevertheless, he wrote to my father that this is undoubtedly aschalta de-ge’ulah. Indeed, while we have been faced with many disappointments, we must put history in perspective and realize that the path of ge’ulah may not be smooth, but is certainly in forward motion – perhaps stutteringly forward, but always forward nonetheless.

Rabbi Zevulun Charlop is the Max and Marion Grill Dean of RIETS.

Ari Lamm is the interviewer for Kol Hamevaser.

On the following pages:


ז"ע

וי"ע

יתבך — לאו ציוו, כי לא חסונת חלודת ואילך.

ירדוכו.

אכין עבדים ותלמודים המוהים, ומשב שטח ומשב שטח,

אלהוה חור מבר יקרוסים מהתמאים מקרוב.

מצור יחזק המשה הדרים.
Whatever the source, its mazal, or its filaments, for it is known to those who walk and those who do not walk.

May the hand of our Lord, who creates in the heavens and in the earth, strengthen and uphold you, and may the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, who sent his angels to destroy Sodom, give you a good portion and make you fruitful and multiply you, as it is written:

And you shall be a blessing. Genesis 12:3
BY DR. RUTH A. BEVAN

As Zionists, we need to reassess the nature of our Zionist commitment as Israel celebrates its sixtieth birthday. We need to fashion a New Zionism. The old Zionism produced the revolution in the life of world Jewry. It brought Jews across the world out of the galut and inspired them to rebuild Israel out of the swamps into the advanced society it is today. It produced the self-directed “new Jew” epitomized by the Israelis. We must never forget those initial swamps or that hellish galut in order to appreciate the revolution wrought by the old Zionism. We now need a New Zionism to sustain and further this revolution, one attuned to the rhythms and demands of our globalized world. This new Zionism must “go with the flow,” meaning it should rest upon an appreciation and use of the world’s current fluidity.

Let me elaborate.

The world has changed drastically since Israel’s rebirth in 1948. Perhaps the key characteristic of our globalized world, as opposed to the world of 1948, is continuous and massive movement across borders, actual and virtual. Jets transport us physically while the internet transports us virtually across borders wherever they exist—every minute of every day. Competing groups attempt to give coher-ence to this fluid world through the imagery and (de)sinformation they channel across the globe through mass communications. A group’s size is less important than its strategic leverage and financial backing. Herein lies the challenge for the New Zionism. Despite the physical dangers confronting it, Israel can not rely solely on military prowess for its security. The larger battle to be won has to do with the world of public relations and with education: it entails conveying information about Israel across the world.

At a recent conference on Israel at Brandeis University, the signature donor of the University’s Center for Israel Studies remarked that the Center seeks to spread the truth about Israel through research. We must participate, in our own way and through our own resources, in this important mission. Gratefully, Yeshiva University now has its own Center for Israel Studies with Prof. Steven Fine as its director. Such centers are springing up all over the country. Our YU Center will have its inaugural conference this month. These centers will be a much needed counter-weight to those universities whose Middle East departments have become anti-Israel propaganda mills. Let us remember this vital point: the facts about Israel speak for themselves. We do not have to manufacture an apologia for Israel. This ennobles our task.

Each one of us needs to be informed about Israeli history and contemporary issues. Ideally, each student should take a course on Israeli Politics (my apologies if this sounds like a self-interested plug for our Political Science Department but, in this case, our Department has an important role to play.) Notice that we are specifying Israeli politics, not Middle East politics. Our reasoning on this score is as follows: every Zionist needs to have factual information about Israel in order to inform others as well as to counter false accusations about Israel. All of us have a lot of work to do in this regard. We must accept this as a personal obligation.

While in Israel last summer as a fellow of the Brandeis University Israel Studies Summer Institute, I was struck by a significant change in attitude among Israelis concerning Diaspora Jewry. A faculty member of Bar Ilan, himself religiously orthodox, remarked in a public forum that he favored strong Diaspora communities. This, of course, means essentially a strong American Jewish community. Clearly, aliyah remains a Zionist priority. It now becomes supplemented, however, conceptually as well as actually, by the Diaspora community.

USA-Israel alliance re-enforces the prejudice. Furthermore, Markovits points to the low incidence of anti-Semitism in American history and subscribes to the idea that, regarding its attitude toward Jews, America is “different.” The point to be made here is that Jews have an important stake in American democracy. Our Zionist activities must include strengthening American democracy in whatever way we can and continuing to advocate for Israel in the American public forum. We must be informed and active citizens.

Today’s college students will be the crux of tomorrow’s Zionist movement. This New Zionism must be information-oriented and Diaspora-active. In this globalized world individual Jews can share living and working space between Israel and the United States. One can work for an American firm, for example, that operates in Israel. Or vice versa. Think about choosing professions that facilitate this kind of New Zionism. Think about professions in communications. In political activism. In teaching. Perhaps we need workshops for this purpose. Contemplate also that your generation will have to shoulder philanthropic and other financial obligations that allow the Jewish world to operate. There is important and exciting work to be done.

Let me leave you with one Israeli’s vision. At the Brandeis University conference Shlomo Avinieri of Hebrew University was the keynote speaker. Listening to his inspiring words created in me the sensation of sitting in the midst of a new Zionist congress. Avinieri dreamed aloud that each Jew should be given Christmas? One woman in the Yom Kippur Hanukkah

*(Image 223x327 to 569x582)*
BY SHIMSHON AYZENBERG

Moses Leib Lilienblum was part of the third and last generation of the Russian Haskalah before he became an ardent Zionist. The story that is tendentiously told of his transition corresponds to that of another early Zionist, Leon Pinsker: Sudden waves of pogroms in 1881 forced Lilienblum to reject assimilation and adopt Zionism. This is the conventional storyline, cast completely in the shadow of Pinsker, the more popular associate in the Hibbat Zion movement. But, in fact, as a former maskil, unlike Pinsker, Lilienblum never wanted to assimilate. Historians have had difficulty reconciling Lilienblum’s conflicting statements between his Russian and Hebrew articles from this period. Yet, these statements are less of a conundrum if we were to consider Lilienblum’s entire life-work.

Lilienblum was born in Kardainai (in the province of Kovno) in Czarist Russia and was recognized by his mentors as an illuy (wunderkind) for mastering the entire Talmud at an early age. After he wed at fourteen he was provided for financially by his in-laws to study the Talmud. He moved to Wilkomir with his wife and opened his own Yeshiva. There he began to read maskilic literature, which often stressed Jews’ need of social affinity with the “benevolent government” of Czar Alexander II. By the 1860’s “the Czar Liberator” not only emancipated the Russian serfs, but abolished his father’s ruthless cantonist system, and allowed for certain well-to-do Jews to settle outside the Pale of Settlement.1 In this period of heightened hope, unparalleled in the history of Czarist Russia, Lilienblum became more convinced that Jews had to be “men who accomplish worthy things, assisting the king’s country in their actions, labor and wisdom,” as Naftali Herz Wessely, an early maskil, wrote in 1781, in order to attract further economic and social betterment from Alexander II as his valued subjects.2

But, Lilienblum felt, the Shulkhan Arukh prevented Jews from being worthy of the Czar’s acceptance. Contrary to the first two generations of Russian maskilim, notably Isaac Leib Levinsohn (“the Russian Mendelsohn”) and Samuel Joseph Fuenn, who courted the government to impose upon the Jewish masses the new school curricula and modern dress, the third generation realized that change cannot be imposed. The rabbis must be persuaded of the maskilic cause to invite reform peaceably. Thus, in 1868, Lilienblum published his first article, Orhot HaTalmud (“The Way of the Talmud”), in the main literary organ of the Russian Haskalah, Hamelitz, asking the rabbis to join his humanitarian cause. He avowed that the intrinsic authority of rabbinic law was intended to be commensurate to particular historical circumstances. Now that the excess of these laws, from over the ages, is unsympathetic to the Jews living in abject poverty in the Pale of Settlement, Lilienblum prodded the rabbis to organize a synod to make Shulkhan Arukh less burdensome. The crop failures of 1867 and 1868 seasons bolstered his claim.

The rabbis, however, considered his article too rash, too radical. Thinking that he sought to undermine their authority, they hissed and cussed at him, mostly in the pages of an ultra-reactionary orthodox paper, Ha-Levanon. His article even aroused a storm of copious criticism from his friends and family. Passersby on the streets of Wilkomir accused him of monstrous heresy. He was forced to close-down his Yeshiva. The harassments got to the point that Rabbi Israel Elhanan Specter, the Rav of Kovno, used his esteemed influence to curb the disputable overreaction.

A year later, Lilienblum published the Nosafot La-Ma’an Orhot Ha-Talmud (“Additional Remarks to Orhot HaTalmud”). This time he accused the rabbis of purposefully falsifying Judaism, who, through their manifold stringencies would lead to many Jews to leave fold of Torah. Subsequently, Lilienblum was compelled to flee to Odessa, then the capital of an acculturated version of the Russian Haskalah. He automatically joined forces with a legendary radical maskil, Judah Leib Gordon, to crusade for reform in Judaism spearheading the Reform Controversy of 1868-1871.3

But by the 1870’s it was already quite evident that the Haskalah movement had undergone a tremendous ideological change. As the Czarist regime grew reactionary, threatened by the emergence of many small anti-Czarist social and revolutionary groups, self-professed delusions of the “benevolent government” were revealed for their foolishness and inanity. The maskilim, thus, moved ever closer to the liberal Russian intelligentsia, which stood at odds with the Romanov monarchy.

From the Russian intelligentsia, Lilienblum learned of Nikolai Chernyshevski’s novel, Shto Delat? (“What Is To Be Done?”). It was about an ascetic revolutionary dedicated to the Realism and Positivism of Dmitri Pisarov, an austere-looking Russian philosopher, who famously cried that a person’s pair of shoes was more important than all of Shakespeare’s plays.” With this practical advice, Lilienblum lambasted the previous two generations of maskilim for their cockeyed set of priorities, spending their days immersing in historical and philological research when millions of Jews were in a more urgent need of “bread, a sense of life, knowledge of the necessities.” Great and highly advanced nations like Britain and France could invest appropriate resources, time and money, for such nebulous subjects, but the Jews, who evince a most dreadful appearance, require advice on how to raise their meager standard of living. The bickering over Jewish chronology or grammar is vainglorious and unhelpful.

But with time and with a modicum of change Lilienblum’s patience simply faded. Doubtful of its strength, he ceased to think that Haskalah could reform Judaism. As he lost hope in Judaism itself, he disqualified himself from the Reform Controversy. He began to study the Russian language more fully to enroll into a university, which was his life-dream. However it should not be assumed that he abandoned his people for assimilation. The Jewish Question and religious reform were still on his mind. Finding no answer to these questions, he put his public advocacy on hold.

Then, as pogroms ripped through the Pale of Settlements in 1881 and Lilienblum hid from the marauding peasants, the answer became clear. The Narodnaya Volya, a radical terrorist group assassinated Czar Alexander II during a royal procession in St. Petersburg. Since one of the assassins was a Jewess, Hesya Helfman, the Jews were blamed forthwith. To the consternation of the younger maskilim, much of the Russian intelligentsia was either blissfully indifferent or downright proud of the pogromchiks. Even Leo Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev, internationally most respected Russian humanists, were peculiarly quiet. In response to these appalling collision of circumstances, Lilienblum wrote a series of articles for the popular Russian Jewish journal, Rassvyet, which were collected and published in book form in 1886 under the Zionist title, “On the Regeneration of the Jewish Nation” (O Vozvazhdeniy Evreiskavo Naroda).

The answer was Zionism/nationalism. Lilienblum’s Jewish nationalism starts out with Risorgimento and arrives at close proximity of the raison d’etre of “integral” nationalism. In fact, his formulaic explanation is kindred to Pinsker’s Autoemancipation. It became obvious to Lilienblum that land is what feeds this frenzy of hate and anti-Semitism. Can one blame the natives for rebuffing their strangers? Strangers are tolerated until they become parasitic, taking substantial amounts of the natives’ food and employment. Once that happens, the stranger could be politely bid to leave, or forcibly kicked out. It is “an instinct of self-preservation.”4 “A new age is upon us,” Lilienblum proclaimed. “It is possible to say that… the pogroms are but a flower of the birth of national consciousness across Europe and the fruit is only starting to bud.”5 “We must know that now begins the second chapter in the history of our suffering, a chapter of national fanaticism.” Any short peaceful time in the past “when Jews were accepted by liberal governments in the 19th century” was only a break between these two chapters, “How many bloody pages will be in the second chapter cannot be known. Therefore, we must strive to colonize Palestine.”6

He later elaborates in more pronounced “integral” terms: “History entered into a new motif, a nationalistic motif… History may develop slowly and allow for a reaction, but once it entered into its predestined path, it will go fully into the direction of its end-point. And what will be then? One need not be a prophet to confidently propound that the nationalistic civilization will ultimately be triumphant over cosmopolitanism… [and there] will be a pre-

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Moses Leib Lilienblum: A Revised Legacy of an Early Zionist

Kol Hameveser

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destined, recognizable, and irrevocable arrangement of each nationalistic society according to the racial right of each nation.”

There is no escape for Jews anywhere in Europe. In Russia there are physical pogroms, men beaten up, houses looted and burned, women raped, yet wherever Jews live in Western Europe as strangers, there are “paper pogroms,” laws that restrict them from fully participating in the country’s social and political spheres.

Only a physical homeland could transform the Jews from a “ghost-like people,” as Pinzker put it in his Autoemancipation, which roams aimlessly around Europe like a tribe of gypsies, in Lilienblum’s analogy, into a full-blown nation. The fact that unlike gypsies, the Jews have a history, language, and culture would, in itself, denote that their racial identity is salvageable and can be rehabilitated.  

The process of rehabilitation is twofold. First, poor Jews would be concentrated in Palestine. The rich Jews would pay for their transfer, so they build the infrastructure for future immigrants. Then, as more immigrants arrive, the religious and cultural questions would naturally solve for themselves by molding a new Jewish society when the settlers would need to inevitably find ways to cooperate with each other in a single piece of land.xiii Thus, with Zionism, solves the Jewish Question and indirectly, entertains the notion of Jewish sov-

ment in Judaism. He, perhaps naively, relied on the assimilated Jews to come back to their Jewish roots in droves to drive the rabbis to rewrite the Shulhan Arukh.xiv But, Lilienblum was not going to tailor Judaism for them as, he expressly pointed out, Reform in Germany. The synod of rabbis “may invent ways to circumvent laws of Moses but cannot negate them.” This statement puts the “Revelation” as the cornerstone of Judaism and Jewish identity. “The entire authority of the Laws of Moses is founded upon the idea that it is the product of the heavenly will of the Lord, without this ad-
mittance the Jews would not have a religion. Frankly, could anyone, even the smartest of people negate the laws that were established by G-d?”xv He devotes an entire article, the second in the series, to explain how the Mishnah and the Talmud acted as guidelines for reform and renewal of Judaism for every generation, nearly reiterating his Orihot HaTal-

mud.xvi

One of Lilienblum’s main tasks is to identify “the explanation for our religious indifferent.” He opines that Jews assimilated because “superiority of various formalisms, little detail, and punctiliousness in the ceremonial part of Judaism,” to the extent that even Jewish patience could not bear it anymore.”xvii Originally there were people who attempted to separate this minuta from Judaism, and cast aside its “medieval gloom,”—the early maskilim. But other Jews, who did not care for any principle, also began to cast this minuta aside en masse. It is a telling admittance, on Lilienblum’s part, that the first wave of maskilim opened a floodgate of dropouts. For a healthy process of reformation our task is to remove the reasons for this indifference: the systematic removal of the minuta of the Shulhan Arukh.

In stark contrast to Orihot HaTalmud, where Lilienblum called for reform to alleviate the toil of the rural religious Jews of the Pale, now he is willing to compromise for the well-to-do Jews, largely secular and urban, so they would have the means to come back to their people. He did not completely disregard his earlier religious reform work with Judah Leib Gordon. He placed it in the second category. The solution to the Jewish Question is for the Jews to immediately establish their own nationalistic state, where religious reform will evolve by itself. He criticized Gordon out of his positivistic attitude toward the earlier maskilim for wasting their time on objectives that were automatically futile. But religious reform should not be totally forgotten in the Di-

aspora, for the assimilated Jew needs to find his or her way back to Judaism, which is the only true identity of the Jew.

Shimshon Ayzenberg is a Senior at YC, majoring in Jewish History, and is working on his masters degree in Modern Jewish History at BRGS.

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2 Divrei Shalom Ye’emet, 13, (Vienna, 1826).
3 Wessely wrote this pamphlet, which became the first official document of Haskalah, in simi-
4 lar hopeful circumstances, after the enlightened despot, King Joseph of Austria, proclaimed the Edict of Tolerance on January 2, 1782, which allowed for Jews to study in German schools.
6 Vilna, was the other center of a more Beit-
7 Medrish type of Haskalah.
9 Fiener, 278
10 O Vozrazhenie Evreyskavo Naroda 4
11 O Vozrazhenie Evreyskavo Naroda 9
12 O Vozrazhenie Evreyskavo Naroda 12
13 O Vozrazhenie Evreyskavo Naroda 43
14 O Vozrazhenie Evreyskavo Naroda 27
15 O Vozrazhenie Evreyskavo Naroda 16
16 Kol Kisevi Lilienblum, (1902) 13-15
17 Kol Kisevi Lilienblum (1902) 29

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MAMLAKHTIYUT

BY GILAH KLETENIK

There is much to be said about Mamlakhtiyut — Ben Gurion’s term for Jewish sov-

ereignty — its definition, its compatibility with traditional Judaism and, further, the feasibility of its implementation by a nation foreign to self-rule. However compelling and complex these conversations are, they are essentially conceptual in nature — concerned more with the philosophical “what” than the practical “how.”

Thus, a more relevant question is: how ought the modern Jewish state act?

Considering that the State insists on being a “Jewish” one, it is not inappropriate to ex-

plore the religion’s classical texts in addressing this question. The obvious challenge to this method is that the Torah never directly, or even indirectly, entertains the notion of Jewish sov-

ereignty independent of a Jewish monarch, bound by halakha, empowered by God’s man-

date. However, this is not to suggest that there is no wisdom to be gleaned from the Torah on this matter. To the contrary, the Torah is rich in insight, universal in scope, and also very ap-

plicable to the deliberation at hand. This essay will focus on a fundamental Jewish idea, that of moral responsibility and its pertinent rele-

Vence to Jewish governance.

The Torah is in many ways merely a book of commandments and Judaism but a religion of laws. However, the system of mitsvot rests on the notion of responsibility — accountability to someone, something or some idea — the recognition that an entity beyond oneself is that which informs one’s actions. This responsibil-

ity often takes the shape of moral imperative. The Torah is filled with commandments de-

manding responsibility rooted in morality and justice.

The Jewish call for moral responsibility transcends time, place and circumstance; it is incumbent upon all, no matter when or regarding what, to stand up for morality. This all-en-

compassing accountability is particularly poignant in Abraham’s conversation with the Lord concerning the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In their exchange, Abraham calls God to task for what he views as unjust: “Shall not the Judge of all the Earth deal justly?” Abraham’s audacity to challenge God’s justness stems from responsibility and his perception of God’s responsibility to be just as well as an understanding of his own respons-

bility — to challenge anyone, even God, when justice is at stake. Moses follows in Abraham’s footsteps when, as leader of the nation he stands up to God, convincing God not to ex-

terminate the Children of Israel following the sin of the Golden Calf. These powerful con-

frontations with Heaven underscore the Jewish value in justice — to challenge even the moral-

ity of God’s actions. While these powerful episodes speak to all, they certainly provide partic-

ular potency for Jewish leaders, empha-

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Main text:

Practical Zionism: R. Yitshak Yaakov Reines and the Beginnings of Mizrachi

BY YOSEF LINDELL

Religious Zionism is heavily associated with the thought and efforts of R. Avraham Yitshak Ha-Kohen Kook. More than any of the other early Religious Zionist thinkers, R. Kook was responsible for creating a theological framework for Zionism that ensured the compatibility of national aspirations and strong religious values. R. Kook believed that the secular Zionist movement could be made holy by directing its efforts to the settlement and cultivation of Israel in preparation for the Messiah. Developing the land and infusing it with spirituality could hasten the coming of the long-awaited Redeemer. Under this umbrella of religious destiny, cooperation with secular and even anti-religious Jews could be sanctioned. This novel stance perturbed many of his religious contemporaries, and seemed to undermine the prevailing tradition for centuries—that the Jewish people must wait passively for the Messianic era to be brought by divine grace alone.

When one thinks of Mizrachi, the political arm of Religious Zionism, this Kookian view, which advocates a commitment to the Land and now to the State by virtue of its religious and ultimately Messianic importance, probably comes to mind. But Mizrachi’s beginnings were much different. The movement was founded by R. Yitshak Yaakov Reines (1839-1905), a man driven by a very different spirit than that of R. Kook. Where R. Kook was a dreamer, poet, and an idealist, R. Reines was a realist, activist, and pragmatist. The pernicious and unrelenting nature of anti-Semitism, not Messianic idealism, brought R. Reines into the Zionist camp.

The Chief Rabbi of Lida, a mid-sized city near Vilna, R. Reines was a brilliant Torah scholar and autodidact—he published works that presented an entirely new logical method for the systematic study of the Talmud. R. Reines was also a courageous and outspoken activist on many issues concerning Eastern European Jewry. His establishment of the Mizrahi Party within Herzl’s Zionist Congress in 1902 earned him the condemnation of many within the traditionalist camp. The story goes that the saintly Hafets Hayim himself came to visit R. Reines to plead with him not to ally within the traditionalist camp. The story goes that the saintly Hafets Hayim himself came to visit R. Reines to plead with him not to ally with the Zionist cause. And, in 1905, R. Reines established the first yeshiva in Eastern Europe to teach secular subjects and the Hebrew language in addition to the traditional Talmud curriculum.

But despite these achievements, R. Reines did not consider himself a visionary. Throughout his voluminous prosaic writings, he constantly speaks of the dire exigencies that drove him to his novel conclusions and the necessity that pushed him to follow through on his projects. It was the immediate needs of the nation, not an idealistic vision, which drove R. Reines’ creative spirit.

R. Reines concluded that in order to ameliorate the terrible injustices the Jews had suffered and to secure their future, they needed a safe haven—a homeland—where they would be free from oppression and persecution. In Kol Mi-Tsion, a letter to Mizrachi constituents, he passionately painted a dire picture: “The blood of our brothers is now being spilled more and more like water everywhere, the hatred for our nation is increasing in all the lands, pushing the Jews more and more from [a normal] life and bringing them to poverty, famine, sickness, suffering and submission of the spirit. … Our sons and daughters are being sold to another nation. … Judaism is being pushed aside more and more for other cultures and the name of Israel is being erased from the face of the earth.”

For R. Reines, Zionism was purely pragmatic political movement necessary to save the Jewish people from physical and spiritual danger. In stark contrast to the position of R. Kook, R. Reines believed the efforts of the Zionists had no connection to the Messianic redemption at the End of Days. In Sha’arei Orah ve-Simhah, he wrote: “And in all their [the Zionists] actions and efforts there is also no hint or mention of the final redemption. Their entire intention is only to improve Israel’s [the Jews’] situation and ennoble it with dignity … so that Israel should know that it has a safe place. … It is only an effort for the improvement of the nation’s physical situation.”

To counter the arguments of those who maintained that making a concerted effort to settle in the Land of Israel before the proper time ordained by God violated a prohibition against hastening the Messianic redemption, R. Reines responded that pure political Zionism had no connection to the Messiah. In this aspect, R. Reines’ ideology was similar to that of Theodor Herzl. Disillusioned by the growing anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe despite the emancipation of the Jews, Herzl gathered the Zionist Congress in 1897 for the express purpose of obtaining a homeland for the Jews that would guarantee their security. His approach, known as political Zionism, made him and R. Reines’ Mizrachi movement natural allies in

In conclusion, framing the conversation about Mamlakhtiyut around its applicability lends itself to everyday practical implementation. Viewing Mamlakhtiyut through the lens of moral responsibility is not only informed by Jewish heritage, but is universal in scope, while at the same time uniquely suited to the Jewish ethos. Herein lies the richness of this approach—it is both very Jewish while at the same time entirely secular. It is at once a submission to God’s ancient command while at the same time an expression of western modernity—in essence, the very epitome of the modern Jewish State of Israel.

The Torah and Jewish tradition do not imagine the possibility of a Jewish democracy. Nevertheless, Judaism has much to say about Jewish leadership—that a true Jewish leader is one who, like God, the archetypal leader, embodies morality. This analysis obviously invites the question: what exactly is morality? Maimonides derives from this conversation that to God, a Jewish governor ought to imitate His moral attributes and only in that way fulfills the Torah’s vision of Jewish leadership.

The Torah and Jewish tradition do not imagine the possibility of a Jewish democracy. Nevertheless, Judaism has much to say about Jewish leadership—that a true Jewish leader is one who, like God, the archetypal leader, embodies morality. This analysis obviously invites the question: what exactly is morality? Maimonides derives from this conversation that to God, a Jewish governor ought to imitate His moral attributes and only in that way fulfills the Torah’s vision of Jewish leadership.

The particular benefits of this moral-minded approach to Mamlakhtiyut are primarily twofold: its universalism and its sensitivity to Jewish national history. The Tanakh’s call for justice and morality is not directed exclusively to the Jewish people. To the contrary, it is instructed to all of humankind. In fact, many of the Torah’s moral tenets have been accepted as universal, or at least as Western values. Thus, this approach need not be in conflict with Israel’s western democratic nature; rather, the two might even compliment each other. Beyond this, the moral charge holds a particular poignancy to the Jewish people. It seems obvious why a nation oppressed for thousands of years and the victim of countless injustices ought to feel a unique responsibility to uphold justice and act morally.

Gilah Kletenik is Managing Editor of Kol Hamevaser

Gen. 18: 1-25
Exo. 32: 9-14
Exo. 33: 18
Exo. 33: 6-7
Guide 1:54

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the Zionist Congress.

Although R. Reines evinced strong inclinations toward political Zionism, this ideology itself was not the catalyst that led him to establish a new party within the Zionist Congress. Rather, R. Reines established Mizrachi in 1902 to oppose the Democratic Faction, a cultural Zionist party headed by Chaim Weizmann and Ahad Ha-Am. Hostile to traditional religious belief, Weizmann and Ha-Am wanted to appeal to discontented Jewish youth by re-formulating Zionism upon secular nationalist lines, stressing the synthesis between Jewish culture and Western intellectualism, as well as the revival of Hebrew language, literature, and art. R. Reines and others started Mizrachi, a party closely allied with Herzl, in an attempt to mitigate the Democratic Faction’s influence by focusing on what they believed to be the essence of Zionism—political activism in search of a Jewish homeland.xiii

R. Reines’ strongest affirmation of Zionism’s political side can be seen in his support of the Uganda Proposal. Although the Zionist movement desired a homeland in Palestine, the Ottoman Turks, under whose jurisdiction it lay, rebuffed Herzl’s propositions. Therefore, in 1903, Herzl proposed an alternative based on an offer from the British: an autonomous Jewish territory in Uganda. While, understandably, this famous proposal met with euphoric conviction, R. Reines did not support this offer from the British: an autonomous Jewish territory in Uganda. Consequently, Mizrachi, the movement founded to establish a plan for religious education and that represents “the first flowering of our redemption,” was established State of Israel, one prominent thinker in the DP camps found refuge in the newly established State of Israel, one prominent thinker transcended this debate of religious legitimacy and in doing so reaffirmed R. Reines’ position. R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in his moving essay “Political Zionism,” argued that the religious im-perative to support, sanction, and settle the State of Israel comes not from its Messianic character, but rather from the covenant of fate that binds all Jews to actively ensure their mutual survival. To R. Soloveitchik, it did not matter whether one believed that the State was a manifestation of the beginnings of the redemptive era or that one saw its secular govern-ment as a legitimate expression of Jewish authority. The refuge it provided in the wake of the greatest tragedy of Jewish history unequivocally confirmed its providential nature. Like R. Reines, R. Soloveitchik saw profound religious value in Israel as a safe haven from further persecution and dislocation.xvi

As I reflect upon Israel sixty years after its founding, I cannot help but wonder how R. Reines would view the contemporary situation. Ahad Ha-Am’s cultural Zionism has been forgotten. Even sixty years later, whether Israel represents “the first flowering of our redemption” remains elusively difficult to predict. Yet it is clear that this modern miracle of Jewish sovereignty in the land of our birthright represents a political and spiritual renaissance of the highest degree. Jewish pride has increased, and exiles that were dispersed to all four corners of the globe have found respite, rejuvenation, and a new life in the land of our ancestral heritage. In these respects, Israel and Zionism have exceeded R. Reines’ most ambitious predictions.

But national unity was also incredibly important to R. Reines. He saw the Zionist movement as a way to bond all Jews, religious and secular, under the common banner of renewal and return. The situation in Israel today—marked by extreme divisiveness on political issues and polarization in all aspects of religious life—would disappoint this visionary. Israel faces enough enemies from among the other nations. We must learn to minimize our differences and celebrate our shared heritage.

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This essay culls material from my undergraduate thesis, “Beacon of Renewal: The Educational Philosophy of the Lida Yeshiva in the Context of Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines’ Approach to Zionism,” now forthcoming as an article in Modern Judaism.

x See Luz, pp. 241-55.
xii See I.J. Reines, Shâ‘arei Orâh ve-Sinahah, Petah Tikvah (Tel Aviv, 1899), 24-25.
xiii See Nathaniel Helfgot to R. Moshe Meiselman in Yosef Lindell’s letter to R. Meiselman in Yosef Lindell’s letter, Sefer Tsiyonut ha-Datit 2 (Jerusalem, 1977), 475.
xiv I.J. Reines, Or Hadash be-Tsiyon (New York, 1946), 276.
xv Ibid., p. 256-57.
xvi See Luz, pp. 241-55.
xviii See Yosef Blau and R. Nathaniel Helfgot to R. Moshe Meiselman in Tradition 33:2 (1999) – Communications. I note approvingly their contention that although R. Soloveitchik believed in a pragmatic Zionism sans Messianism, that does not make it any less religious. Indeed, R. Reines more or less felt the same way.
IDF: Peace-makers or Warmongers?

SABBATH OBSERVERS OR HERETICS?

BY AVIVA STAVSKY

The Israeli Defense Force is known as one of the strongest, most technologically advanced military forces in the world. Strangely enough, the perpetual debate among Jewish thinkers is whether taking military action in order to gain political independence is permissible according to Jewish tradition and law. Sources from the Written and Oral Law give proof to both sides of the debate, thus causing uncertainty among modern political theorists as to whether Judaism champions or opposes war. Though one can find sources to verify both sides, a certain degree of militancy is arguably vital to the existence of the State of Israel, which is, according to many, a prerequisite for the survival of the Jewish nation. Mamlahtiyut, a neologism coined by David Ben Gurion to refer to the political sovereignty of the Jews, would practically have to encompass both Jewish Law and modernism in order to achieve independence while preserving Jewish identity.

In the Diaspora, Jews were considered a state within a state; they were often free to practice their religious traditions, but they weren’t given the rights of statehood, resulting in (This ready ought to say something like “instead suffering from”) political subjugation and repression. Over the centuries, the Jewish people were subject to cruel scrutiny from the other nations, possibly in part a reaction to the Jews’ view of themselves as the “Chosen People.”

This attitude of superiority pervaded Jewish law, whether in the differentiation between Jewish and gentile blood or the “resident alien” (ger toshav) status of the non-Jew in the Jewish state. Such an attitude, in addition to the timidity of the Jews because of halakha, led to the oppression of the Jews and therefore the need for a state to serve as their safe haven.

Once the reason behind the necessity for the state is clearly stated, its goals and course of action for achieving these goals are more easily understood and justified. Because the state was established for a people who had been politically oppressed, the state does not just serve to achieve independence. It must also be a tool for the people to combat those forces of opposition who have and continue to persecute them, resulting in the conclusion, I believe, that military force is not only justified, but necessary for the goals of the state. A famous source of this rationale is the commandment by God for the Jews to destroy all of the Canaanites. This biblical reference is utilized as an example of a “holy war,” a fulfillment of God’s will, as opposed to an “optional” or “unholy war.”

Rav Kook builds on this distinction between holy and unholy wars and says that wars fought for Israel are divinely or-
dained and therefore do not challenge Jewish Law. Thus, it seems logical to conclude that military force is both a permissible and necessary component of the Jewish state.

The next question that should be raised is the balance between nationalism and Judaism; between statehood and halakha. First and foremost, it is important to recognize that a total separation of politics and religion is simply impossible in any state because deeply held religious convictions will inevitably affect one’s stance on policy issues. In the case of a Jewish state, political power and halakha are used to maintain order in the state and in religion, respectively. The issue, however, with which Israel grapples is finding a healthy balance between the two forms of authority. Halakha seems to promote passivity on the part of the Jews when it comes to war. Biblical law places limitations on the justifications for waging war, and Talmudic law expresses its strong aversion towards cruelty to the enemy during a time of war. So it would seem that requisite for the success of Jewish statehood is a reconstitution of modern, essentially pagan, political tactics with halakha and a compromise between the two arguably opposing forces.

The issue raised, however, in Daniel J. Elazar’s “Kinship and Consent,” is the dilemma posed by Machiavelli: “a Christian prince has to choose between being a Christian or being a prince,” claiming that such a balance would be impossible.” Though arguably quite simple, the Archimedeian point raised by Professor Nathan Rotenstreich, which insists that the Jews should remain true to their beliefs but also serve to achieve independence. It must also be a tool for the people to combat those forces of opposition who have and continue to persecute them, resulting in the conclusion, I believe, that military force is not only justified, but necessary for the goals of the state. A famous source of this rationale is the commandment by God for the Jews to destroy all of the Canaanites. This biblical reference is utilized as an example of a “holy war,” a fulfillment of God’s will, as opposed to an “optional” or “unholy war.”

A nation cannot claim sovereignty over a land if it lacks a political system to govern its people. Elazar argues that due to the Jews’ prolonged lack of autonomy, halakha has become antiquated and atrophied from disuse. Therefore, searching for a way for Judaism to contribute to political theory, Elazar mined the roots of the Jewish people to find a hint of political thought, discovering that the idea of transferring powers, or “social contract,” is based on the original covenant between man and God. (Because the Jews asked for a king to enforce the laws of God, the ruler’s powers were limited by the laws and absolute power of God, thus, as I’ve interpreted, establishing, in some form, a system of “checks and balances.”) Thus, Elazar provides evidence for political theory penetrating Jewish tradition and law.

It is imperative, however, to establish Jewish political thought assiduously and mindfully because of the tendency of the rest of the world to misinterpret Jewish thought and course of action, resulting in oppression. While it is argued that halakha and state can coexist, based on a compromise that allows “religious Jews to live according to godly way of life in a state which lives according to worldly way of life,” how is this situation any different than that of the Jews in America today? The State of Israel, therefore, take a different approach in order to call itself a Jewish state. There must be a balance between halakha and opposing secular ideologies rather than a mere separation of the two. The Zionist interpretation of the Holocaust has always been that six million Jews died because they lacked a military force, a state-power. And while halakha does establish certain restrictions limiting the use of force, it is also important to recognize that Jewish law, to an extent, is ever-changing, which is most clearly exemplified by the fact that many Rabbis draw disparate halakhic conclusions based on the specific case with which they are dealing and the time in which they are living. It has become evident that a military force is not only justified by Jewish Law but arguably sanctioned by Judaism in order to guarantee the survival of the Jewish people.

However, while it seems to me that Israel has been careful not to conflict with halakha in its establishment of a military force, the question that is pertinent today is the battle within the state between secular Zionists and ultra-religious Jews. A Jewish state does not necessarily mean a religious state, and without making that distinction, religious Jews will continue to feel politically inferior, and the secular Zionists will continue to feel religiously inferior.

Though many will argue that a Jewish state without Jewish laws is no Jewish state at all, I have observed that the importance of Jewish tradition takes precedence over the intricacies of halakha. For the sake of regaining and preserving the many links in the chain of Judaism, including all sects within it, Israel must recognize that the common link between all sects of Judaism is not halakha, but rather Jewish tradition and heritage.

Mamlahtiyut, plain and simple, refers to the sovereign power of the Jews, the statehood of the Jewish people. Arguments have been raised as to the legitimacy of a Jewish state, resting on the idea that Jews have not contributed to political thought. However, once scrutinized, both the Written and Oral Law contain many hints of political theory. Once the idea of a Jewish political body is sanctioned by Jewish texts, it is inevitable that the justification for military force will soon follow. While statehood denotes independence, Jewish statehood requires a level of halakhic consciousness in obtaining autonomy. The moral values of halakha are important to retain for the success of a Jewish state, but I certainly do not believe it is necessary or appropriate for halakhic values not pertaining to political matters to pervade the Israeli government. It is important for the state to find a way to balance halakha and politics in the same way other countries do. The Israeli government should accommodate and respect the religious Jew but should not impose the views of the more right-wing Jews on those who are secularized. What I believe makes the State of Israel Jewish is that it embraces Jewish tradition and culture, thus appealing not just to the Orthodox Jews, but to all Jews.

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2 Nicholo Machiavelli discusses this point in reference to Christian virtues. See Ibid. 27.

3 Ibid. 22.

4 Ibid. 223.

5 Ibid. 22.


7 Ibid. 448.

8 Ibid. 447.

9 Ibid. 459.
BY ZEV ELEFF

This essay has been written in dedication to my colleagues, David Lasher and Matan Erder, and their incalculable efforts in reviving Kol Hamevaser; their product far surpassed my initial plans for the publication. May they continue to write, inspire, and write some more.

On the front-page of The Commentator’s special edition commemorating Israel’s 50th anniversary, Yehuda Burns published an article entitled, “YU, The Commentator and Israel: Through the Years.” As the longest running student publication within the University, Burns correctly theorized that by “looking back at [The Commentator]’s coverage of Israeli affairs throughout the years,” he would be able to gauge the student body’s Zionist fervor since the newspaper started in the mid-’30s.

While sifting from select issues when one might expect to find reports of Israel related news and editorials, Burns also points to growing relations between Yeshiva University and Israel toward the ‘60s and ‘70s. Indeed, in his attempt to cover over a half-century of news coverage of Israel in a single article, the writer swept through The Commentator’s history, pointing out key articles, among other events, visits to Yeshiva’s Main Center campus by Israeli Prime Ministers and chief rabbis; the development of AIPAC; and Dr. Belkin’s plan to encourage Teacher’s Institute students to study at Machon Gold’s Jerusalem campus.

What we wish to take issue with is Burns’s primary thesis, namely that “if there is an overriding trend to point out, it is how the news coverage increased as the years went by.” After reviewing Commentator editions from 1935-1948, it is clear that the above claim is untenable. Further, the author’s charge that “the exiles. Any Zionism, it would seem to these students, was good Zionism. Vehement criticism of branches of Orthodoxy, on the other hand, was far from un-touchable. During those years, the most scathing criticism on the subject was reserved for the more right-wing groups of American Orthodoxy. At the end of the 1936 academic year, the May 6 issue of The Commentator included an editorial decrying the decision of the Agudath Harabomin to refuse participation in that year’s World Jewish Congress on the grounds that its involvement in a nondenominational conference would be a detriment to Orthodox Jewry. “By their indifference and even opposition to Zionism,” the newspaper declared about the Agudath Harabomin, “they have already succeeded in causing the rebuilding of Palestine in an irreligious spirit.” Moreover, the editorial concluded with a striking criticism of the rabbinic organization’s lack of presence in American Jewish society. “Such problems do not exist for people whose minds have been hibernating among the petty questions of the Polish village of last century.” Indeed, the information provided in Burns’s article is incomplete if not spurious.

Despite the high volume of coverage in The Commentator’s pages from the time of its inception, the newspaper’s diligence in reporting on Zionism was at an all-time high in the months leading up to Israel’s establishment. What is more, during this later period, the newspaper continued its uncompromising support of all factions of Zionism. One example of the newsmen’s clear support is seen in a May 22, 1947 editorial entitled “U.N. Aftermath.” In the piece, the Governing Board identified and lashed out at the Jews’ enemies saying that “the Arabs, by stupid political maneuvering, damaged their own case. They monopolized the floor. They threatened to boycott the session; they threatened war.” Not missing a chance to criticize local opponents, the editors remarked that “the American positions can be best portrayed as a rape of justice” and ripped members of the American Agudah who “knew they had little or no hope of recognition, but sold their birthright for a hash of public sentiment.”

In addition, the Rav — who believed that “Yeshiva students must form the backbone of a religious pioneering movement” — stressed that although “Orthodoxy may not have a big share in the new state yet Torah will be fruitful in Palestine. Religious Jews will be able to live better in a Palestine ruled by Hashomer Hatzair than in an American Jewish ghetto like Williamsburg.”

Of course, the newspaper did not limit itself to drawing its readers’ attention to Israel’s financial concerns. Thus, following the newspaper’s history during this time, it would be remiss of any study of Yeshiva’s study body during this time period if we did not make mention of The Commentator’s stirring issue dated February 19, 1948. Before publication, Yeshiva students got word that Moshe Pearlstein, a member of the close-knit Yeshiva College class of ’46, had perished in battle. Shortly after graduation, Pearlstein made aliyah and enlisted in the Hagannah. Eulogizing their friend, the newspaper recalled that “Meshe always went out of his way to be a friend to all those he knew and this cordial spirit was what endeared him most to us. Arab bullets,” they concluded, “cannot erase him from our minds and memories of his years as our schoolmate will never escape us.”
Accompanying the editorial was a letter Pearlstein had sent to his parents shortly before they received the tragic news about their son. Originally written in Hebrew, the editors obtained it and had it translated into English. Just as The Commentator related to its readership 60 years ago, Pearlstein’s letter “acts as the finest tribute to the type of man he was.” Believing that Pearlstein’s words carry with it the power it had many years ago, we have reproduced the letter in full and unchanged from its original at the end of this article.

A few more articles and editorials dealing with U.N. and White House politics graced The Commentator’s pages over the next few months. Then, finally, it happened.

Without reserving any emotion, the May 20, 1948 issue of The Commentator hit stands announcing “Yeshiva Rejoices At Birth of Israel: Zionists Applaud Historic Occasion.” In addition to reporting on a large rally held days earlier (May 16) “by all branches of the Zionist organizations” at Madison Square Garden, the newspaper’s layout team inserted a copy of Israel’s Declaration of Independence in the center of the front-page surrounded by a watermark of a map of Israel.

Aside from including remarks made by Yeshiva President Samuel Belkin, Teacher’s Institute Dean Pinkhos Churgin and YC Dean Moses L. Isacks, the young writers took the opportunity to reflect in a simply titled editorial “State of Israel.” The piece began profoundly: “The thousand years of waiting have at long last ended. The land of Israel, built with the blood, sweat, tears and lives of countless martyrs who so longed for that land, now exists in the cradle of our religion’s birth. Our persecuted and down-trodden shall flock to Zion to receive letters from my friends in the United States. We may have been severely restricted, but we have a defender whose support will be constant, whose backing will not depend on bribes, oil, or politics.”

Over the next year, the student newspapers devoted ample space to the early travails of the State. On September 30, 1948, an editorial entitled “Assassination Aftermath” addressed the assassination of the Count of Vwlsbog Fokile Bernadotte. The United Nation’s Security Council believed that the Swedish diplomat, who famously negotiated the release of 15,000 prisoners of Nazi concentration camps, would help broker peace between Jews and Arabs. Unfortunately, the members of the Stern Gang who ambushed Bernadotte’s motorcade on September 17 disagreed. Like most columnists, The Commentator condemned the terrorist attack. “The murder of Count Bernadotte cannot be condoned,” the editors repudiated in the editorial.

“Last Letter from Moshe Pearlstein

I don’t know how you are receiving the news from Palestine these days. From the letters I’ve received from my friends and from the headlines of the “Herald Tribune” that I’ve seen, I got the impression that in New York they suppose the situation here is to be bad.

From the point of view of encounters between Jews and Arab gangs, it is clear that the Yishuv knows well how to defend itself. The truth is that a much greater number of Arabs have been killed. But the British don’t tell about that, because they want to incite the terrorists and they have no desire to frighten them. When the Arabs assaulted part of Tel Aviv, tens of the attackers fell. In the Old City, too, they received a blow. Everywhere the Arabs attacked, the men of Haganah engaged in punitive action. All this in spite of the British, who do not only not aid in the maintenance of order but also harass Haganah men.

In recent weeks I have been on guard duty in the environs of Jerusalem and in different sections of the city itself. Most of the time I have been with Americans – among them Carmi and Aryeh. Understandably it has been difficult to study in recent days, even when I’ve been free from duty. Now there is a new schedule, according to which we shall study for a fortnight and guard for a fortnight. The natural science lectures and laboratories were halted and I shall leave for two weeks of guard duty.

Should the situation continue for a long time, I don’t expect to waste any time. Most of the hours on duty, we’re free, though we are forbidden to leave the post. So I read and write. Now, if I find a companion, I’d like to study Talmud.

I am very happy that I have to privilege of living in Palestine today. I don’t think I could suffer living in the United States in crucial days such as these. I feel this strongly when I receive letters from my friends in the United States.

About the attitude toward Jews here, I’ve met Englishmen filled with respect for Haganah: the Arabs generally are wary. I’ve heard from many friends who traveled on buses from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem how the Arabs fled on seeing buses and trucks approaching the city. They were frightened of seeing Englishmen filled with respect for Haganah.

MOTHER wrote about the U.J.A. committee being sent to Palestine to examine defense problems. It is easy to understand the need for money today, if one just calculates the thousands who have been mobilized who must have their needs met.

With hope for days of peace and upbuilding and with love,
Your son,

Moshe Pearlstein
The Future of the Zionist Enterprise:
Let’s Not Worry About the Wrong Things!

BY NOAH CHESES

I recently heard a prominent Modern Orthodox rabbi remark that “maybe the Satmar Rebbe was correct after all; maybe the State of Israel is not the beginning of the flowering of our redemption.” These words made me shiver. I can understand why the Modern Orthodox community’s attitude toward the state of Israel is being tested. The problems in Israel are many and great: failed leadership, increased violence, poor education, a growing non-Jewish population, abandoned immigrant populations, increased awareness of the external threats posed by Iran and other terrorist regimes, and an uninspired vision for the nation’s future (a partial list). I cannot understand despair. The very fact that our community could entertain throwing in the towel is an absurdity.

The purpose of this article is to identify the origin of this poisonous, yet increasingly popular, outlook in the Modern Orthodox community, and then to suggest how we can redirect our attention elsewhere. I will argue that we cannot let our broad worries to lead to pessimism and despair, and should instead focus on more positive, constructive, and important matters. It’s a matter of attitude and focus.

In my work with Bnei Akiva and the Moshava camps over the past few years, I have heard many chanichim report that they are afraid for Israel because of the sudden realization that it has Iran and Hamas knocking on its doorstep. Knowing that most kids do not read any Israeli foods, has been replaced by a degree of calm and excitement which has come as a result of beginning to realize a dream.

It is finally happening. It’s happening because I can’t imagine beginning the next stage of my life somewhere else; because I can’t imagine falling in love, raising a family or growing old anywhere but in the place God told me to live. As the author Daniel Gordin puts it, “For after all, if there’s a place in this world that can make you cry, isn’t that where you ought to be?” If there is place that can move and stir my inner being on a morning jog through its green hills; in a makolet buying toilet paper that specifies which Shabbat desecrations I will not commit by purchasing it; when I wake up in the morning happy because I live in the land I know I’m supposed to call home—how could I choose any differently?

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The (Almost) Final Boarding Call

BY JAIMIE FOGEL

I am not a success story yet. Mine is a story fraught with trepidation, with the unknown and the undiscovered. After years of mental conditioning and preparation, the moment is quickly transforming from a far-off future endeavor into a present reality. Will the reality be as great as the dream? Certainly not, my rational mind responds, but then again, in the past few years I have garnered a greater appreciation for realities. Dreaming is step one, but dreams are intangible until realized and that brings me to where I am today: less then two months away from my aliya, a move which will carry me—alone—across six thousand miles, far away from my family and friends. Moving to fulfill a dream most of the world views as insane—to live the rest of my life in a bona fide war zone, smack in the middle of its often depressing, post-national existence.

The attack on Mercaz ha-Rav made it all real. I kept imagining myself six months from then, answering a frantic call from my mother wanting to make sure that I and all I knew were alright. Get ready, I told myself on that awful Thursday afternoon, because this will be an ever-present element in your daily existence. We may not want to admit it, but no matter how sorrowful one feels for those suffering in Israel, we are still somewhat grateful to be able to step onto the curb of 34th and Lexington or 185th and Amsterdam where the buses are still running as scheduled and the kids are still playing rowdily in the schoolyard. But this time, after receiving the text message with the tragic news, the distance was almost entirely swallowed. After all, the homeland of the Jewish people—no—my home had been attacked. The friends of children I will soon know, the parents of a population of which I will soon be a part, were screaming in pain. That Thursday, Israel stopped being the “Jewish homeland” and became my home. My backyard. My yeshiva. No more escaping outside into the normalcy of Manhattan. No more departure dates. That Thursday I finally understood that I had bought a one-way ticket home.

One of the most startling responses I received upon revealing my future plans was from an old high school classmate with whom I had lost touch. I ran into her outside the Stern dining hall and in the course of friendly conversation she asked me about my post-college plans and I told her about the upcoming aliya. Her eyes widened in shock as she replied, “Wow! That’s well, that’s fulfilling a life dream. Good for you!” I calmly responded, “Well, it’s the first step of a larger dream, yes.” I certainly wouldn’t call making aliya my ‘life dream’ because if this were my life’s fulfillment, that would imply that I’ve reached my apex at twenty-two—quite a disturbing thought. No, this is the first stage in a larger vision for a life steeped in service of God and service of the Jewish people in a state I like to call “an opportunity but not a promise.” For me, there is no more singing “le-shannah habah he-Yerushalyim” at the Pesah sedar and mase’ot! Yom Kippur wondering when I’ll really mean it; no more voluntary exiles in Miami and Long Island; no more desperation and longing to be anywhere but here.

Standing on the threshold of a life-altering decision which will drag me across vast oceans and which will make me a foreigner in a land I have always called my “home,” is to be present in a complex reality. Coupled with fears, doubts and occasional loneliness are thoughts, hopes and expectations for the start of what I hope to be a fulfilling life. The short period of irrational fear during which I couldn’t listen to the Israeli music on my Ipod or eat any Israeli foods, has been replaced by a degree of calm and excitement which has come as a result of beginning to realize a dream.

In the Purim story, when the decree of destruction was declared, Ester directed the people to implement them. As the young, tradition-minded individuals and communities, inevitably evaluate the current status of Israel. Let us not get bogged down with heavy questions like ‘Will Israel still be around in 60 years from now?’ ‘Will Iran and Hamas be successful in their plans?’ ‘Will Iran and Hamas be successful in their plans?’ Worrying about these questions is only counterproductive to the future of our home land.

Instead let us try to answer smaller but I believe more important questions such as, ‘where is Israeli culture headed?’ ‘How can the increasing gap between the rich and the poor be decreased?’ ‘How can immigrant communities (like the Ethiopians and Russians) be better integrated into Israeli society?’ ‘How can the internal conflict over Jewish identity be solved or simply managed?’ ‘How can the fear of Religious Zionism be rekindled?’ ‘How can we cultivate stronger religious and political leaders?’ ‘How can we be so deaf to the deafening cries of the Sderot community?’

The answers to these questions are complex, confusing, and contentious, but that is no excuse for ignoring them. A stronger effort must be made to formulate good answers and to implement them. As the young, tradition-loving Zionists, this task rests heavily upon our shoulders.

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