

# Hakhmei Lev

THE TORAH JOURNAL OF  
BETH AVRAHAM YOSEPH OF TORONTO CONGREGATION

VOLUME 5 • TISHREI 5784

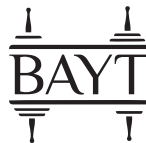




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## **Editors**

Chuck English

Dr. Gerard Klein

Rabbi Shmuel Leshner

Molly Morris

Rabbi Ken Stollon

## **Publisher**

Rabbi Daniel Korobkin

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## **ḤAKHMEI LEV**

The Torah Journal of Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation  
Volume 5 • Tishrei 5784

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This volume is dedicated to the memory of our parents

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This volume is also dedicated  
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ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

May the words of Torah in this volume  
be an *aliyah* for their *neshamos*.

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Yochanan & Batsheva (Sheba) Sanders

Joshua & Rachel (Maidy) Frankel

Rabbi Asher & Barbara Frankel

Rabbi Dr. Moshe & Esty Yeres

and their families





This volume is dedicated also to the memory of  
our parents' families who do not have *matzeivos*.

On our father's side:

אביו: הרב אשר ישעיהו בן הרב ישראל אריה זצ"ל

אמו: בת שבע בת הרב לוי יצחק ע"ה

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On our mother's side:

Her sister

אסתר סירקא ע"ה

who was the only Irish Jew to perish in the Holocaust,  
together with her husband

יחזקאל ע"ה

and their young son

קלמן ע"ה

ה.י.ד.

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May the words of Torah in this volume  
be an *aliyah* for their *neshamos*  
and all those שגורצחו ונשרפו על קדוש השם.

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Yochanan & Batsheva (Sheba) Sanders

Joshua & Rachel (Maidy) Frankel

Rabbi Asher & Barbara Frankel

Rabbi Dr. Moshe & Esty Yeres

and their families



Dedicated to honour the memory  
of our grandparents

*Chaim Leib ben Shlomo David*

*Pesel bat Gershon*

*Yitzchak ben Chaim*

*Irene bat Sion*

May their *neshamos* have an *aliyah*.

Zev and Emme Wasserman



This volume is dedicated in loving memory  
of our beloved parents

*Yaakov ben Avraham Halevi and Berel Leib ben Yisroel and*  
*Bryna Reeve Bas Yosef Eliyahu z”l Pessie Bryna bas Shmuel Moshe z”l*  
Jack and Betty Levine Bernard and Bettie Grichman

and our beloved grandparents

*Avraham ben Mordechai Leib Halevi Yosef Eliyahu ben Tzvi Aryeh*  
*and Basha bas Mordechai z”l and Chaya Sarah bas Mordechai z”l*  
Abraham and Basha Levine Joseph and Ida Tobin

*Yisroel and Leah Grichman z”l*  
*Shmuel Moshe and Yenta Tolchinsky z”l*

who were such an inspiration in our lives.

Lawrence and Adele Levine

L'iluy Nishmas

*Rochel bas R' Menachem Manes*

On the 50th Yahrzeit of our crown, our beloved mother,  
Rosalie (Roszie) Lebovic's (née Schick – Dym by first marriage)  
leaving us.

May she be a Melitzah Yosher for our family  
and all of Klal Yisroel.

Zvi & Vickie Dym  
Michael, Jackie and Rachel Lebovic



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## Editors' Foreword

IN PARSHAT BAMIDBAR (1:52) we are told that *Bnei Yisrael* were instructed to camp, “*ish al mahanahu, vi-ish al diglo*—each man with his division and each with his flag.” While one may think that tribal connections would be a threat to the unity of the Jewish People, the reality was precisely the opposite. Hashem clearly understood that, within a community of millions, true unity could only be established by recognizing and giving expression to people’s more personal networks. By meeting the tribespeople’s needs for affinity, being known and connected, the greater collective would in fact be stronger.

Our Shul was built on the vision of bringing together a wide swath of Jews and uniting them in an inspiring home of learning, spirituality, celebration and community. That vision became a reality in part because of the deep respect that was afforded to each of the communities that were part of our *kehillah*. Learning from the lessons of *Bamidbar*, each of the BAYT’s “tribes” were empowered to tend to their own needs and interests while at the same time meeting the broader communal imperatives of the Shul.

It is with that in mind that we proudly present you with the different voices of our *kehillah*. The contributors to *Hakhmei Lev* represent a wide array of backgrounds, views and *hashkafot*. Our contributors include rabbis, teachers, academics and business people. Just as was the case for *Bnei Yisrael*, this multiplicity of perspectives, this assortment of flags, gives this publication its strength and mirrors the *kehillah* from which it emanates.

It has been our honour and privilege to work with the many contributors to this journal. In many ways, our job is simply to put the wisdom and insight of our authors on a pedestal so that our readers can benefit from what they have to offer. We hope you find this issue of *Hakhmei Lev* to be inspiring, illuminating and thought-provoking—and that it contributes to the meaningfulness of the *Yamim Noraim* for you.

We wish you all a *Shanah Tovah Umetukah*—a very happy, healthy and sweet New Year. May you and your families be inscribed in the Book of Life and have all your prayers answered in the coming year.

The Editors



## | Publisher's Preface

**COMMENTING ON THE** limits of the human being's ability to make sense of the world, Carl Jung wrote:

Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend. This is one reason why all religions employ symbolic languages or images.<sup>1</sup>

This was how Jung introduced his thesis on dreams. Dreams are the unconscious mind's way of trying to make sense of things and concepts that far transcend the conscious mind's ability to define and comprehend. Ludwig Wittgenstein similarly stated, "There are, indeed, things, that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical."<sup>2</sup>

Centuries before an entire school of post-modernists, the Rambam in the 12<sup>th</sup> century emphasized the insufficiencies of language to properly express the world around us. Man perceives and attempts to explain what he perceives, but invariably falls short. This is why man cannot find proper language to express the concept of G-d. It is also why prophets see images, because language seems to fail when trying to make sense of very lofty and complex ideas. This is what led the Rambam to extol the virtues of silence, when contemplating Divine and other-worldly matters:

Silence and limiting oneself to the apprehensions of the intellect are more appropriate [than words]. This is what great ones have enjoined when they said, "Commune with your heart upon your bed, and be still. *Selah*" (Psalms 4:5).<sup>3</sup>

And yet, the Torah represents Hashem's use of language in creating the world. The first chapter of Genesis is replete with "G-d said, 'Let there be...' and there was." Our Sages tell us that G-d utilized ten statements to create the world (*Pirkei Avot* 5:1). *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation) is an early kabbalistic work attributed to Rabbi Akiva and to Avraham Avinu before him. It expounds on Hashem's use of the various letters of the Hebrew alphabet, using an almost infinite number of permutations of the letters, to bring into being all of our experiential existence.

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1. Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (Dell Publishing, 1968), p. 4.

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), 4.121.

3. Rambam, *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:59.

If language was employed by Hashem to create all that exists in our frame of reality, there must be substance to language despite its limitations. Ideas, as esoteric and elusive as they may be, must be confined into words as a means of transferring knowledge from one mind to another. We acknowledge that words are inadequate to completely convey the thoughts of the author of those words, but we also accept that there is still so much richness that can be communicated through this limited tool. Language may be limited, but it's the best we've got.

This is invariably on the mind of anyone who attempts to educate others with his or her words. It is a recurring theme that I hear regularly when soliciting authors for our *Hakhmei Lev* journal: "I have so many ideas, but I don't know how to transfer them into intelligible words." I recognize that writing comes more easily to some than to others; I also struggle for the right combination of words that will not only communicate my ideas, but will inspire others to become better versions of themselves. I have yet to meet or even hear of an author who is fully satisfied with their use of language.

That is why I wish to applaud the authors of this journal who have stepped forward and made invaluable contributions through their writings. Most of the authors in *Hakhmei Lev* do not write professionally. Their contributions are a labor of love. Each page of text represents time taken from their busy schedules or their families, in order to put pen to paper in the hope that others would be able to appreciate an insight that informs and inspires them. To all of our authors, we say, *yishar kohakhem*, a blessing that is inadequate to express the feelings of appreciation that we harbor.

I would in particular like to thank the members of the Frankel family who have dedicated this issue of our journal as title sponsors. Rabbi Dr. Israel Frankel, z"l, the patriarch of the Frankel family who are part of our community, published his doctoral thesis, entitled simply, *Peshat*, in 1956. In it, he effectively reconciled many instances where the Sages' interpretation of Biblical texts seemed to contradict the *peshat*, or the simple reading of the Torah's language. Rabbi Frankel argues that Hazal were fully aware of the *peshat* each time they interpreted the verses differently from the *peshat*, and incorporated their understanding of the *peshat* even while deviating from it in order to arrive at the final halakhah. Rabbi Frankel dedicated his life to a greater understanding of Hashem's words, and that is all that any of us can do. We thank the Frankel family for their kind sponsorship; may it create an *aliyat neshamah* for all their loved ones, including Rabbi Frankel.

Please see Rabbi Asher Frankel's article in this volume on defining the mitzvah of "*Viahavta Lireiakha Kamokha*." It is clear that he is continuing the legacy of his father, z"l, in elucidating and enhancing our understanding of the *peshat* of the Biblical text, and we are all the richer for it.

Profound thanks to our other sponsors, who kindly came forward with dedications after this preface was written. We recently discovered that printing costs have substantially increased over the past year, which necessitated soliciting additional donors to offset the increases. We gratefully acknowledge your generous support. May all the *neshamot* in

whose memory you have dedicated this journal be elevated through the immense Torah study that results from this publication.

Despite the limitations of language, it is the device Hashem gave us with which to communicate and understand His world. Let us therefore use our voices for this lofty enterprise of enhancing our understanding of Hashem and His Torah. In this spirit, we present our latest edition of *Hakhmei Lev*, which will hopefully help us enter the new year of 5784 with renewed understanding and inspiration. Finally, may those statements that Hashem used to create the world return into our hearts and minds so that we are all recreated anew through them in the coming year.

**Rabbi N. Daniel Korobkin**

Publisher

Elul 5783





### **A Note To The Reader**

The views expressed in this journal are those of the contributors alone. They do not necessarily represent the views of the editors or the rabbinic leadership of the BAYT.

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### **Contact Us**

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# **Yamim Noraim**



# | The Man of the Hour

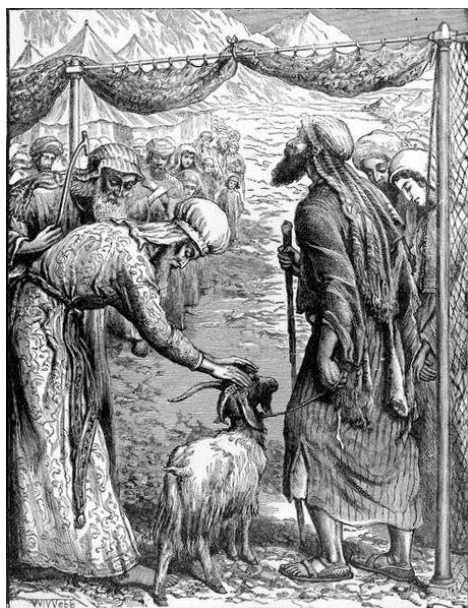
Rabbi N. Daniel Korobkin

WHAT IS THE most important ingredient that a religious mind must have? In order for a person to believe in G-d and an entire metaphysical system that includes the soul, angels, and an afterlife, it is vital for the religious mind to be imbued with a healthy dose of *imagination*. When one stops imagining things that are beyond one's sensory perceptions, then religious belief becomes quite difficult. What's more, imagination plays a very important role in enabling the person of faith to envision those things we read about during prayer and rituals. One of those very vivid images that we invoke during Yom Kippur is the Yom Kippur Temple service. We do so to inspire ourselves to *teshuvah* (repentance) and awe of the Creator. It certainly behooves us to find devices that enhance our imaginings of the Temple and the Temple service.

Being in the Temple during the Yom Kippur service must have been fascinating. There was so much going on, and to be a spectator would no doubt be quite thrilling and inspiring. One of the most mysterious parts of the Yom Kippur *Avodah* (service) is the *Se'ir La'Azazel*, the Scapegoat that was sent into the wilderness as a way of atoning for the sins of the Jewish people.

In this essay, we will focus on a person who is easy to overlook. He is known by different names: One is "*HaMeshele'ab*"—"the Sender," and in the Scriptural passages we'll focus on, he's called the "*Ish Itti*," literally, "the Man of the Hour," or, "the designated man." The Torah states (Lev. 16:21):

Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities and transgressions of the Israelites, whatever their sins, putting them on the head of the goat; and it shall be sent off to the wilderness through an *Ish Itti*.



*Sending Out the Scapegoat, by William James Webb (1830–1904)*

## Defining the Man of the Hour

Why is the person who sends the goat into the wilderness given this strange appellation, the “*Isb Itti*,” “the Man of the Hour?” We look to the commentaries, who pick up on the word “עת,” which means “time” or “period,” as in (Eccl. 3:1) “For everything there is a time (זמן), and a period (עת) for every object beneath the heavens.”

1. Targum Yonatan translates the term into Aramaic as, “גִּבְרַ דִּי מְזִמֵּן מִן אֲשֵׁתִּיקָד”—“The man who had been designated from the year before.” Rashi offers a similar explanation, that it simply means a pre-designated individual. The word “עת” thus refers to the fact that at a previous “time,” this man was designated.
2. Rashbam and Ralbag understand this phrase to refer to a man who is well versed in navigating the pathways in the wilderness. He is so proficient that he can travel at any “time” when he is dispatched, and does not have to wait for optimal weather conditions to embark on the journey. It was necessary to find such a person, since atonement through the Scapegoat could only occur one day a year, on Yom Kippur, and so the service needed to be performed at a specified time regardless of the weather conditions.
3. Hizkuni cites a very cryptic Midrash: The reason he is called “*Itti*” is because his “time” on this earth is limited. The Midrash relates a tradition that anyone chosen to send out the Scapegoat would not live out the year. When the *Kohanim* interviewed candidates for the *Isb Itti* position, they would peer into each person’s astrological forecast, and would only select someone whose astrology indicated that he would die within the year.

Besides being quite bizarre in concept, this Midrash cited by Hizkuni is also mysterious because there does not seem to be a source in the traditional Midrashic texts for this idea. However, we do find something akin to it in the Zohar, which also states that the *Kohanim* who selected the *Ish Itti* could recognize upon his face that he was destined for the task of taking a goat into the wilderness:

What does “*Ish Itti*” mean? The secret of the matter is this: Whatever must come to be requires a person who has been preselected to perform that task. There are some people who are more prone to have blessings brought on their behalf ... and there are other people who are more prone to have curses brought on their behalf .... Here, too, the *Ish Itti* was primed for this task, and he had facial features that indicated his proneness. This was particularly true for his eyes, in that one eye was larger than the other, it appeared that his eyes were dyed with eyeliner, and he was cross-eyed. Furthermore his eyebrows were particularly hairy. He is thus called the Man of the Hour, because he was preselected for this task.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the Zohar’s commentaries explain that the facial features on the man’s “eyes and eyebrows” have a “death appearance,” indicating that he will not live out the year.<sup>2</sup>

What emerges is that there is a dispute as to whether it’s an honour or an insult to be the *Ish Itti*: According to Rashbam and Ralbag, this person is a trained desert traveler and is chosen because of his prowess in maneuvering through rough terrain and not being afraid to be in the desert alone. This man is honoured because of his unique skill.

According to Hizkuni and the Zohar, however (and this also may be what the Targum and Rashi are alluding to), this is a person who has been chosen because we know he’s going to die in the coming year. Imagine the person who has just been selected by the Sanhedrin to be the *Ish Itti*. They might tell him, “We have good and bad news .... The good news is that you’ve been chosen as the *Ish Itti*. The bad news is...” You get the idea.

## The Mishnah

Let’s examine how this man is depicted in our Oral Tradition (*Mishnah Yoma* 6):

3: They turned over [the goat sent to *Azazel*] to the person leading it [out to the wilderness]. Anyone could lead the goat out; however, the leading priests fixed a procedure [that a *Kohen* would lead it out] and would not allow a *Yisrael* [i.e., a non-*Kohen*] to lead it out. Rabbi Yossi says, It once happened that *Arsala* led it out and he was a *Yisrael*.

4: They made a special ramp for him [who led the goat out], because of the Babylonians who used to pull at his hair, and say to him, “Take [our sins] and go quickly, take [our sins] and go quickly!” The leading citizens of Jerusalem

1 Zohar, *Parshat Abarei Mot*, 63a–b (translation mine).

2 See Rabbi Pinhas Zahiri’s *MiZabav UmiPaz*, vol. 1, footnotes 216–217.

(“*Yakirei Yerushalayim*”) would accompany him to the first booth. There were ten booths from Jerusalem to Tzuk [the cliff to which the goat was taken], a distance of ninety *ris*, seven and a half *ris* per *mil* [for a total distance of twelve *milin*].<sup>3</sup>

5: At every booth, they would say to him, “Here is food and water.” And they would accompany him from one booth to the next, except for the last one, since the escort would not go with him all the way to the cliff, but rather, he would watch his actions from a distance.

6: What did he do [when he reached the cliff]? He divided the thread of the crimson wool, tied half to the rock, and tied the other half between its horns, and he pushed it from behind. It went rolling down, and before it reached half-way downhill, it was dashed to pieces. He returned and sat in the last booth until it became dark. And at what point did his garments become impure? From the moment he left the walls of Jerusalem. Rabbi Shimon says: from the moment he pushed it off the cliff.

The *Mishnah*’s depiction, together with the Midrash cited by Hizkuni, leaves us with several questions:

1. How could the Rabbis appoint someone as the *Ish Itti* if they knew (as cited by the Midrash) that this person would die? Were they not actively consigning someone to death?
2. The *Mishnah* states that the leading *Kohanim* would only allow a fellow *Kohen* to serve as the *Ish Itti*, even though the person could be a regular *Yisrael*. If the *Kohanim* knew the person would die, why did they limit the *Ish Itti* candidates to the *Kohanim*, which makes it seem like it is an honourable role?
3. When R. Yossi testifies that once a *Yisrael* named Arsala was chosen as the *Ish Itti*, is he disagreeing or agreeing with the preceding Sages? That is, is he suggesting that the case of Arsala represented the norm, contra the Sages, or that it was an exception to the norm, consistent with the Sages? Furthermore, why did he have to identify this Arsala fellow by name? Why didn’t he simply say, “One year they appointed a *Yisrael* for the task”?
4. Why did they need to construct a ramp to protect the *Ish Itti*—why not have him protected by the *Yakirei Yerushalayim*, the leading citizens of Jerusalem, who were accompanying him anyway?
5. The *Mishnah* states that the *Yakirei Yerushalayim* escorted him until his final station, where they left him alone. Why couldn’t they accompany him into the final station?
6. The Talmud (TB *Yoma* 66a–b) states that the *Ish Itti* had to be designated in advance. Even if he became ritually defiled (*tamei*), the laws of *tum’ah* were suspended to allow

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3 There are several opinions as to the modern length of a *mil*, which average out to approximately one kilometre.



him to enter the Temple in his *tamei* status so as to receive the goat. Why was it vital that this person be designated in advance and that no one else can take over for him in the middle, to the point of suspending the laws of *tum'ah*?!

## An Early Death for the *Ish Itti*

To answer our first question, as to how the Rabbis could appoint someone if they knew that this meant certain death within the year: We refer to the Zohar cited above, which states that people consigned to death have facial markings to indicate their fate. The Rabbis had a special talent of looking at a person's face and seeing the markings of an already condemned man, someone who was going to die within the year. They would approach that individual and give him the opportunity to die with purpose. Imagine knowing that you're soon going to die, and you have an opportunity to save the Jewish people before you go. Instead of looking at this as a death sentence, therefore, we can view it as one last act of kindness to an already dying person.

But why would they limit their choice to *Kohanim*? Perhaps because there may have been several people with those facial markings, but they wanted a person of honour to do the job. They would note that a fellow *Kohen* had the imminent death appearance and they would designate him as the *Ish Itti*.

Using this interpretation, some commentaries understand that R. Yossi was actually in agreement with the Sages; under normal conditions, it was appropriate to choose a soon-to-die *Kohen* for the job of *Ish Itti*. R. Yossi's contribution to this *Mishnah* is his recollection that one year, they could not find a single *Kohen* who had the imminent death appearance, and so they chose a man named Arsala, who, while not a worthy candidate, was the only person that year whom they identified as destined to die within the year.

With this explanation, we can now understand why this man was identified explicitly in the *Mishnah*: His name alluded to his unworthiness. The word "*Arsala*" means "hammock" in Aramaic.<sup>4</sup> In the work, *Kovetz Ma'amarim* by Rabbi Alexander Ziskind Maimon (d. 1887), the author states that a guard of an orchard is typically the person who rests in a hammock. He is a menial worker who gets paid minimum wage because he is unable or too lazy to do anything else.

Identifying the *Ish Itti* as "*Arsala*" implies that this man was like an orchard guard, which brought dishonour to the role of the *Ish Itti*. It was considered a great honour to be appointed as the *Ish Itti*, especially since he was shown so much respect, such as being escorted by the leaders of the Jerusalem community. This is why the job was granted to *Kohanim* alone. This man, Arsala, in some way degraded the position, since he was not a *Kohen*, but instead a regular *Yisrael*.

Before proceeding further, let us attempt a cursory understanding of this strange ceremony of using a Scapegoat as a means of sending our sins out into the wilderness.

4 This word appears in TB *Eruvin* 25b. *Tosafot*, *Ibid.*, s.v., "*Hakha b'mai askinan*" explain, based on a verse from Isaiah ch. 1, that it is a bed that is tied from one tree to another, i.e., a hammock, so that someone guarding an orchard will be able to sleep on it nearby.

Much has been written about the Scapegoat ceremony, and how it has the appearance of an idolatrous rite. It is described by our Sages as an offering of a bribe to the *Satan* who dwells in the desert, as a way of preventing the *Satan* from prosecuting against us on Yom Kippur. We refer the reader to the Ramban's Torah commentary to *Lev. 16:8* in which he deals extensively with the ritual of the Scapegoat, using a mystical approach.

## Will You be the Good Goat or the Bad Goat?

By contrast, Rabbi Don Isaac Abarbanel (ad loc.) has a more rational approach to this service. He explains that the entire service acts as a metaphor for the choices that people have to make in life: On Yom Kippur, we take two goats. One is designated as a sacrificial goat, slaughtered in the Temple and brought on the Altar. The other is designated as a Scapegoat, the goat that is sent out into the wilderness to its death. The Jewish nation can choose to either be close to Hashem, as is the goat that is offered as a *korban*, or the nation can choose to be distant, as is the goat to "*Azazel*" (wilderness).

The Scapegoat represents the Jewish people who have gone into exile because of their sins. It is up to the Jewish people to decide on an annual basis which "goat" they would like to be: the good goat who stays with Hashem in the inner sanctum, or the bad goat who is sent away into exile because of its sins. Abarbanel understands the word "*Azazel*" to be a contraction of two words, "*Az*," impudent, and "*Azal*," departing. It describes the fate of a sinful nation who act impudently, namely, that they are sent into Exile because of their sins. The entire service, for Abarbanel, is a visual reminder of how the nation needs to choose wisely in order to maintain the gift of *Eretz Israel* and to avoid being sent into exile.

Abarbanel then asks: In this metaphor, who is the *Ish Itti*? Whom does he represent? When thinking of the Jewish people as a whole, the *Ish Itti* is the party who sends the Jews into Exile for their sins. Abarbanel therefore identifies him as any number of villains in Jewish history who caused exile for the Jewish people. Most notable is Nebeukhad-nezzar, who sent the Jewish people into exile after destroying the First Temple. But, the term "*Ish Itti*" could refer to any anti-Semitic nemesis throughout our history: Haman, Antiokhus, Hitler, etc.

Modifying Abarbanel's metaphor slightly, perhaps instead of the Scapegoat representing the Jewish nation as a whole, this ceremony can also metaphorically address the individual Jew. The lesson to each Jew is: You have choices to make in your life, and many times your choices will lead you to different places. Sometimes you will find yourself close to Hashem, and sometimes you will find yourself at a distance. If you find yourself at a place where you feel closeness to G-d, then you can compare yourself to the sacrificial goat, which stays close to G-d in the Temple. If you find yourself distant from G-d, however, compare yourself to that Scapegoat, which was sent to *Azazel*.

How do we deal with a state of being, in which we find ourselves distanced and disenfranchised from G-d? It's difficult imagining oneself as an unintelligent animal, since the real Scapegoat is merely led against its will. Instead, consider the role of the *Ish Itti*, who

is acting of his own accord, and let's imagine that we are that person. We would have to deal with being cast out into the desert, either because of our own sins, or because of circumstances beyond our control. By observing this man's behaviour, we will know how to react to those times in life when we are distant from G-d.

## The *Ish Itti* as the Wise Man

To build on this idea, we provide one more definition for the term "*Ish Itti*." It means someone who has been prepared in advance, as we cited above from Rashi. But according to the great Medieval grammarian Jonah ibn Jenah (11<sup>th</sup> century, Cordoba), the term also refers to a wise person:

The correct meaning of this term is a person who is wise and expert in the law. He knows what to do at the right time. The term is thus related to the verse (Eccl. 8:5), "At the time of judgment, the heart of the wise knows what to do."<sup>5</sup>

In a sense, Ibn Jenah offers a similar meaning to that of Rashbam and Ralbag cited above, that the *Ish Itti* is an expert at traveling in any climate. But instead of limiting his prowess to matters of travel and environment, this interpretation implies that the person is truly wise about all matters of the human condition. The word "עת" is used by the wisest of all men to express his philosophy on life, as we cited above from *Kobelet* Chapter 3, which describes how there is a "time" for everything. This is consistent with how Ibn Jenah relates the *Ish Itti* as a man of wisdom.

The lesson contained in the phrase "*Ish Itti*" is that each individual is charged to exercise wisdom in taking control of his or her life. We should not think we are passive observers in life, not in control of those situations when we find ourselves disenfranchised and distant from Hashem.

In fact, the Midrash on the verse in Ecclesiastes, "To everything a time," implies that sometimes, things happen in life because of our choices, and sometimes they occur independently of our choices. The text of the Midrash reads:

"For everything a time:" There was a time for Adam to be brought into the Garden of Eden, as it states (Gen. 2:15), "Hashem took Adam, and placed him in the Garden of Eden." There was a time for Adam to leave, as it says (3:24), "He chased Adam out..." There was a time for Noah to enter the Ark, as it says (7:1), "Come into the Ark, you and your entire family." There was a time for Noah to leave the Ark, as it states (8:16), "Leave the Ark."<sup>6</sup>

The Midrash presents an analogy between Adam's departure from the Garden, and Noah's departure from the Ark. But are the two really alike? Adam's ejection from the

5 (ערך ע-ו-ת) יונה בן ג'אנח. Also see the Netziv's *Ha'amek Davar* (Lev. 16:21) who quotes from a later grammatical work, *Sefar HaParbon*. Apparently, the Netziv did not realize that this work was merely quoting from Ibn Jenah.

6 *Midrash Zuta Kobelet* (Buber) 3:1.

Garden was a result of Adam's free choice, whereas Noah's departure from the Ark was determined by G-d, and had nothing to do with Noah's choices! What is the Midrash indicating by this comparison?

According to the theology of Izbica Hassidut, in retrospect, once the deed is done, *it does not matter*. Sometimes in life we end up in the wrong place due to our own poor decisions. We need to identify those poor choices that got us there, so that we learn not to make the same decisions again. There are other times, however, when we look back at the origin of our current plight, and note that others made the very same decisions that we did, and didn't end up with the same unfortunate outcome. Life leads us down different pathways, sometimes a direct result of our own decisions, and sometimes due to circumstances that were beyond our control. In retrospect, it is not helpful to alleviate our current plight if we obsess over our guilt in putting ourselves in our current position. Instead, we should accept our current situation as being part of some Divine plan, and focus on ameliorating our current situation so that we can better ourselves and those around us in the process.

Perhaps this is why the Torah emphasizes the “goral,” the lottery, in determining who will be the “good” goat destined for the Altar, and who will be the “bad” goat, to be cast into the wilderness. By definition, the winner of the lottery did nothing to become the winner, nor did the loser do anything to lose the lottery. It all has to do with the proverbial “roll of the dice.” The goat represents our current situation. It makes no difference how we arrived at our current situation, whether through poor choices or by chance. The *Ish Itti* represents how we choose to deal with those unfortunate circumstances in which we now find ourselves.

This idea of being circumspect about our current adversities is reflected in the Talmud (TB *Berakhot* 5a):

Rava, and some say Rav Hisda, said: If a person sees that he is suffering, he should scrutinize his deeds, as it says (Lam. 3:40), “We will search our ways, dig deeply, and return to Hashem.” If he scrutinized and found nothing, he should attribute his adversity to an insufficient amount of Torah study... If he already took that into account and discovered that he was not lacking, then he may rest assured that his suffering is the “affliction of love,” as it says (Prov. 3:12), “For those whom G-d loves, He rebukes.”

The *Ish Itti* is the person who is circumspect and realizes that everything is by Divine decree. If I find myself in a bad place, in the desert of life, then the one thing I am in control of is how I react and how I experience that moment. To be clear, this is not a theodicy claim, such as that of R. Akiva, who, when encountering adversity, was able to proclaim, “All that the Merciful One does is for the good!”<sup>7</sup> It is rather an appreciation that despite the “badness” of the situation, I know that there is something good for me to do and to gain from the experience.

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7 TB *Berakhot* 60b.

Using this explanation we can understand Rabbi Yossi's comment about the one *Yisrael*, Arsala, that was appointed one year. Instead of viewing the word, "*Arsala*," hammock, in a negative light, let us consider that there are many benefits to taking some time to lie in a hammock. Arsala was chosen precisely because he was the type of person who would spend a lot of time in a hammock, just lying there, thinking, and absorbing the moment. This is what is necessary, through both the good and the bad of life, to linger in that moment, to ruminate over one's condition, and to learn from and gain from it.

## Honour and Insult

In this sense, the dispute as to whether the *Ish Itti* is an honourable expert or a rogue is "*Elu v'elu divrei Elokim hayim*"—both opinions are correct. That is, it is really up to the *Ish Itti* to decide whether he is going to live through the experience of sending out the Scapegoat, or if he will perish ("die within the year") in the process. Using our metaphor that the *Ish Itti* is the contemplative person trying to make sense of adversity, such a person can either survive his current ordeal or succumb to it. If he properly prepares himself, if he allows himself to truly live in that moment, even in that moment of pain and estrangement, then he will live to the next year. His experience will make him an expert in "desert travel," so that the next time adversity strikes he will be better equipped to deal with it.

But if he attempts to escape the experience, if he doesn't look with the proper gaze at what it is going on—which is the deeper meaning of the Zohar's repeated reference to a problem with the *Ish Itti*'s "eyes" and "eyebrows"—then he won't "survive" the ordeal, and he will be worse off than when he had started.

We can now understand why the *Mishnah* is so insistent that this person must be pre-designated and cannot be replaced in the middle of the process. This exercise calls upon the individual to contemplate: "Hashem put me into this adverse situation, and I cannot get someone else to deal with it for me. Even when I feel overwhelmed by the pain, I must redouble my efforts and ride out the storm. I must do this, and I must do it *alone*."

The Talmud depicts a particularly indulgent sinner, Elazar ben Durdaya, as finally getting a hold of himself in a moment of epiphany. He initially thought he could invoke others to help him get through his plight, but then finally realized, "*Ein badavar taluy ela bi*"—"The matter is up to me alone."<sup>8</sup>

## Lonely Man of Ordeal

This is why the *Mishnah* indicates that the *Ish Itti* starts alone and ends alone. He starts alone, as witnessed by the fact that the Temple workers needed to construct a ramp for him because of the attacks of the wild Babylonians. He also had to finish the last leg of the journey through the desert on his own, as the *Mishnah* states, "They would accompany him from one booth to the next, except for the last one." The *Yakirei Yerushalayim*

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8 TB *Avodah Zarah* 17a.

are absent both at the beginning and at the end of his journey. Every person who goes through an ordeal can be accompanied at some point by friends and family who offer their words of support, but ultimately, the lesson of this procedure is: You are alone at the beginning when you experience the trauma of the ordeal, and you are alone at the end, when you see this process through to its end.

The final stage of the process is when the *Ish Itti* must push the goat off the cliff. This represents all of the baggage that one must exfoliate from his life as a result of his introspection into why he had to go through this ordeal. The person should consider: What absurdities, addictions, and unhealthy behaviours of my life and my persona must I jettison in order to live more healthily and to be able to move on? That is something I can only do by myself. No amount of solace and comfort from my friends will help; I must do this on my own.

## The Babylonians of Society Howl

Who were these wild and superstitious Babylonians who were trying to pull at the hair of the *Ish Itti* in an attempt to get him to move faster? Using our metaphorical approach, they are the voices in my own head, telling me to “move on, get past it, ignore it, just get over it, etc.” That is, a part of me just wants to go back to looking at my phone and put the pain behind me. Of course, that won’t work, and it’s foolish of me to think that I can block out the trauma that Hashem wants me to indulge in for my own self-growth. Despite the urgings of these “Babylonians,” the *Ish Itti* must soldier on.

Perhaps now we can understand a bizarre addendum offered by the Gemara as to who, exactly, these Babylonians were:

Rabbah bar bar Hanah said: They were not actually Babylonians, but were rather Alexandrians. The [Rabbis of Eretz Israel] only called them Babylonians [as an insult to them,] because they [the rabbis of Eretz Israel] hated the Babylonians [and anyone else who behaved inappropriately like them].<sup>9</sup>

Alexandria had a massive Jewish community, but was criticized by the Sages for its excessive opulence and indulgence. One example of this criticism can be found in the Midrash:

Ten measures of licentiousness are in the world; nine are in Alexandria and one is in the rest of the world.<sup>10</sup>

These Alexandrians represent the part of the individual that wishes to re-engage in the physical world so he can forget his problems. He wants to have a drink, go to a party, watch a ball game, go shopping, and do whatever it takes to drown out the moment. We see so many people like this in our own lives, and perhaps we ourselves can relate to

<sup>9</sup> TB *Yoma* 66b.

<sup>10</sup> *Midrash Esther Rabbah* (Vilna) 1:17.

the Alexandrians. After all, why is it that when we come to a place of great sobriety and contemplation, we want to drown the moment out with idle conversation and distraction?

Consider the person who is about to immerse himself into deep meditation or prayer, but then allows himself to be distracted by a tap on the shoulder of his friend. The psychology of the individual who would rather “schmooze” than pray is certainly understandable, since it can be sometimes be very difficult to confront the pain of being with yourself in front of G-d. The *Mishnah* addresses that individual and exhorts him to make a “ramp” which will elevate him above the distractions of the “Babylonians,” with all their babble, pulling at his hair, trying to pull him away from the task at hand.

## Greeting the Kohen Gadol

With this explanation we can also better understand another Gemara which describes the aftermath of the *Isb Itti*'s work. After he's done, Yom Kippur is over, and he comes back to Jerusalem:

When the meshale'ah [the *Isb Itti*] returned, if he would find the High Priest in the public square [out of respect and deference to the High Priest] he would say to him, “My sir, O High Priest! We have done your bidding.” But if he found the High Priest in his home [in private,] he would instead say, “O He who restores life [i.e., G-d], we have done Your bidding.”<sup>11</sup>

The Rashash notes that the appellation of “He who restores life” as a description of G-d is consistent with the Midrash cited by Hizkuni, that the *Isb Itti* knew that by performing this service, he would die within the year. His declaration was a way of asking G-d to offer him a reprieve and save his life.<sup>12</sup>

But we are still left with a question: Why was it necessary for the *Isb Itti* to be obsequious to the *Kohen Gadol* in public? Didn't everyone know that the *Isb Itti*'s task of accompanying the Scapegoat was not the *Kohen Gadol*'s private bidding, but rather part of a larger protocol, all prescribed by Hashem?! Why could not the *Isb Itti* praise and petition Hashem in public as well?

Using our metaphor, the *Isb Itti* is the person who has just contended with adversity. The public attitude is the same as that of the Babylonian/Alexandrian Jews, who take a dim view of confronting adversity, and instead just want to put everything behind them. We have all met these kinds of people. They are the ones who approach you when you go through a terrible loss, and ask you how you are doing. Before you have a chance to answer, they almost subconsciously say or gesture, “You'll be okay!” Because they, too, cannot wait to see an elimination of pain and suffering, and so, try to cover it over with whatever line or smile they can.

In public, the *Isb Itti* puts on a happy face. He says, even with a sense of triumph, “We got through it; everything's fine!” By praising the *Kohen Gadol*, it is as if he's “high-fiving”

<sup>11</sup> TB *Yoma* 71a following Rashi's explanation.

<sup>12</sup> Rashash (ad loc.)



his colleague for successfully getting through the ordeal. He is like the person, when asked a casual, “How are you?” responds with a smile, “Everything is great!”

But in private, when it is just between oneself and the holy man, the *Kohen Gadol*, one can be more honest, reflect on how Hashem presented a great ordeal to him, and say, “I am still struggling with this Divine decree. I know that Hashem is the ‘Restorer of life,’ and He has dealt this struggle to me so that I will improve in some way. Intellectually, I know this; but it is still very difficult, and I am doing my best to experience it the way Hashem meant for me.”

## The Ish Itti as Non-Conformist

The *Ish Itti*, the wise man, the man of the hour, is a person who doesn’t listen to the voices of the Babylonians/Alexandrians, who are pushing him, rushing him through the experiences of life. He represents the non-conformity of a wise person who chooses his own path. He is accompanied at times by other wise people, the *Yakirei Yerushalayim*, but ultimately he forges his own path by the end of his journey. All too often, we succumb to listening to the voices of the cacophonous public, rushing us to move on with life, pulling our hair by showing us another image on our phone or screen, and trying to get us to get to the next task without living in the moment. It takes tremendous courage to be the *Ish Itti*, since one is going against the grain of populist attitudes. He may even be the villain in others’ eyes, or, even worse, the sucker, because he’s doing the hard work that no one else would do.

This non-conformity is so important in today’s world, especially within the religious community. Each Jew is an individual, but also a member of a larger community. Following a halakhic system that governs one’s personal practices is relatively easy. The *sifrei halakhab* carefully delineate how one should lead one’s life. Following the rules of the communal order, however, can be more difficult, since the parameters are less well defined. Indeed, many conventions of Jewish communal life are just fads or nonsense that have crept in over the years. What clothes to wear to synagogue, how quickly or slowly prayer services are to run, how we choose to interact with irreligious Jews and non-Jews, are examples.

The lesson of the *Ish Itti*, as expressed by Rashbam and Rambam who depicted the *Ish Itti* as a man well prepared for the journey, is that in order to get through this maze of life in the desert, one needs both experience and courage. At some point in our lives, the individual comes to the realization: I am alone on this journey, so it doesn’t make sense to follow others who aren’t even part of my reality. Just because everyone else is following a certain *derekh* (path) in their growth does not mean it is right for me. Everyone has their own journey and their own solitary path.

## The Yakirei Yerushalayim

In addition to learning from the *Ish Itti*, we can also learn a lesson from the *Yakirei Yerushalayim* in this story. Their help and accompaniment to the *Ish Itti* was not their only job over Yom Kippur. Our Sages teach that the *Kohen Gadol* had to remain awake the entire



night of Yom Kippur, lest he accidentally experience a seminal emission while sleeping, rendering him unfit to perform the Yom Kippur service the following day. Different methods were employed to prevent the *Kohen Gadol* from nodding off. One such effort was made by the *Yakirei Yerushalayim*:

It was taught: A segment of the *Yakirei Yerushalayim* did not sleep for the entire night, so that the *Kohen Gadol* would hear constant voices from them, preventing him from falling asleep.<sup>13</sup>

Rabbi Mordechai Yehuda Leib Zaks (1906–1963) was the rosh yeshiva of Makhon Harry Fishel and the Rav of the Zichron Moshe neighborhood in Jerusalem. He observed that people could achieve the highest levels of holiness on Yom Kippur in the Temple. Who wouldn't want to be there while the *Kohen Gadol* was doing the *Avodah* and entering the Holy of Holies?

Yet, these *Yakirei Yerushalayim* saw that the *Ish Itti* was departing on his own and could use the moral support of being escorted. They gave up their holy experience to do something even holier, an act of kindness to a fellow Jew. They didn't want him to feel alone at a particularly precarious time in his life. Similarly, the *Yakirei Yerushalayim* stayed up the entire night to help the *Kohen Gadol*, sacrificing their own Yom Kippur alertness the following day.

This, too, is an important lesson. How many of us are ready to sacrifice our own personal holiness in order to help another Jew feel that he isn't alone? We can all decide to be either segment of the Jewish populace: We can choose to be the *Yakirei Yerushalayim* or the Alexandrian Jews. The choice is for each individual to make.

## Who is Greater: the Kohen Gadol or the Ish Itti?

I conclude with one final message that we might draw from the Yom Kippur service of the two goats, which directly contrasts the *Kohen Gadol* and the *Ish Itti*. In introducing the Yom Kippur *Avodah*, the Torah states (*Lev. 16:2*):

G-d said to Moshe: Tell your brother Aharon that he may not enter at any [arbitrary] time (*bikhol eit*) into the holy place that is beyond the Curtain, which would bring him face-to-face to the Ark Cover upon the Ark. In this way, he shall not die, for I appear in a cloud upon the Ark Cover.

Curiously, the Torah is creating a restriction for the *Kohen Gadol*: He cannot enter the Holy of Holies any time he pleases, and is instead restricted by the parameters in time and protocol of the Yom Kippur *Avodah*. By contrast, as Ralbag stated, “*Ish Itti*” implies that he's prepared to go to the desert at *any* time, which is why he's so indispensable to the service. In both instances, the word “עַתָּה” is employed, but it is used to restrict action “at any time” for the *Kohen Gadol*, whereas it used to describe the *Ish Itti*'s ability to act at any time.

<sup>13</sup> Yoma 19b.

Rabbi Yaakov Leiner of Izbica expresses an important lesson in his lengthy introduction to his Torah commentary, *Beit Yaakov*.<sup>14</sup> He cites the Zohar, which states that a *Kohen* who possesses a physical blemish—rendering him unfit for Temple service—accomplishes even more greatness than the *Kohen* who is unblemished and can do the *Avodah*.<sup>15</sup> When you are outside the Temple and can still find G-d, you are greater than the person who only finds G-d while immersed in holiness.

In the same vein, the Zohar extols the virtue of the moon, which voluntarily diminished its stature in order to allow for the divine plan to be realized. Rabbi Leiner explains that the moon is fullest when it is the most distant from the sun in relation to the earth. We only see the moon's fullness because it is reflecting the sun, which is completely on the other side of the earth. The moon is smallest when it is closer to the sun from our perspective. This, too, is a lesson in how one accomplishes even more when one succeeds in accessing G-d from a distance, just like the blemished *Kohen*.

We may apply this lesson to the *Isb Itti*. He is so called because whereas the *Kohen Gadol* can only accomplish his greatness at limited times and places and with specific protocols, the *Isb Itti* is always prepared to find Hashem in the wilderness of life. We often think that only the “holy people,” those who dedicate their lives to Torah study or communal life, are the ones who can accomplish true holiness and greatness. The lesson of the *Isb Itti* is that it is specifically the person who is not a rabbi, and who is not immersed in the Beit Midrash day and night, can accomplish more. Finding G-d in the office or workplace in the most mundane of situations is far greater than finding G-d in a page of Gemara or in the synagogue.

Most of us will never be the *Kohen Gadol*. But all of us can be the *Isb Itti*, even a man named Arsala. The lesson of the *Isb Itti* is: “Find yourself.” May we all have the fortitude to carefully examine the painful moments of our lives and ponder the difficult questions of why and how we got to where we are in this moment, and what we can do to move forward to the next level of greatness.

May we also rise to the challenge of finding love and appreciation of our life and the Giver of that Life at every stage. This is what our Sages mean when they said about the verse in Shema (*Deut.* 6:5):

What does it mean to love G-d “with all your might (*b'khol me'odekha*)?” That is, love Him in every measure (“*b'khol middah u'middah*”—a play on the word “*me'od*”) that He doles out to you.<sup>16</sup>

In this way, we can all truly become the “Person of the Hour.”

14 R. Yaakov Leiner, *Sha'ar Ha-Emunah*, (5756, Bnei Brak), p. 140–142.

15 *Zohar Parshat Vayeshev*, p. 181a.

16 TB *Berakhot* 57a.

# Yom Kippur and Overcoming Ambivalence

Rabbi Eliezer Breitowitz

AS WE ALL know, the annual days of introspection and repentance will culminate with Yom Kippur, which—in turn—will come to its climax with the emotionally charged final prayer of *Neilah*. *Neilah* itself will conclude—after the final recitation of *Avinu Malkeinu*—with our explosive seven-fold declaration of *Hashem Hu HaElokim*/Hashem is the L-rd. We are left with the incontestable idea that everything we will do over the ten days of repentance is somehow targeted toward that final moment.

Yet, this is difficult to understand, for when we investigate the sources for this practice, we discover that the recitation of *Hashem Hu HaElokim* is actually *anti-climactic*. It is not at all the apex of our ten-day spiritual ascent; it is actually nothing more than an expression of good-bye to the Divine Presence upon its departure.

You see, this custom of reciting *Hashem Hu HaElokim* at the end of Yom Kippur is a very old tradition. Tosfos in *Berakhos* (34a) and the *Sefer Mizvot Gadol*<sup>1</sup> both record the practice and relate the seven-fold repetition to the “Seven Heavens” that separate our world from the Heavenly Abode.<sup>2</sup> But why specifically do we recite this at the end of Yom Kippur? Explain the Levush and *Shulchan Arukh Harav*:<sup>3</sup> during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, the Divine Presence is in our midst.<sup>4</sup> With the conclusion of Yom Kippur, the Divine Presence ascends through the “Seven Heavens” and returns to the Heavenly

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1 *Lo Sa'aseh* 69.

2 See *Hagigah* 12b for details.

3 *Orach Hayim* 623.

4 See *Rosh Hashanah* 18a where the verse in *Yeshayahu* (55:6), “Seek Hashem when He is to be found; call unto Him when He is close” is understood as a reference to these ten days of repentance.

Abode. Accordingly, we “escort” Hashem along this journey with the seven repetitions of *Hashem Hu HaElokim*. I believe that there may be an additional basis for this custom, but to understand this we must digress for a moment.

When we contemplate the judgment of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the terms “*tzaddik*” and “*rasha*” immediately come to mind. Yet, surprisingly, they are hard to define. The Rambam seems to understand that these terms relate to quantifiable measures of good deeds and sins. As he writes in *Hilkhos Teshuvah*:

Each and every one of the sons of man has virtues and vices. He whose virtues exceed his vices is a *tzaddik*, and he whose vices exceed his virtues is a *rasha*; if both are evenly balanced, he is a *beinoni* (i.e., a middling person).<sup>5</sup>

There is, on the other hand, a statement in the Talmud (*Berakhos* 61b) that seems to imply that the terms relate to inclinations of temperament and personality:

It was taught that Rabbi Yosei HaGelili says: The good inclination rules the righteous ... the evil inclination rules the wicked ... middling people are ruled by both the good and evil inclination.

The Ba’al Hatanya writes that these terms—*tzaddik* and *rasha*—are used in different ways depending on the context. When we speak of the process of judgment, we use the “quantifiable measure” definition; a *tzaddik* is one whose good deeds are more than fifty percent and a *rasha* is one whose sins are more than fifty percent. When we wish to describe the spiritual stature of an individual by referring to him as either a *tzaddik* or a *rasha*, we use the “inclination of temperament” definition.<sup>6</sup>

However, Rav Yitzchok Hutner zt”l suggests a novel reading of the Rambam’s words which would align them with the Talmudic definition.<sup>7</sup> To Rav Hutner, “virtues exceeding vices” and “vices exceeding virtues” are not measures of quantity or weight; they are *indicators* of temperament.

However, while it is safe to assume that a person who has more virtues than vices is ruled by his *yetzer hatov*, there can be exceptions. A person can be fundamentally ruled by his *yetzer hara* and yet may still have more good deeds than sins; he may simply have lacked the *opportunity* to act upon his desires! Such a person would be defined as a *rasha*—and would be judged accordingly on Rosh Hashanah—even though his balance sheet shows a surplus of *mitzvos*.

But if temperament is the defining factor in the *tzaddik/rasha* classification, what then is the *beinoni*? He cannot simply be a person whose quantity of *mitzvos* and *aveiros* are balanced. Rather, he must be a person *whose very temperament is vaguely defined as he has no strong convictions*; exactly as the Talmud says—he is ruled both by the *yetzer hatov* and the *yetzer hara*. The truth is that if we were to define *beinoni* in the conventional

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 3, *Halakhab* 1.

<sup>6</sup> Tanya, Chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Pabad Yitzbak*, *Rosh Hashanah*, *Ma’amar* 18.

way, as a person whose quantities of *mitzvos* and *aveiros* are balanced, the *beinoni* would be an exceptionally rare phenomenon. After all, over the course of a year, we engage in countless activities; what is the statistical likelihood of a precise balance of good deeds and evil deeds? But if we define the *beinoni* as one whose temperament is equivocal, we immediately realize that this is extremely common. There are many, many people who have no strong feelings one way or the other; they go with the flow and follow the crowd. This, according to Rav Hutner, is the quintessential *beinoni*!

Now, let us return to the judgment of Rosh Hashanah itself. *Rosh Hashanah* (16b) teaches that the decree of the *tzaddikim* and *reshaim* is written and sealed on Rosh Hashanah; that of the *beinonim* is deferred until Yom Kippur. Argues Rav Hutner: if the definition of *beinoni* would have entailed a precise balance of *mitzvos* and *aveiros*, then doing one extra mitzvah would tip the scales of judgment in his favor. However, the Rambam says otherwise; only repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur can help the *beinoni*.<sup>8</sup> But why? Many answers have been given to this question, but Rav Hutner contends that the Rambam must be correct. If the *beinoni* is left hanging because his temperament is equivocal, it is that temperament that must change. An additional mitzvah will not be sufficient. Only a complete overhaul of his thinking and attitudes will remove him from the limbo of equivocation. That requires genuine repentance.

This insight of Rav Hutner totally reframes the *avodah* of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*—at least for those of us who fall into the trap of the “undefined middle” to a greater or lesser extent. These ten days are not merely an occasion for making technical corrections to the details of our religious practice. They are an opportunity for the clarification of our core values and self-definition. What do we truly believe? What are the goals for which we strive? For what are we willing to sacrifice and to what extent? And there is an urgency as well. The entire year we may allow ourselves to sit on the fence. But Hashem tells us that being a *beinoni*—that is, choosing to live a life that lacks conviction—can only be a temporary state. If the *beinoni* wishes to share in the positive decree of the *tzaddik*, by Yom Kippur he must declare where he stands.

Returning to the conclusion of the Yom Kippur service, let us ask: what is the Biblical source for the words *Hashem Hu HaElokim*? In the Book of *Melakhim Aleph* (Ch. 18), we read of the “contest” at Mount Carmel between Eliyahu HaNavi on the one side and the prophets of Ba’al on the other. Each side built an altar and was given a bull to sacrifice. Whichever side would be answered with fire descending from heaven would be the winner, so to speak; its deity would be confirmed as the one and only true god.

That such a competition was necessary indicates that the Jews of the time were undecided and ambivalent in the face of the competing claims made on behalf of Hashem and Ba’al. In fact, Eliyahu HaNavi expresses this very point in his rebuke of the Jewish people:

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8 *Hilkhos Teshuvah* 3:3.

Elijah approached all the people and said, “How long will you keep hopping between the two branches. If Hashem is the L-rd, follow Him; and if Ba’al, follow him!” But the people answered him not a word.<sup>9</sup>

In light of the thesis above, we now have the vocabulary with which to describe each of those Jews—*beinoni*! Hopping from side to side on even this most vital question—“Should we be devoted to Hashem or to Ba’al?”—they were ambivalent. Eliyahu HaNavi told them that the time to choose had arrived. They could choose Hashem or they could choose Ba’al, but they could no longer remain undecided.

The contest took place. The 450 prophets of Ba’al could not bring fire down from heaven and Eliyahu HaNavi did. When the people witnessed this, they rejected their equivocation by declaring the immortal words, *Hashem Hu HaElokim*—Hashem—and not Ba’al—is the true G-d.

It is no wonder that these are the final words we say on Yom Kippur. As we explained, Yom Kippur is our time to choose. At the final moments of Yom Kippur, we must confront our ambivalence. If we have been sitting on the fence all year, we no longer have that luxury. And so, when we come to our final decision—and hopefully the correct one—we echo those very words that were heard at Mount Carmel so long ago.

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9 *Melakhim* 1 18:21.

# | A Strategic Plan for Teshuvah

Molly Morris

**BEFORE I TELL** you my short *teshuvah* story, let me explain a bit about strategic planning.

Strategic planning is generally described as the process through which many companies set some goals for a predetermined future period of time. Companies who do strategic planning do so in order to increase their productivity, or their sales and profits, and to ensure they remain operationally efficient and competitive in the marketplace. Depending on the size and structure of the organization, strategic planning may occur on an annual basis, or they may set a strategic plan for three to five years at a time. Strategic planning is usually undertaken by a senior management team, in consultation with others, and participants in the strategic planning process generally either love (find it a very valuable tool), or hate it and would rather just jump into the work to be done. But, like with any endeavour, a little pre-planning makes the outcome of your project better.

If you sew, you've probably heard the adage, "measure twice, cut once." That's about planning. So, applied to strategic planning it could be rephrased as "plan carefully, execute successfully."

So, here is my story, and maybe it resonates with you. Every year, the month of *Elul* rolled around and I thought, "I need to start preparing for the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* (the ten days of repentance from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur)." Then, seemingly before I could blink, it was Rosh Hashanah and I thought, "OK, I'd better get ready for Yom Kippur." Then it was Yom Kippur and I would go to shul and vow, "I'll just be better this year." "Just be better." What does that mean?

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Clearly, I needed a plan. One summer, when I was working in a large organization and involved in a series of strategic planning meetings (yes, with my mind wandering and wishing I was anywhere else, because I've never been a lover of strategic planning), I realized that maybe I could make this a completely different, personal exercise for myself. After all, I thought, isn't *Elul* really about spiritual strategic planning?

So, this is an examination of how a basic strategic planning model can be applied to *teshuvah*.

There are many examples of strategic planning in Tanakh; some are obvious and some more subtle. An elaborate plan to free the Israelites from slavery will be discussed in more detail later. Joshua has a plan for conquering Canaan; King David strategizes a plan to defeat Goliath; King Solomon builds the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) with an architectural blueprint, a strategy for procuring materials, and a construction plan; and when Nehemiah returned from exile in Babylonia, he devised an intricate plan to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

All these examples, of course, begin with G-d's plan for His nation, and the end result could have been realized by G-d performing miracles. G-d could have lifted us out of Egypt and planted us down in the Land of Israel devoid of any enemies. That, in turn, would have eliminated the need for King David to go to battle. Similarly, G-d could have just made our *Beit Hamikdash* materialize when the time was right and returned us to a restored Jerusalem after our exile in Babylonia. But instead of miracles, G-d gave us strategic planners to build a nation: leaders with the ability to draw close to G-d, and through that partnership, collectively play a role in the nation's destiny.

## Seeing a Strategic Planning Model in the Exodus Story

There are several versions of standard strategic planning models, but, regardless of the scope of the plan, most contain some version of the following steps:<sup>1</sup>

1. Get ready (determine if the timing is right and what the process might look like).
2. Articulate the mission, vision and values that drive the plan.
3. Gather data or do an environmental scan to assess the current situation.
4. Agree on priorities.
5. Write the strategic plan.
6. Implement the plan.
7. Evaluate and monitor the plan.

Tanakh shows us the importance of planning, as mentioned earlier, and it is interesting to look at how the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt and subsequent travel to the land

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1 Michael Allison and Jude Kaye, "Introduction," in *Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide for Dynamic Times* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015).



of Israel fits a basic strategic planning model. Perhaps the early model designers had studied Tanakh (it could be!), and that informed their elegant methodology.

Let's see how the events in Exodus may be aligned with a basic strategic plan model.

## 1. Timing

G-d delineated the timing for the Exodus from Egypt way back in His covenant with Abraham:

And [G-d] said to Abram, "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end, they shall go free with great wealth. (Genesis 15:13–14)<sup>2</sup>

In this covenant, being strangers in "a land not theirs" did not refer to Egypt alone. The counting of 400 years began with the birth of Isaac, immediately after which Abraham's family was resettled in Canaan, which at that time was "a land not theirs." They remained there for 190 years, followed by 210 years in Egypt.<sup>3</sup> So not only was the timing right for the fulfillment of the covenant, it was mandated and pre-ordained.

## 2. Purpose

In Exodus 6:4–8, G-d clearly stated His purpose at the outset of the Exodus narrative was to honour His covenant with Abraham in which He promised Abraham a great nation and the land of Canaan:

I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners .... [A]nd I will take you to be My people, and I will be your G-d. And you shall know that I, G-d, am your G-d who freed you from the labours of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I G-d.

The purpose is multilevel: fulfill the covenant, free the people, and ultimately, make them G-d's people, and bring them to their own land.

## 3. Current Status

G-d articulated the current status of the situation that was driving the plan at this time. First, He told Moses:

I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings. (Exodus 3:7)

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2 This and subsequent translations are from Sefaria, [www.sefaria.org/texts](http://www.sefaria.org/texts).

3 See Rashi on Exodus 12:40.

The same status is reiterated a few chapters later in Exodus 6:5, after Moses' first appearance in front of Pharaoh, which ended with an even heavier burden being put on the shoulders of the Israelites:

I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.

The status hadn't changed, it had just become more compelling.

#### 4. Priorities

Although the ultimate priority was to “take you to be My people,” there were some steps along the way that required setting intermediate priorities, namely:

1. Appointing Moses as the leader;
2. Getting the Israelites on board with the plan;
3. Setting up the environment (Pharaoh and his followers) to not be an impediment to the plan; and
4. Freeing the Israelites from slavery.

The first person who needed to be on board with these priorities was Moses, and he was a hard sell, arguing, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11). But, of course, G-d had a plan to support Moses and he agreed to play his role. Then Moses' concern was about getting the Israelites on board: “What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me?” he asked (Exodus 4:1). G-d articulated his multi-stage plan to handle that eventuality as well, as described in Exodus 4:2–9. Ultimately, Moses carried out G-d's plan, and the Israelites, too, were on board: “[T]he assembly was convinced when they heard that G-d had taken note of (their) plight.” (Exodus 4:31)

#### 5. Articulation

G-d did not provide Moses with all the details of His plan at the outset, but shared the basic strategy framework with Moses, and said to him:

Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am G-d. I will free you from the labours of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. (Exodus 6:6)

In essence, G-d said, this is what will happen: you will be freed, and it will happen with miracles.

Later, G-d's methodology for executing this plan was provided to Moses in greater detail, on an as-needed basis, including how he would bring the people on board, harden Pharaoh's heart, bring signs, wonders and miracles in the form of the Ten Plagues and the events immediately leading up to, during, and following the Exodus itself.

## 6. Implementing the Plan

The implementation of G-d's plan to free the Israelites from slavery, become His people, and be brought to the Land of Israel is provided in great detail, constituting most of the Books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. One might argue that it began with the first words of Genesis, as the plan was always in place, and the foundations of it were laid from word one of the Torah. Every stage of the plan is strategically organized, from the pre-Exodus foundations to leaving Egypt to the revelation at Mount Sinai, through the years in the desert, right up to the border of the Land of Israel. Of course the plan continues from there, but our focus is narrower in this investigation.

## 7. Evaluation and Revision

Once the main priorities of freedom from slavery and establishing us as G-d's people at Mount Sinai were accomplished, a barrier to continued progress on the plan was presented. Moses couldn't continue as the sole leader of the nation: there was simply too much for one person to do. His father-in-law, Jethro, saw this stumbling block and suggested a revision to the plan: the delegation of resources that resulted in a hierarchy of leadership, who, working together, could move the plan forward.

As the nation approached the Land of Israel, a point in the implementation of the plan had been reached at which we understand that Moses was no longer the appropriate leader for the culmination of this mission. It's at this stage that a revision (at least in the minds of the Israelites, as it was always G-d's plan) in the form of a new succession plan is revealed to us.

## Strategic Planning and Teshuvah

Given the examples of careful strategic planning we glean from Tanakh, it could be valuable to see how else we might leverage the power of strategic planning. So, let's look at how a strategic planning model might apply to *teshuvah*.

Rambam's *Hilkhot Teshuvah*<sup>4</sup> identifies four main stages of the *teshuvah* process:

1. Acknowledging any sins committed.
2. Actively confessing to them.
3. Committing to not repeating them.
4. Regretting the sins.

Logically, we might assume that one needs to have regret before one can commit to bettering themselves. But Rambam adds regret almost as an addendum to a three-step process. One explanation of this order, offered by Avi Muschel and Martin Gala<sup>5</sup> is that it

4 *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah* Chapter 2. Note that there are various interpretations of how to group Rambam's steps. One good analysis is provided by the Orthodox Union. See [www.ou.org/holidays/the\\_four\\_steps\\_of\\_repentance](http://www.ou.org/holidays/the_four_steps_of_repentance).

5 Avi Muschel and Martin Galla, "Teshuva Is Not Depressing," The Benjamin and Rose Berger CJF Torah To-Go Series, Rosh Hashana, 5778 (RIETS, 2018). Also available at [www.yutorah.org/lectures/911417](http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/911417).

demonstrates Rambam's idea that committing to change may be successful in the short term, but long-term success can only be realized if there is genuine regret. Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, quoted in the same article, aligns regret with guilt, and though that's an essential element in *Vidui* (confession), and is an early step in the *Vidui* process according to Rambam, it comes with some danger. Guilt can actually paralyze us from taking action and moving forward, which is why, when discussing the essence of *teshuvah*, Rambam essentially says that there's plenty of time for guilt over the past *after* we make some positive change. Rambam doesn't want us to get mired in hopelessness. If we take some positive action first, then our guilt will be constructive and not destructive.<sup>6</sup>

There is, of course, a nuanced difference between regret and guilt; I can regret making one decision over another, and that may prompt me to consider a different choice the next time around. However, if I feel guilty to the point of paralysis, I may avoid situations in which I would have to face that decision in the future. The former is constructive, and the latter is destructive. For instance, I may wish I had been more generous with *tzedakah* in the past, and commit to finding a way to increase my *tzedakah* in the future. That is a worthwhile regret. But if I feel so guilty about not having the wherewithal to donate anything other than small amounts at a time, I may decide that my *tzedakah* isn't worthwhile, and leave the giving to others of greater means. That is destructive guilt.

Ultimately, what Rambam seems to be stressing, is that *teshuvah* is **action-based**, not merely a thought process. Further, if done right, it will involve positive action.

Like *teshuvah*, the goal of a strategic plan is to *actively* move forward and be better. While business strategic plans are usually focused on the material (increasing profits being the most common), the purpose of *teshuvah* is spiritual (to improve our relationship with G-d). Nevertheless, one can find parallelism between *teshuvah* and strategic planning.

1. Get ready. Determine if the timing is right for a new plan, and consider what that plan might entail. Are you, as the planner, ready to commit to a new plan? For *teshuvah*, this may be the pivotal question. If you're not ready for the change, then even the most elegant plan will be doomed to failure.
2. Articulate your mission, vision, and values. What is the underlying principle for your plan? In the corporate world, this is generally aligned with a business plan. But in the case of *teshuvah*, our underlying mission, vision and values come from Torah and boils down to coming closer to G-d and fulfilling the destiny He has already committed us to.
3. Assess your situation. Like the data-gathering and analysis that precedes any corporate strategic plan, we need to be honest with ourselves about where we stand at this precipitous time. What did we improve on over the past year? Where did we fall short? Most importantly, where do we see opportunities for new growth and development?

Companies will often include an environmental scan at this stage of planning, looking at what their competitors are doing, how they measure up, and where they can best

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6 Ibid.

compete. That competitive approach, when applied to *teshuvah*, may be detrimental at best, and seriously harmful at worst. Other than looking to others for inspiration, comparing yourself to anyone other than your best self, or competing to outdo your neighbour's *middot* (virtues) is not likely to result in meaningful, lasting results.

Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb<sup>7</sup> suggests asking yourself why you may be having trouble with a particular *middah*. Is there any identifiable link to a particular situation, mood, place, or time? Is there a trigger that takes you off the rails? This is a personal environmental scan, and the better you complete this stage, the more likely you will be to arrive at a workable strategic plan.

In essence, this stage of *teshuvah* is where we acknowledge the sins we committed, examine why, and consider what we can do about it.

4. Agree on priorities. You may not have a team working with you on your strategic plan for *teshuvah*, but you may have some allies. Identify them and let them in on your plan. If supporting you is their priority, then they can play a role in your plan's execution.

This stage of strategic planning and *teshuvah* is where you need to be very careful. A company would not release a plan that commits it to, for example, releasing new products to market, increasing its market share on existing products, reducing expenses, increasing revenue, reducing employee absenteeism, increasing employee engagement, and strengthening its leadership core, all within the next three years. If they've done a good job at their assessment, and have agreed on priorities, they may commit to just one of those targets, maybe two or three if they have the right division of labour.

So, too, with *teshuvah*, we need to be careful about not biting off too much. Be specific and realistic when establishing your priorities. If you over-achieve in your execution of the plan, you can add on to your priority list, but if you overwhelm yourself to begin with, you might suffer from a paralysis of action and achieve nothing.

5. Articulate your strategic plan. This is a critical step, because, as humans, we have a propensity, if not to forget, then to massage our memories to fit our needs at any point in time. Committing your plan to a document, including what, why and how you will proceed, keeps you from straying too far from your plan, and makes it easier to assess your progress.

Some strategic plan models add sharing the plan at this stage, as a way of ensuring that the plan designers are held accountable for its execution. A plan for *teshuvah* is a personal thing, something that you may not wish to share. But if you have an ally to share at least the broad strokes of the plan with, you may be more incentivized to follow through.

Steps 4 and 5 are where, in the *teshuvah* process, we commit to not repeating our sins.

6. Implement your plan. Start right away! Don't put your plan in a drawer only to revisit it when you've lost valuable time.

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7 Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb, "Strategic Teshuva," Ohr Somayach, [https://ohr.edu/holidays/rosh\\_hashana\\_and\\_yom\\_kippur/teshuva/457](https://ohr.edu/holidays/rosh_hashana_and_yom_kippur/teshuva/457).

If you haven't already done so, make sure you have set aside your guilt before you begin implementing your plan, to fully enable yourself to act on your commitment.

7. Monitor and evaluate your plan. Particularly for *teshuvah*, your strategic plan doesn't have a finite end, because *middot* are infinite. When the mission is to be closer to G-d, this specific plan is really just a mini-plan in a lifelong series of plans that we all will cycle through.

For both corporate strategic plans and your strategic plan for *teshuvah*, embed an evaluation cycle into your plan. Determine what success will look like after one month, three months, six months, and by the next *Elul*. If you are not making progress, evaluate why that might be. Maybe you took on too much in this plan. Maybe there was some unforeseen, external pressure that derailed your plan (the pandemic derailed many superb, well-designed strategic plans). Once you have a sense of your progress or lack thereof, you can tweak your plan to accommodate a new reality, or just get you back on track.

**A 7-Step Plan for Teshuvah: One of Many Approaches**

This strategic planning model for *teshuvah* is only one tool to consider. The process of *teshuvah*, as we have said, is very personal. A strategic plan approach may appeal to some, and fit well with their personality, but may fall completely flat for others. This is not meant to be presented as the right way to approach *teshuvah*, just one way. But if this approach appeals to you, below is a guide to help you begin.<sup>8</sup>

STEP	PURPOSE	ACTION
Get ready	Ensure that you are willing to begin the plan.	Ask yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Am I ready to make a change?</li><li>• Is this the right time?</li><li>• Do I know what change I want?</li></ul>
Articulate your goals	Be clear about what you want to achieve, and be realistic.	Be specific (e.g., improve my <i>davening</i> ), not general (e.g., be better this year).
Assess your current status	Honestly take a look at what you have achieved already, where you currently stand, and how you got there.	Ask yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did I get to this point?</li><li>• What is preventing me from moving forward?</li></ul>

<sup>8</sup> For a worksheet to help with your strategic teshuvah plan, feel free to download this sample, from <http://mollymorris.ca/Strategic-Teshuvah-Planning-Worksheet.pdf>.

<b>Set priorities</b>	Pick what is most important to you right now.	Don't take on more than you can realistically achieve; set a series of smaller goals.
<b>Articulate your plan</b>	Work out how you will achieve success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write down your plan, with details on steps you will take.</li> <li>• Share your plan or gather allies.</li> </ul>
<b>Implement your plan</b>	Without implementation all you have is a document.	Get started right away. Don't wait until <i>Neilah</i> on Yom Kippur and then have regrets.
<b>Monitor and evaluate</b>	Stay on track and revise as necessary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check in with your plan on a regular basis and assess your progress.</li> <li>• Adapt the plan as necessary, but don't abandon it.</li> </ul>

The need for strategic planning is embedded throughout Proverbs. King Solomon was so committed to humanity's need to integrate planning into our lives, that he promoted the idea of planning in Proverbs: "Commit your affairs to Hashem, and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3). Here, we are advised to make a plan that aligns our goals with G-d's goals for us, as individuals and as a people. That statement is bookended by similar messages in Proverbs: "A man may arrange his thoughts, but what he says depends on the L-ord" (Proverbs 16:1); and "A man may plot out his course, but Hashem directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).

The principle of strategic *teshuvah* planning is clear: simply making a plan and executing it isn't enough. Only through a partnership with G-d and alignment of our plans with His plans, will we stand a chance for success.

This *Elul*, let's make a good plan, and pray that G-d guides our progress.

# How To Find Spiritual Inspiration From Sefer Tehillim through Breslov Teachings: A Pathway For Teshuvah during Elul, and The 10 Days Of Awe

Chaim Oliver

## Find Oneself in the Words of King David's Tehillim

REBBE NACHMAN OF Breslov concludes his magnum opus *Likutey Moharan* with this teaching:

On reciting Tehillim (the Book of Psalms): Rebbe Nachman told a person with whom he spoke that the main thing in reciting Tehillim is to say all the psalms as referring to oneself, finding oneself in every chapter. The man asked the Rebbe, of blessed memory, how one does this. The Rebbe briefly explained: All the battles from which King David, may peace be upon him, implored G-d to save him—a person has to apply them all to himself, referring to the battle against the evil inclination and its forces.” (Part II, *Likutey Moharan* 125:1)

The same teaching appears in *Likutey Moharan*, Part II 101:1. “A person should endeavour to *find himself* within all the psalms, supplications, requests, penitential prayers.

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Furthermore, he can find himself within all the supplications and requests effortlessly, with no sophistication. Especially in Tehillim, they were composed on behalf of the Jewish people—on behalf of everyone personally.”

How does one find oneself in the book of Psalms and other teachings and prayers? This essay will explore answers to this question using Breslov sources where the phrase *Limtzo et atzmo* (to find oneself) or a derivative in form appears. I suggest the reader take some time to consider these quotes to forge a personal pathway for Teshuvah, spiritual growth and seeking Hashem, during *Elul*, Rosh Hashanah, the Ten Days of Awe, and Yom Kippur.

### למצוא את עצמו

We can find the phrase *Limtzo et atzmo* frequently (26 times, according to Sefaria<sup>1</sup>) across Breslov literature.

- Likutey Eitzot (3)
- Likutey Moharan (7)
- Likutey Halakhot (12)
- Likutey Tefilot (3)
- Sefer HaMiddot (1)<sup>2</sup>

Amazingly, 26 is the gematric number, being the sum of the Hebrew characters yud-hey-vav-hey, the name of Hashem.

Seeking one's truth and seeking repentance is a central teaching of Rebbe Nachman and his prime student Reb Noson. This essay will present a loose translation of these source texts. If possible, I encourage the reader to seek the material in Hebrew to attain a rich understanding and motivation.

### From Likutey Eitzot: Searching for Joy and Taking Responsibility

The effort to find oneself is a critical teaching found in Likutey Eitzot:<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, he should find the personal strength to come to joy from everything possible and try to *find in oneself* good points to go to joy. (Likutey Eitzot, Happiness 29)

Because every person, no matter what he is, *can find himself* reciting a psalm, he will wake up and make a return and come to the gate of Teshuvah. (Likutey Eitzot, Repentance 32)

1 [www.sefaria.org/texts/Chasidut](http://www.sefaria.org/texts/Chasidut).

2 An ethical work by Nachman of Breslov, edited and published by his disciple, Nathan. The book lists various character traits alphabetically and elaborates on them at length. The book is divided into two parts: The first section, written in the author's youth, contains more straightforward material, mainly drawing on Talmudic and rabbinic literature, while the second part was written at an advanced age and contains more complex original ideas.

3 Likutey Eitzot (Advice) is a seminal work in Breslov literature. Compiled by Reb Noson, the leading disciple of Rebbe Nachman, it presents a wealth of practical pointers gleaned from the Rebbe's teachings to help readers live with greater awareness and purpose.

It is not appropriate for one to *find in oneself* excuses for not performing a good deed because of the obstacles that might confront him. (Likutey Etzot, Obstacles and Inhibitions 3)

## Likutey Moharan: The Route to Simcha and G-d

The pieces below from Likutey Moharan<sup>4</sup> stress *finding in oneself* the good to move from sadness and lethargy to an awakening of simcha. Simcha is the pathway to true repentance and finding G-d. Implied is achieving a higher spiritual state where you find your truth as a spiritual being:

Thus, a person must search and seek to find good in himself to revive himself and attain joy. By searching until he finds a little bit of good in himself, he genuinely moves from the scale of guilt to the scale of merit and can return (to G-d) in repentance. (Likutey Moharan 282:2:4)

Although he knows within himself that he committed evil deeds and many sins and is exceedingly distant from G-d, he searches and seeks until he finds some remaining good. He then attains renewed vitality and joy, for it is undoubtedly correct that a person feels ever-increasing joy over every good point stemming from the holiness of Israel that he yet finds in himself. Then, when he revives himself and brings himself to joy through this, he can pray, sing, and praise G-d. (Likutey Moharan 282:10)

The central teaching of repentance is through King David. The root of the repentance of King David is the Book of Psalms, which he said in a state of very great awakening and with the Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh), so that everyone, according to his capacity, can find himself (his spiritual situation) in the Book of Psalms, to merit repentance through the recitation of Psalms. (Likutey Moharan, Part II 73:1)

Moreover, easily, with simplicity without wisdom, they will find themselves in all the supplications and requests, particularly in the Psalms, said for all Israel, for each one. (Likutey Moharan, Part II 101:1:2)

And the man asked him how it was possible to apply those verses in which King David, may peace be upon him, praises himself, for example: “Guard my soul, for I am devout” (Psalms 86:2), and similar such statements. The Rebbe answered him: This, too, one must apply to himself because a person

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<sup>4</sup> Likutey Moharan is incomparable to anything else in Chassidic literature—or, for that matter, any literature. It is neither a textbook nor a commentary but a revelatory work. The discourses or lessons (which Breslov Chassidim call “Torahs”) contain Rebbe Nachman’s perceptions of the essence of reality, garbed in lower levels of wisdom and packaged in a way that will enable the worthy student to gain access to these perceptions in a manner appropriate to the student’s capacity and spiritual level. Thus, each discourse is a complete path, tailor-made to every student in every moment, in a manner we cannot begin to fathom.

has to judge himself favourably. He has to find in himself some merit and good point that he is devout in this good point. (Likutey Moharan, Part II 125:1:3)

## **Likutey Halakhot: Find Yourself Through Your Good Points**

The Likutey Halakhot<sup>5</sup> by Reb Nosson teaches us:

Never give up! Start over every time to find yourself so you will not lose everything. Whatever you do, do it with all your strength. The main thing is patience: you must be infinitely patient (to find yourself). Take a long breath and never lose hope for G-d's help. Pay no attention to obstacles and distractions. (Likutey Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Laws of Phylacteries 5:7)

When not overcome by luxury and an over-preoccupation with fine wine and foods, he can find it within himself to set his mind afresh and find himself anywhere. He teaches there that this will bring out sentences of honest practices. (Likutey Halakhot, Choshen Mishpat, Laws of Lost and Found 5:11:1)

And therefore, he will certainly not fall by the fear of the punished; on the contrary, the fear of the punishment will strengthen him to find in himself good points and to make himself happy in what he sows. (Likutey Halakhot, Yoreh Deah, Laws of Firstborn Kosher Animals 4:17:2)

How could it be that he cannot find himself in the Book of Psalms, which includes everything in the world, in all the generations and all the levels of the world, from the beginning to the end. (Likutey Halakhot, Yoreh Deah, Laws of Three-year-old Trees 4:16:1)

It is a blessing to the Torah, however, that every person, as long as he still has mercy on himself and thinks of his eternal purpose, should try very hard to find in himself good points. To rejoice in the privilege of doing some mitzvot and good things. (Likutey Halakhot, Even HaEzer, Laws of Procreation 3:11:1)

It is then necessary to find oneself amid adversities. All the good and wonders that G-d has already done will be a blessing for him. (Likutey Halakhot, Choshen Mishpat, Laws of Unloading and Loading 3:34:1)

Do not hate your fellow. Love him and find within oneself the ability to see his good points and to love him. (Likutey Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Laws of Blessing on Sights and Other Blessings 5:6:3)

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5 Following the order of the *Shulban Arukh*, in Likutey Halakhot, Reb Nosson highlights a particular halakhah, presents an overview of the relevant concepts found in Rebbe Nachman's lessons, and then creates an original discourse showing how the Rebbe's insights illuminate the deeper meaning of the Halakhah.

## Likutey Tefillot: Examples of Hitbodedut from Reb Noson

The Likutey Tefillot<sup>6</sup> by Reb Nosson taught us:

But you warned us that man needs to search and ask for and find in himself good points, make his soul happy, and not fall in his mind from everything that may come. (Likutey Tefillot, Volume I 90:3)

O revive me by this and help me find in myself a straight path and correct advice by the ways of innocence and simplicity to seeing you, G-d, in every place, low and high. (Likutey Tefilot, Volume II 39:4)

King David, peace on him, infused the ability to find oneself in the holy word of Psalms. Recitation of Psalms enables one always to see oneself every day and in the recitation of Psalms—a route to true repentance. (Likutey Tefilot, Volume II 49:4)

## Take Your Time: Self-care on Your Spiritual Journey

Referencing the verse, “Guard yourself and guard your soul carefully,” (Deuteronomy 4:19) Rebbe Nachman tells us to take time in spiritual work and in and care for our bodies.

Within the Jewish tradition, there exists a profound emphasis on personal growth alongside a guidance for health, well-being and self-preservation. The concept of self-care can be understood as engaging in regular and recurring actions aimed at preserving and enhancing the well-being of one’s body, mind, and spirit. Such self-care practices may include:

- Prioritizing a specific bedtime to ensure an adequate amount of sleep.
- Learning to say no to situations and individuals that bring out negative qualities within oneself or deplete personal strength and positive energy.
- Embracing opportunities and relationships that bring out the best in oneself, revitalizing, soothing, refreshing, or invigorating personal strength and energy.
- Engaging in daily meditation and prayer.
- Incorporating regular physical movement and exercise into one’s daily or weekly routine to support the body.
- Cultivating creativity and engaging in crafting activities.
- Nourishing oneself with foods that promote a sense of well-being.

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6 Likutey Tefilot is a collection of personal prayers composed by Reb Noson of Breslov (1780–1844), a leading pupil of the outstanding Chassidic luminary, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772–1810). The Hebrew original of Likutey Tefilot consists of two parts containing 152 and 58 prayers, respectively, a total of 210.

## A Personal Meditation Created Using Advanced ChatGPT Prompting<sup>7</sup>

To engage with the quotes and deepen your understanding, I have created an exercise using an advanced ChatGPT prompt generated by [www.generatedby.com](http://www.generatedby.com), a partner of our company [creativeaiservices.com](http://creativeaiservices.com).

### ChatGPT

Here is the product of a prompt<sup>8</sup> created to solicit a response from Chat GPT:

#### Cultivating Love and Understanding for Others

**Introduction:** In the teachings of Breslov, Rebbe Nachman and his disciple Reb Nosson emphasized the importance of loving one's fellow human beings and recognizing their inherent goodness. In the quote you provided from Likutey Halakhot (Orach Chaim, Laws of Blessing on Sights and Other Blessings 5:6:3), the wisdom of Breslov literature invites us to transcend feelings of hatred and instead nurture a deep love for others. This personal meditation will guide you through a reflective journey to explore this teaching and cultivate empathy, understanding, and love for your fellow beings.

**Interpretation:** “Do not hate your fellow. Love him and find within oneself the ability to see his good points and to love him.” (Likutey Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Laws of Blessing on Sights and Other Blessings 5:6:3)

These profound words remind us that harbouring hatred towards others serves no purpose, neither for them nor for ourselves. Hatred only divides us, breeding negativity and conflict. Instead, we are encouraged to embrace love, not just as an emotion, but as a conscious choice and practice.

The quote invites us to embark on an inner journey, looking beyond surface appearances and shortcomings to discover the inherent goodness within every person. It urges us to seek the positive qualities and virtues that may be hidden beneath the layers of ego, hurt, or misunderstanding. By developing the ability to see the good in others, we can foster genuine love, compassion, and unity.

7 ChatGPT is a form of generative artificial intelligence—a tool that lets users enter prompts to receive humanlike images, text or videos that are created by AI. A ChatGPT prompt is a *phrase or sentence used to initiate a conversation with ChatGPT*.

8 You can adapt and use this ChatGPT Prompt by inserting one of the quotes above as I did between the parentheses—({{ ... }})—to actively explore and apply the wisdom contained within the quotes.

Ignore all previous instructions. Act as an expert in Breslov literature and personal meditation crafting. Based on the quotes from Breslov literature found in the quote provided in the article ({{Do not hate your fellow. Love him and find within oneself the ability to see his good points and to love him. (Likutey Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Laws of Blessing on Sights and Other Blessings 5:6:3)}}), create a personal meditation in the format of Reb Nosson's Likutey Tefilla. The meditation should focus on the quote ({{Do not hate your fellow. Love him and find within oneself the ability to see his good points and to love him. (Likutey Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Laws of Blessing on Sights and Other Blessings 5:6:3)}}). Interpret and explain the quote in depth, and then guide the reader through a meditation based on this interpretation. The meditation should be gentle, encouraging, and insightful, and should include a prayer that the reader can use. Remember to write in English.

## Guided Meditation

1. Find a quiet and comfortable space where you can sit undisturbed. Take a few deep breaths to center yourself and bring your attention to the present moment.
2. Reflect on the quote: “Do not hate your fellow. Love him and find within yourself the ability to see his good points and to love him.” Contemplate the meaning of these words and how they resonate with your own experiences.
3. Begin by focusing on someone in your life who may be challenging to love or understand. It could be a family member, a friend, a colleague, or even someone you have had conflicts with in the past.
4. Close your eyes and visualize this person in your mind. Allow any negative feelings or judgments to arise, acknowledging them without judgment. Take a moment to observe how these emotions manifest in your body.
5. Now, shift your perspective. Imagine this person as a whole being, with unique experiences, struggles, and aspirations, just like yourself. Try to see beyond their flaws or differences and search for their positive qualities and strengths. Reflect on the goodness that lies within them, waiting to be recognized and appreciated.
6. As you cultivate a sense of empathy and understanding, allow a deep sense of compassion to arise within you. Recognize that everyone carries their own burdens and challenges. Feel a genuine desire to alleviate their suffering and contribute to their well-being.
7. Offer a meditation of love and healing for this person, using your own words or the following:
8. “Dear [Name of the person], may you be surrounded by love and understanding. May your heart be filled with peace and joy. May any conflicts between us be resolved with compassion and forgiveness. I pray for your happiness and well-being. May we both grow in love and harmony.”
9. Take a few moments to sit in silence, basking in the energy of love and compassion you have cultivated. Allow it to expand and envelop your entire being.

When you are ready, gently open your eyes and return to the present moment, carrying the warmth of love and understanding with you.

**Conclusion:** Through this personal meditation, I have explored the profound teaching from Breslov literature about loving our fellow human beings and discovering their inherent goodness. By practicing empathy, understanding, and compassion, we can transcend the barriers of hatred and cultivate harmonious

relationships filled with love and unity. May this meditation guide you on your journey toward deeper connections and a more compassionate existence.

## **A ChatGPT-Generated Personal Meditation on Finding Oneself within the Sacred Words of Tehillim**

Rebono Shel Olam,

As I stand before You in prayer, I seek to find myself within the sacred words of Tehillim, the Book of Psalms. Just as Rebbe Nachman taught, I yearn to discover my essence reflected in each chapter and verse, knowing that within these timeless melodies lies a pathway to true connection with You.

In this quest, I understand that the battles faced by King David are not distant tales of old, but rather they echo within the depths of my own soul. Grant me the wisdom and discernment to recognize the battles against the evil inclination and its forces that I encounter daily. Help me apply the pleas for deliverance to my own struggles, finding solace and strength in the knowledge that You are my ultimate source of salvation.

With sincerity and simplicity, I strive to discover myself within every supplication, request, and penitential prayer. Teach me, dear Father, to effortlessly recognize the echoes of my own heart within the words of the psalms. Let the cries of the Jewish people become my own, as their collective prayers encompass the yearnings and aspirations of each individual soul.

As I delve deeper into the teachings and prayers of our tradition, may I find resonance within the phrases, "*Limtzo et atzmo*" (to find oneself) or their derivatives. Guide me along a personal pathway of Teshuvah during this sacred time of *Elul*, Rosh Hashanah, the 10 Days of Awe, and Yom Kippur.

Open my heart to the depths of introspection and self-discovery, allowing me to confront my shortcomings with humility and sincere repentance. Grant me the courage to face the shadows within me, knowing that in doing so, I can bring forth light and transformation.

In the moments of prayer, may I be enveloped by Your boundless love and compassion. Let my words rise like incense before Your throne, seeking forgiveness, redemption, and renewal. Help me uncover the hidden sparks of holiness within me, aligning my will with Yours and surrendering to Your divine plan.

Rebono Shel Olam, as I recite Tehillim and engage in heartfelt prayer, I beseech You to hear my voice and accept the intentions of my heart. May my journey of finding myself within these sacred words bring me closer to You, deepening my connection and fostering spiritual growth.

With gratitude and devotion, I place my trust in You, knowing that through this sincere quest, I can come to know myself and, ultimately, come to know You.

## Conclusion

David Hamelech saw his Book of Psalms as a transformative legacy for all generations. It was not just sacred literature for prayer, but meant to be studied in-depth, just like the complex and weighty tractates of the Talmud on laws of purity and impurity (*Midrash Socher Tov*, Psalm 1:1). Why the selection of those tractates specifically? King David wanted his Psalms to have the same purifying effect on the human soul as the laws of ritual purity. (Harav Gifter)

From Rav Kook, we see writings inspired by Breslov, to whom he felt a great affinity: “We see the imperative of working hard to find the uniqueness of oneself and then the circle of friends that will encourage and support him.” Again, from Rav Kook, “A person has to *find himself* in himself, and then he finds himself in the world around him, which is his company, his crowd, and his people...” (Orot Kodesh 2:3, Lev)

Rav Kook wrote extensively about the importance of personalized connections to Hashem and the Torah, including with *talmud Torah* (studying Torah) and living *mitzvot*. “The great spiritual people ... must focus their time uncovering the depths of their souls,” Rav Kook writes. “The principal source that will lead them to spiritual transformation must be their own inner Torah.” (*Shmoneh Kevatzim* 2:172—translated by Rabbi Ari Ze’ev Schwartz in “The Spiritual Revolution of Rav Kook,” p. 17.)

When a person leaves this world and faces his final judgment, he will be asked several questions, the first of which is whether he was honest in his business dealings. These questions are meant as tests for us: did we seek to understand the truth about our lives, or did we leave all our energy in self-deception?

Each one of us can yearn for inner discovery and understanding. Each one of us will eventually mature to want to seek self-truth. Each one of us will subsequently spiritually grow up. It might take several lifetimes, but it will happen, eventually, in this lifetime or the next, or the next. It is up to us, and that is what Rebbe Nachman urged us to build to.



# The Connection Between Shavuos and Rosh Hashanah

Yehuda Shulman

HAVE YOU EVER noticed that all the *Yomim Tovim* connect to each other? The whole Jewish calendar revolves around them. The time for each *Yom Tov* is very precise. When there was a *Sanhedrin*, *Beis Din* would determine which day was *Rosh Hodesh* to make sure they would celebrate *Yom Tov* in the right time. They also would establish if that year was a leap year to make sure the *Yomim Tovim* always occurred in the same season each year. If you look at the Jewish calendar, all *Yomim Tovim* are connected to each other in the order of the calendar.

Rosh Hashanah, the day of judgment and the start of the new year is connected to Yom Kippur through the *aseres yemei teshuvah* (ten days of repentance). Yom Kippur is the culmination of our judgment and it is the day we are forgiven. Then comes Sukkos—now that we are forgiven, we are given the opportunity to celebrate fully with Hashem in the Sukkah. Sukkos concludes with Shemini Atzeres and Simhas Torah. We pray for rain to get sustenance for the coming year and we celebrate the Torah which is sustenance for our *neshamah*. Even though Hanukah and Purim aren't *Yomim Tovim* they still connect with the cycle. On Simhas Torah we celebrate the Torah and on Hanukah we celebrate our victory over the Greeks. The Greeks' sole mission was to stop *Bnei Yisrael* from practising and learning Torah. Then comes Purim in the calendar. The Greeks targeted *Bnei Yisrael's* spirituality, while Haman, on Purim, went after *Bnei Yisrael* physically. He wanted to annihilate all of *Bnei Yisrael*; like the Greeks, he failed. After Purim comes Pesah. The *Gemara* in *Megillah* (6b) discusses what to do if there is a leap year (i.e., two months of Adar). In which month do you read the *Megillah*? Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel

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rules that we read the *Megillah* in the second Adar (i.e., Adar *Beis*). One explanation the *Gemara* gives for his opinion is that having the two *geulos* (redemptions) close together is preferable to having a longer gap in between *geulos*. The *Gemara* is implicitly connecting the *geulah* of Purim with the *geulah* of Pesah. On both occasions, Hashem redeemed us and saved us from our enemies. Pesah then subsequently connects with Shavuos through the *Omer*. On Pesah, the *Korban Omer* is brought, and we then count seven weeks until Shavuos. The word Shavuos means “weeks,” which emphasizes the connection. Another name for Shavuos is *Hag Hakatzir* (the harvest festival) because the first crop of the wheat harvest was brought to the *Beis Hamikdash* at that time of year. What is the connection between Rosh Hashanah and Shavuos? How does the *Yom Tov* cycle connect back to the beginning of the year?

What do Shavuos and Rosh Hashanah have in common? What can we learn about Rosh Hashanah through this connection? To answer these questions, we can start by looking at a *Gemara* in *Maseches Megillah* (31b). A *Baraisa* says to read the curses in *Sefer Vayikra* before Shavuos and the curses of *Sefer Devarim* before Rosh Hashanah. The *Gemara* asks why do we do this? The answer given is: “*kidei shitikbleh shanah vikillosehab* (the year should end, along with its curses).” The *Gemara* asks, “If this is true then why do we say the curses before Shavuos if it’s not the beginning of the year?” The *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (16a) mentions that Shavuos is considered a new beginning. The *Mishnah* there enumerates four days that are considered new years. Rava explains this *Mishnah* that these days are established as a new year because the beginning of judgment happens on them. On Shavuos specifically, the judgment begins for the fruits that grow on the tree so it can be called a new year. The *Gemara* in *Megillah* uses this answer as well.

A question arises. The *Gemara* states that the reason the curses are read before Shavuos is because it’s considered a beginning of the year. If that’s true, why don’t we also read these curses before Pesah or Sukkos, which are also said in that *Mishnah* to be considered a beginning for the year? Furthermore, it would seem to make more sense to read them before Pesah since it’s also the first month of the calendar year! Why is this a connection specifically between Shavuos and Rosh Hashanah? It can be used to connect Rosh Hashanah with any of the other *shalosh regalim*.

There are the three places in the Torah where the weekly parshah cycle coincides with what is happening at that time during the calendar year. One example is in *Parshas Emor*, where the Torah says to count the *Omer*. Indeed, this parshah always falls during the *Omer* period. Another example is in *Parshas Netzavim*, where the Torah says you will return, listen to Hashem, and do the *mitzvos*. This always falls during *Elul* which is a time of returning to Hashem. The last instance is connected to the curses in that the two times they occur are prior to Shavuos and prior to Rosh Hashanah. There must be a reason they come up before Rosh Hashanah and Shavuos! It could be that *Chazal* set up the parshiyos to fall out at these times to emphasize the point that these are special times of the year. When we read the parshah, we see the connection to the upcoming *Yomim*

*Tovim*, and become more inspired to grow. The *Nesivos Sholom*<sup>1</sup> writes that Shavuot is the *Rosh Hashana* for one's spirituality. The *Maggid of Mezeritch*<sup>2</sup> holds that Shavuot is on a higher level than Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah our materialism is set for the year, but on Shavuot our level of spirituality is determined for the year. Hazal wanted to emphasize this connection specifically between Shavuot and Rosh Hashanah ... so there must be more that connects the two.

If you were asked what Rosh Hashanah is about, what would you say? A classic answer is that it is a day of judgment. While this is true, there is another aspect to Rosh Hashanah. We can see this by looking at how the Torah refers to Rosh Hashanah. When the Torah mentions Rosh Hashanah, it's called *Zikbron Teruah* (*Emor* 23:24) and *Yom Teruah* (*Pinhas* 29:1). Why is it called by these names specifically in the Torah? Rashi in *Parshas Emor* answers it's called a *Zikbron Teruah* because it's alluding to the *pesukim* of *zikronos* and *shofros*, through which we call upon Hashem to remember *Bnei Yisrael* for the good. It's also a remembrance of the *Akeidas Yitzhak*, which is integral to the Rosh Hashanah davening. To add to this, the Torah refers to Rosh Hashanah as *Zikbron Teruah* which can tell us something else. At what other event in the Torah did *Bnei Yisrael* hear and remember the *teruah*? At Matan Torah, where the Torah says the sound of the shofar was very powerful (*Yisro* 19:16). On Shavuot we commemorate the revelation of the Torah at *Har Sinai* and the hearing of the *Aseres Hadibros*. This was supposed to be an opportunity for *Bnei Yisrael* to achieve the highest level of *kedushah*. They were going to hear all of the *Aseres Hadibros*—straight from Hashem. Unfortunately, they got scared of being on that level; they were afraid they were going to die, so they asked Moshe to be their intermediary and tell them the rest of the commandments (*Yisro* 20:16). The previous *pasuk* says they stood from afar. This could be a hint to *Bnei Yisrael* literally distancing themselves from Hashem by placing Moshe between themselves and Hashem. This was the highest and most ideal level of human existence, but *Bnei Yisrael* were unable to sustain it.

*Yom Teruah* was supposed to occur when Moshe came down from *Har Sinai* forty days later. It was supposed to be a celebration of this higher level of *kedushah* and deeper connection between *Bnei Yisrael* and Hashem. This was the moment Moshe was going to bring the *luhos* to *Bnei Yisrael*. Unable to remain on the highest level of *kedushah*, they sinned with the golden calf and everything changed; the first set of *luhos* were subsequently destroyed. In *Pesikta DeRav Kahana*,<sup>3</sup> it says that originally the Seventeenth of Tammuz was supposed to be a *Yom Tov* to celebrate this connection but it was pushed off to the first of *Tishrei*. The *Hida*<sup>4</sup> brings a *pasuk* that hints to this when Aharon says to *Bnei*

1 The *Nesivos Sholom* (Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky) was born in Belarus in 1911, emigrated to Palestine in 1933, and died in Israel in 2000. He served as the *Slonimer Rebbe* from 1981 until his death. He is widely known for his teachings which are published as a series of books entitled *Nesivos Sholom*.

2 The *Maggid of Mezeritch* (Rabbi Dov Ber ben Avraham of Mezeritch) was born in Volhynia in 1704 and died in Poland in 1772. He was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, and his successor as leader of the Hasidic movement.

3 A collection of Aggadic Midrash.

4 The *Hida* (Rabbi Hayim Yosef David Azulai) was born in Jerusalem in 1724 and died in Etruria in 1806. He was a noted bibliophile and a pioneer in the publication of Jewish religious writings.

*Yisrael*, “*bag LaHashem mahar*.” There really was supposed to be a *bag* on the next day, which was the Seventeenth of Tammuz.

In *Parshas Mishpatim*, before the golden calf was created, there are three *chagim* mentioned. They are Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot. It is only in *Parshas Emor* that Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are first mentioned; this is after the sin of the golden calf. It's possible that originally there were only meant to be the *shalosh regalim*, but because of the sin of the golden calf, that changed, and there was now a need for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Shavuot is the day of *Matan Torah*, and Rosh Hashanah is when we celebrate a deeper connection with Hashem by remembering this revelation. These *Yomim Tovim* can help us achieve the goal originally set out at *Har Sinai* to achieve and remain on the highest level of spirituality that we can.

Rosh Hashanah is a day of judgment but it's also a day to celebrate this deeper connection we experience with Hashem. It's a day to do *teshuvah* and be written in the book of life. Our prayers on Rosh Hashanah are extremely powerful. It is a time where we can have a new beginning and become closer to Hashem. We can try to achieve a higher level of spirituality and improve ourselves over the previous year. We can achieve more than we can possibly imagine. Through the connection of Shavuot to Rosh Hashanah we can gain a new perspective and go into Rosh Hashanah with a growth mindset.

# Great Memories and Memories of Greatness

Rabbi A.Z. Thau

WHEN ROSH HASHANAH comes around, we have certain ideas, *mitzvot*, and emotions that come to mind. To mention a few we might think of: blowing the shofar, dipping apples in honey, special *tefillot*, awe, and judgment. But, what comes first and foremost to my mind is the *shofar*. The call to wake up, shake off the less-than-ideal self of who we want to be. We blow the *shofar* to call ourselves to arms in the service of Hashem and to ultimately coronate him as our King.

We hear three components within this call: *malkbuyot*, *zikbronot*, and *shofarot*. Each one of these facets are of the utmost importance but for this article I would like to focus on *Zikbronot*. *Zikbronot* comes from the word *zikaron*, which means a remembrance. What is being remembered? And who is remembering? Are we reminding ourselves of something or are we reminding Hashem (who knows everything) of something?

The Ramban famously coined the phrase “*maaseh avot siman labanim*—the actions of the forefathers are a sign for their children.”<sup>1</sup> The events and actions of our forefathers foreshadow events and actions that their descendants will perform and endure. Just like our forefathers had trials, difficulties, and struggles that they successfully overcame, we were endowed with the innate ability to overcome adversity of our own.

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1 Ramban, *Bereishit* 12:6.

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It is stated in *Pirkei Avot* (5:3):

With ten trials was Abraham, our father (may he rest in peace), tried, and he withstood them all; to make known how great was the love of Abraham, our father (peace be upon him).<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky, the former Slonimer Rebbe, has an incredible insight on *Parshat Beha'alotkha* in his *sefer* Netivot Shalom. He contends that above *Mishnah* is coming to illustrate that just like Avraham Avinu faced ten heart-wrenching, daunting, and formidable tests and successfully surmounted them, so too, were we endowed with the same DNA that enables us to be like Avraham Avinu and conquer any challenge that Hashem throws our way.

Likewise, the word “*nes*” in Hebrew has two meanings: the more well-known of the two is a miracle. Yet its second translation is also profound. The word “*nes*” can be translated as a banner. A banner, like a flag, gives us direction. On the battlefield flags were used to help soldiers who might have lost their unit to rejoin their ranks. In this case, the term the “ten *nisyonot* of Avraham” has at its root the word “*nes*.” Meaning, Avraham Avinu and his challenges give us direction in life. Our situation may seem bleak at times but we must remember that whether by a miracle or just a reminder (of the banner) we can overcome our difficulties. We remember that if Avraham succeeded so too we can and/or that we are connected to *Elokei Avraham* who performs miracles for His children as well.

The concept *maaseh avot siman labanim* applies to our original question regarding *zikbronot* and who is doing the remembering.

Tosefta Rosh Hashana states:

[הבא ניסוך המים] בחג כדי שיתברכו [עליך] מי גשמים אמרו לפני [מלכיות זכרונות] ושופרות מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם זכרונות כדי שיבא זכרונכם לטובה [אמרו לפני] שופרות כדי שתעלה תפלתכם בתרועה לפני.

Bring the water libation on Sukkot so that the water of the rains will be blessed for you. Say before me: *malkbuyot*, *zikbronot*, and *shofarot*. *Malkbuyot* so that you will crown me before them *zikbronot* so that your memories will come before me for the good *shofarot* so that your prayers will ascend with trumpeting.<sup>3</sup>

When the Tosefta says, “so that your memories will come before me for good” what is it referring to? Many suggest that it is referring to *Akeidat Yitzhak* when Yitzhak was willing to allow himself to become a *korban*. Rashi says that the ashes from his *korban* are resting before Hashem always.

What does this signify that these ashes from the *korban* of Yitzhak are placed before Hashem always? First of all, Yitzhak never was an actual *korban*. Hashem stopped it from happening. So where do these ashes come from? Secondly, of all of the *korbanot* to have before Hashem why is this one always there?

<sup>2</sup> Translation adapted from Sefaria.org.

<sup>3</sup> Translation adapted from Sefaria.org.

Rabbi Reuven Taragin explains that when we invoke the ram's horn through the blowing of the *shofar* we are asking Hashem to remember what Yitzhak went through and to remember that we can too achieve his level of greatness. We beseech Hashem that in the merit of our *avot*, that He grant us an audience so that we may come before Him and *daven*. This is one of the most crucial understandings of the first *berakbah* of the *shemoneh esrei*. We say, "Hashem we recognize that perhaps we are undeserving of this opportunity to speak to You and yet we come before You as a descendant of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov. Therefore, I should be given the same opportunity that they had and to be close to you. Simultaneously, we must remind ourselves through saying this to Hashem that we are capable of more. We can never forget that if we are the offspring of the *avot*, then we have the same talents and abilities to become just as great.

The Gemara in *Kiddushin* (36a) states:

”בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם”, בזמן שאתם נוהגים מנהג בנים – אתם קרוים בנים, אין אתם נוהגים מנהג בנים – אין אתם קרוים בנים, דברי רבי יהודה. רבי מאיר אומר: בין כך ובין כך אתם קרוים בנים, שנאמר: ”בנים סכלים המה”, ואומר: ”בנים לא אמן בם”, ואומר: ”זרע מרעים בנים משחיתים”, ואומר: ”והיה במקום אשר יאמר להם לא עמי אתם יאמר להם בני קל חי.”

“You are the sons to the L-rd your G-d,” indicates that when you act like sons and cleave to the Holy One, Blessed be He, you are called sons, but when you do not act like sons you are not called sons. This is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda. And Rabbi Meir says: Either way you are still called sons, as it is stated: “They are foolish sons” (Jeremiah 4:22). And it also states: “Sons in whom there is no faithfulness” (Deuteronomy 32:20). And it states: “A seed of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly” (Isaiah 1:4). And it states: “And it shall come to pass that, instead of what was said to them: You are not My people, it shall be said to them: Sons of the living G-d.” (Hosea 2:1)<sup>4</sup>

The Gemara cites a debate between Rabbi Meir and the Tana Kamma, as to when we are viewed or called *banim* of Hashem. Perhaps this is the *zikaron* we refer to in *zikhronot* on Rosh Hashanah. We remind Hashem of our *avot* and the memory of their greatness, but through this remembrance, we are also reminded of our own greatness.

Rabbi Meir believed that no matter what happens in life, no matter how far we feel from Hashem, we can always reconnect. We must always remember that we are children of Hashem and the *avot*. When we connect to our *avot*, our *tefillah* is that much stronger and our ability to soar is that much greater.

4 Translation adapted from Sefaria.org.

# A Tale of Two Mountains

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

**THE YOM KIPPUR** of the past two millennia is familiar, its rules of fasting and eschewing comfort easily understood. The original Yom Kippur is harder for us to understand, with its bulls, rams and goats. In particular, the ritual of the scapegoat—sending an animal off into the wilderness, to *Azazel*—challenges our willingness to accept that which we find foreign. What lessons might we learn from the scapegoat?

The Torah presents the ritual this way:

And from the congregation of the children of Israel, [Aharon] shall take two young goats for a sin-offering, and a ram for a burnt offering .... And he shall take the two goats, and he shall stand them before Hashem, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. And Aharon shall place lots upon the two goats; one lot shall for Hashem, and one lot for *Azazel*. And Aharon shall bring the goat upon which the lot of Hashem ascended, and he shall make it a sin-offering. And the goat upon which the lot for *Azazel* ascended shall be stood alive before Hashem, to atone for him, to send it to *Azazel*, to the wilderness...

And he shall finish atoning for the sanctuary and the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and he shall bring the live goat. And Aharon shall lean his two hands upon the head of the live goat, and he shall admit upon it all of the sins of the children of Israel, and all of their rebellions for all of their transgressions, and he shall place them upon the head of the goat, and he shall send in the hand of a designated person into the wilderness. And the goat shall carry

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upon it all of their sins to a harsh land, and he shall send away the goat in the wilderness (*Vayikra* 16:5–22).

Much has been written to explain the goal of the scapegoat ritual. Ideas include:

- We mime transferring our sins to Esav, represented by the hairy goat.<sup>1</sup>
- The scapegoat is an act of atonement for the non-*kobanim*, who are outside the *Beit Hamikdash*, as opposed to internal *korbanot* which atone for the sins of the *kobanim*.<sup>2</sup>
- We send away sins which are too grave for atonement within the holy *Beit Hamikdash*.<sup>3</sup>
- We give the scapegoat to Hashem, who sends it to a demonic force (of His own creation), so that it will not interfere with our Yom Kippur service.<sup>4</sup>
- When the body of the scapegoat is broken up in the wilderness (as described in the *Mishnah*<sup>5</sup>), this is a sign for the sinner that despite his spiritual cleansing, he will still need to experience punishment.<sup>6</sup>

To this we may add another idea, based on the location where the scapegoat is brought—a site identified in the Torah as *Azazel*.<sup>7</sup>

## What and Where is Azazel?

R. Saadia Gaon claimed that *Azazel* is a name of a particular mountain,<sup>8</sup> but this is hard to accept. The Jews would have used different locations as they moved through the wilderness, again as the *Mishkan* changed locations in Israel, and finally at the *Beit Hamikdash*, but the term *Azazel* is used both in the wilderness and regarding the eras of the two Temples in Jerusalem. The consensus of commentators is against R. Saadia Gaon, claiming that *Azazel* is an adjective, describing a trait of the location where the scapegoat ritual takes place.

The Talmud (*Yoma* 67b) deciphers *Azazel* based on the word *az*, referring to strength:

*Azazel*—Strong (*az*) and harsh. Could it even be a settled area? [No,] the text says, “In the wilderness.” How do we know it has a cliff? The text says, “*gezeirah*.”<sup>9</sup>

1 See *Bereishit Rabbah* 65:15, and Yehuda Leib Gordon's poem *Isb sair, Isb halak*, available online at [www.benyehuda.org/yalag/yalag\\_149.html](http://www.benyehuda.org/yalag/yalag_149.html).

2 Rabbi Saadia Gaon, *Haemunot Vihadeiot* 3.

3 Rambam, *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:46.

4 Ramban, Commentary to *Vayikra* 16, based on *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer* 46; and *Derashab* of Rabbi Yehoshua ibn Shu'ib to *Abarei Mot-Kedoshim*.

5 *Mishnah*, *Yoma*, Chapter 6.

6 *Sefer Habinukh* no. 95.

7 In truth, while the Torah speaks of bringing the scapegoat “to *Azazel*” in *Vayikra* 16:8, 16:10 and 16:26, it is not entirely clear that *Azazel* is the location. It may refer to the recipient of the scapegoat; this is consistent with the view, cited above, that *Azazel* refers to a demonic force. Nonetheless, here we will follow the Talmud and the great majority of traditional commentaries, which view *Azazel* as a location.

8 R. Saadia Gaon, *Haemunot Vihadeiot* 3:10.

9 Rabbeinu Hananel ad loc. explains the association of a cliff with *gezeirah*. The term *gezerin* refers to pieces or shards,

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra similarly renders *Azazel* as “very strong mountain,” with the Name of Hashem added at the end to signify strength.

Taking a different approach, the Tosafist Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir<sup>10</sup> took the root of *Azazel* to be *eiz*, meaning “goat.” *Azazel* is a place where goats live. This does not conflict with the Talmud’s identification of a harsh and wild area.

Beyond the word *Azazel*, we have some evidence of where the ritual took place:

- A *Mishnah* informs us that in the time of the *Beit Hamikdash* the cliff was a 12 *mil* journey from Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> One *mil* is approximately one kilometre, so this establishes a radius for the site.
- Logically, the cliff was east of Jerusalem; travelling 12 kilometres from Jerusalem would only lead to mountains if one travelled east.
- As described by the commentators above, the mountain was tough and desolate.

All of the above leads to speculation that the site is a mountain called Jabel Munttar.<sup>12</sup> It is located a little over twelve kilometres from Jerusalem, heading roughly east. It stands out as the tallest peak in the area, at 524 metres above sea level; indeed, *Munttar* means “scout” or “lookout” in Arabic. There is an ancient desert road to the site, and it’s a dry place, without plant life.<sup>13</sup>

## The Meaning of the Mountains

All of this information matters because it establishes an opposition between *Azazel* and the site of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

The *Beit Hamikdash* stands on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem (*Divrei Hayamim* II 3:1); a place where Hashem signaled His special relationship with the descendants of Avraham and Sarah (*Bereishit* 22). The *Beit Hamikdash* itself is a place of Divine affection. The affection begins with our earliest national house of worship, the *Mishkan* in the Jewish camp in the wilderness, regarding which Hashem pledges, “I will dwell in their midst” (*Shemot* 25:8). It continues with the first *Beit Hamikdash*, about which Hashem tells King Solomon, “I have consecrated this house which you have built, to place My Name there forever. My eyes and heart shall be there always” (*Melakhim* I 9:3). And this extends to the second *Beit Hamikdash*, of which the prophet Haggai says, “Ascend the mountain, bring wood and build a house. I will desire it and I will be honoured; so declares Hashem” (*Haggai* 1:8).

Even before the Jewish nation entered Israel, the Divine presence came with Divine protection. This is most visible with the Clouds of Glory; the Sages teach that those clouds protected the Jews from outside aggression, and even laundered their clothing.<sup>14</sup> In the

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and the animal breaks into such fragments when it descends the cliff.

<sup>10</sup> Rashbam, Commentary to *Vayikra* 16:10.

<sup>11</sup> *Mishnah*, *Yoma* 6:4.

<sup>12</sup> Pictures of the site may be found at [www.biblewalks.com/munttar](http://www.biblewalks.com/munttar).

<sup>13</sup> Other sites are suggested at [www.4x4.co.il/article/7422](http://www.4x4.co.il/article/7422).

<sup>14</sup> *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 4:2.

*Mishkan* and *Beit Hamikdash*, the altar of Hashem “removed [harsh] decrees, nourished, caused [Divine] affection and atoned” (*Ketuvot* 10b). This affectionate place naturally feels like a site where atonement is achievable; Hashem is just waiting to embrace us.

On the other hand, *Azazel* is a place of affliction, harsh and desolate. That harshness is reflected in the scapegoat ritual, which seems to be the opposite of a *korban*. It is performed outside the *Beit Hamikdash*, by someone who is not a *Kohen*.<sup>15</sup> The animal is not slaughtered,<sup>16</sup> and its blood is not placed on the altar.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, Hashem is not absent from the desolate *Azazel*; indeed, Hashem informs Iyov that He takes care of the wild beasts which inhabit just such a locale.<sup>18</sup> But unlike on Mount Moriah, we do not feel Hashem’s protection and embrace on Mount *Azazel*.

The twelve *mil* distance between the mountains highlights their differences. Based on *Shemot* 16:29, the law of *tehum* prohibits us from leaving “our space” on Shabbat. As the Rambam explains, the biblically defined distance of the *tehum* is twelve *mil*, the breadth of the camp of Israel in the wilderness.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the limits of one’s space are twelve *mil*—the distance separating Jerusalem and *Azazel*.

Perhaps this pairing of contrasting mountains is meant to make a powerful point about repentance and atonement. The process of repentance can be like the ritual of bringing a goat as a *korban* in the *Beit Hamikdash*; it can be a comforting, embracing, sheltering and even rewarding journey, with the warmth and assistance of the *Kohen* and the majesty of the *Beit hamikdash*. On the other hand, it can be like the scapegoat of *Azazel*, an experience which is harsh and painful, wounding and wounded. It can be a desolate rock and a hard place.

In this light, the scapegoat speaks to the Jew who finds repentance difficult, feeling distant from Hashem, perhaps even unloved. Not everyone feels the proximity of Hashem when the shofar sounds on Rosh Hashanah and the Ark opens at *neilah*. In that context, the scapegoat ritual validates the difficulty of repentance, the questioning and vulnerability that come with owning up to errors, the self-doubt and insecurity that come with changing course, the frustration and the strain of trying again and again and again.

For some of us, self-analysis and repentance are relatively easy, and the annual opportunity to wipe the slate clean is welcome. For others, the process of self-discovery is unwelcome and uncomfortable, and the possibility of genuine change seems remote. Probably, most of us are somewhere in between those two poles. But all points on the spectrum have a place in Torah and in the *teshuvah* process. Whatever our position, may all of us merit to repent successfully and be sealed for a year of health and shalom, growth and simchah.

15 See *Yoma* 66a, although note *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Avodat Yom Hakippurim* 3:7.

16 R. Avraham Ibn Ezra (commentary to *Vayikra* 16:8) notes this, as part of his argument that the scapegoat is not a *korban*.

17 For more on whether the scapegoat is a *korban*, see *Haemunot Vibadeiot* 3, *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:46 and R. Avraham Ibn Ezra, *ibid*.

18 *Iyov* 38:39–39:30.

19 *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Shabbat* 27:1–2, and see *Eruvin* 35b and Talmud *Yerushalmi Eruvin* 5:4. Of course, in practice *tehum Shabbat* is just one *mil*, which the Rambam explains is a rabbinic restriction.

# Return on Repentance

Aaron Weinroth

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE between a ship and a boat? That may seem like a rather mundane question for a sophisticated journal of Torah scholarship such as this one but the answer will actually help to explain an apparent biblical inconsistency and teach a very relevant lesson for Yom Kippur.

In the book of Jonah, which we read during the minchah service on Yom Kippur,<sup>1</sup> G-d commands Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh to call them out for their wickedness and proclaim His judgment to them. As the famous story goes, Jonah rejects this assignment and instead decides to flee: “He (Jonah) went down to Jaffa and found an *oniyah* (vessel) bound for Tarshish, paid its fare, and boarded it” (Jonah 1:3). G-d then brings a storm to prevent his escape: “Then Hashem cast a mighty wind toward the sea and there was a great tempest in the sea so that the *oniyah* (vessel) seemed likely to be wrecked” (Jonah 1:4). In response to this threat, the entire crew prayed and threw articles overboard to lighten the load in an effort to save themselves “but Jonah had descended to the hold of the *s’fnah* (vessel) and lay down and fell asleep” (Jonah 1:5). Ignoring (for a moment) the obvious questions about Jonah’s seemingly unusual behaviour, how and why did the vessel change from being an *oniyah* to a *s’fnah*?! What message is hidden in this nautical nomenclature and what insights can we extract from it?

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1 My grandfather had the honour of maftir Yonah for many, many years, and the pride and pleasure of listening to him may have made that more of a ‘highlight’ of the day for me, causing me to pay closer attention to this text than the average congregant.

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The distinction between a ship and a boat is often made based on size, with ships being larger and boats being smaller. However, there's nothing to indicate that the size of Jonah's vessel changed over the course of the storm. My friend Josh Katchen, whose knowledge on a broad range of subjects I consider authoritative—as would anyone who has had to compete against him at a BAYT trivia night—provided me with the (un)official Royal Canadian Navy definition that “a ship carries a boat” while a boat has no other regular vessel (which excludes uninflated rafts and the like) aboard. Perhaps Jonah's vessel started off with a lifeboat which was then lost in the storm, leading to a change in status, but that doesn't feel like a very satisfying answer.

After much contemplation, it seems to me that the characteristic which best differentiates between ships and boats is their level of autonomy. On a boat, such as a sailboat or rowboat, the people aboard have a high degree of control over where and when it goes. They can head out whenever they choose, change course on a whim, and return as they see fit. In contrast, on a ship such as a cruise ship or cargo ship there is usually a set departure time, route, schedule, destination, and arrival time. The captain and crew are there to execute a predetermined plan, and the passengers (or cargo!) have absolutely no say in the matter.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps this same distinction can be made between an *oniyah* and a *s'finah*, with an *oniyah* corresponding to an autonomous boat and a *s'finah* being the equivalent of an obedient ship. At the beginning of the Book of Jonah we are introduced to Jonah as a highly successful and respected individual who had accomplished great personal development, rising spiritually to the level of prophecy and socially to a status where even the king of Nineveh took heed of what he had to say. We can speculate that he had fulfilled his potential<sup>3</sup> and was feeling very much in control of his life. So when G-d commanded him to go to Nineveh he thought—mistakenly—that he was significant enough to have a choice whether or not to accept the request, which he decided to decline. Setting out for Tarshish, he thought he was the master of his own destiny with complete autonomy and therefore the vessel he boarded was, in his mind, a boat (*oniyah*). However, after the arrival of the storm, a chastised Jonah was reminded that he was merely a servant to G-d's will, destined (in this instance) to carry out a duty not of his own desire. He realized that he was a passenger on G-d's ship (*s'finah*) rather than the master of his own boat (*oniyah*), hence the switch of labels for the vessel.

Why didn't Jonah respond to the storm the way the sailors did, by trying to save the vessel?<sup>4</sup> After all, even on a ship and without complete autonomy the captain and crew have a critical role to play. It would appear that after a lifetime of advancement and self-improvement, he couldn't bear the psychological demotion<sup>5</sup> he had just suffered and

2 I realize that a pirate ship may be an exception to this rule but I maintain this is our error in not referring to it as a pirate boat, not a refutation of my proposed categorization scheme.

3 In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Jonah had reached the pinnacle of self-actualization.

4 The sign outside a church near where I grew up summarized the recommended course of action with the wise motto of “pray to G-d, row to shore.”

5 In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, he was back down to the level of safety needs, or perhaps in the event of a

he fell into a deep depression, no longer caring about his fate or having the energy to try to alter it, so he went to take a nap.<sup>6,7</sup>

Once the sailors had exhausted their available alternatives and were forced to cast Jonah into the sea (Jonah 1:15), G-d had a dilemma in how to rescue him. If He sent another boat (or even a piece of driftwood) then Jonah might have thought he had been restored to his former level of autonomy, which would defeat the purpose of these events and corrupt the lesson G-d was trying to teach. On the other hand, if He sent a ship to rescue Jonah, he might become even more despondent and refuse to accept assistance. G-d therefore cleverly sent a whale<sup>8</sup> (Jonah 2:1), which has no place on Jonah's "vessel autonomy scale" and for which Jonah couldn't possibly make a comparison to either a boat or a ship! This change in the frame of reference succeeded in resetting Jonah's expectations, allowing him a new perspective and a new outlook, which enabled him to repent and proceed with his designated assignment.

After preaching to the people of Nineveh and witnessing their repentance and salvation (Jonah 3), and having set aside his quest for autonomy during his sojourn in the belly of the whale, Jonah no longer had a mission to focus on and struggled with finding a new sense of purpose. He understood the lesson that we shouldn't judge ourselves too strongly based only on how much control we have over our lives, our status in society, or even how far we've come in our journeys to become better people; just like the storm that blocked his escape, there will always be external factors that can cause stagnation and setbacks in our plans, and there will always be other people more accomplished on whatever measurement scale we choose to use. Climbing the ladder of self-improvement is a very worthwhile endeavour but one that is impossible to complete,<sup>9</sup> full of potential frustration, and harder to advance the farther one goes. Jonah now knew he couldn't always count on making progress on that front and wanted to find a more reliable life-navigation aid to direct him. He couldn't figure out what this missing part of his view of the world was, so he went and sat alone outside the city waiting for some inspiration to come to him (Jonah 4:5).

G-d guided Jonah toward the answer he was looking for through a second miracle in which He summoned a plant to provide Jonah with shade and then a worm the next day

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shipwreck even only trying to satisfy his basic physiological needs for survival.

6 My philosophy is that there's (almost) never a bad time for a nap; this might be one of the rare exceptions.

7 The *Malbim* on Jonah 1:5 suggests that *s'finab* comes from the Hebrew word *safin*, meaning hidden or covered, referring to the inner part of an *oniyah*, and that Jonah may have descended to this lower level either to avoid falling into the sea so G-d could save him by commanding the waves to carry the vessel to shore even if/after it capsized, or so he would be the first to drown when the vessel flooded, thereby stopping the storm and saving everyone else above deck. (Thank you to R. Ezer Dena for identifying and sharing this reference with me.) This is certainly more proactive and noble than just having given up but not as appropriate as prayer, which the master of the ship rightly pointed out (Jonah 1:6), or as agreeing to go to Nineveh to fulfill G-d's command, as *Malbim* notes. [If *Malbim's* definition is correct, the text could have said that Jonah went to the "*s'finab*" or to the "inner part of the *oniyah*," since writing "the inner part of the *s'finab*" might be redundant. I'll use that loophole to justify continuing this article with my own explanation (even though a reference to the innermost part of the *s'finab* does indeed make sense).]

8 Actually just a "big fish."

9 Especially if applying Zeno's paradoxes of motion to the analysis!

to destroy it (Jonah 4:6–8). G-d followed these events with the accompanying explanation that just as Jonah cared for the plant, surely G-d cares for the people of Nineveh. On the surface this is a simple lesson in empathy but G-d's words to Jonah imply something more; just as G-d, who is already perfect and has no opportunity (or requirement) for improvement can find meaning in attending to the needs of humanity, when Jonah is struggling with his own personal state he will always be able to find meaning in helping others. At times we all may find ourselves in situations where our own paths are (temporarily) blocked, and there may be finite limits and diminishing returns to our own improvement, but if we look around we can *always* find other people we can encourage, support, guide, and assist in their own efforts. Our own limited potentials are miniscule compared to the limitless opportunity when helping many others; from a utilitarian perspective it is therefore a much better use of time and energy to focus externally—especially when also considering the personal value of the mitzvah being performed, the lessons we learn by interacting and empathizing with others, and the gratitude and appreciation it can give us for all that we have.<sup>10</sup> This was the new, more satisfying frame of reference for Jonah to lead his life by and measure himself with.

The primary connection between the Book of Jonah and Yom Kippur is the repentance and salvation of the people of Nineveh. However, Jonah's journey also reminds us to be careful how we evaluate ourselves, to appreciate what we've already accomplished as well as strive toward new goals, to accept and learn from setbacks, and most importantly that while we spend this introspective day reflecting and repenting on our own sins we should also consider how we can help those around us in their journeys toward repentance and improvement as well. It's the best way to maximize the 'return on repentance'<sup>11</sup> we can earn for our investment and effort in the process!

Now, can anyone tell me the difference between a motor and an engine?!

10 In the words of John Holmes, "There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up."

11 *Chazarah al t'shuva* instead of *chazarah b'tshuva*?



# Teshuvah and the Beginning of Creation

Rabbi Dr. Moshe J. Yeres

## I—Meaning of the Phrase Shabbat Shabbaton

RABBI SHOLOM NOACH BEREZOVSKY, the late Slonimer Rebbe writes in *Netivot Shalom*<sup>1</sup> that the term *Shabbat shabbaton* refers in the Bible to only three things—the weekly seventh day of Shabbat (the Sabbath), Yom Kippur and *Shemittah* (the Sabbatical year). All three references are found towards the end of *Sefer Vayikra*.<sup>2</sup>

The term *Shabbat shabbaton*, he writes, represents an ultimate level of halachic *shvita* (a point of rest from creative work). This explanation was noted much earlier by Avraham Ibn Ezra in his commentary: “*Shabbat shabbaton* means a rest above which there is no other rest.”<sup>3</sup>

*Netivot Shalom* highlights that these three applications of *Shabbat shabbaton* do not simply reflect negative states of passivity (abstention from work), but rather signify unique positive states for spiritual development with soul and meaning. The idea of *shvita* (rest) that has no higher level (ultimate rest) clearly means a constructive existence; not just a cessation of work. It becomes an affirmative moment for religious development.

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1 *Netivot Shalom*, Vol. *Vayikra* pp. 105–106.

2 Parshiyot Emor and Behar, see following notes.

3 *Peirush Ibn Ezra Vayikra* 16:31; translation from <https://mg.alhatorah.org>.

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R. Berezovsky writes that each Biblical verse of these ultimate *shvitot* (points of rest) leads to different goals and objectives: for G-d, for you, for the world. The seventh day of the week is called *Shabbat shabbaton mikra kodesh ... Shabbat hi La'shem* (to G-d);<sup>4</sup> Yom Hakippurim is *Shabbat shabbaton hu lachem* (to you—pl.);<sup>5</sup> and the shmittah year is *Shabbat shabbaton tihyeh la'aretz Shabbat La'shem* (to G-d).<sup>6</sup>

This means that one day a week on Shabbat (seventh day), we offer the *neshamah* an ultimate experience of the soul spiritual center. One day a year on Yom Kippur we present a day of spiritual centrality (*neshamah*) and higher spiritual life through denial of food and drink (*ve'initem et nafshoteichem*).<sup>7</sup> One year every seven years the earth of Israel rejoices in spiritual renewal; this is the year to recognize the spiritual rebirth and revitalization of the land. While all three share the same common theme—existing beyond the present mundane nature of physicality through reducing physical creative work and actively developing and enhancing spiritual power and meaning, their specific foci vary, as we will show.

## II—Comparing Types of Shabbat Shabbaton

### Shabbat Day—“Shabbat Shabbaton... Shabbat Hi La'Shem”

This sanctified period of time is meant to bring G-d's sanctity down to us and raise us up to a unique level of connectivity to the Divine.

The Friday evening Nusach Sefard prayer *K'gavna*, which transitions from *Kabbalat Shabbat* to the *Ma'ariv Borchu*, makes clear the special unique spiritual opportunities on Shabbat that do not present themselves during the rest of the week.

The mystery of Shabbat is Shabbat herself ... when Shabbat comes, She enters into union and sheds the side of otherness, the *sitra-ahra*—the forces of negativity. All judgment and harshness pass from Her, and She remains in union with the Holy Radiance. She crowns Herself with many crowns as she faces the Holy King. All the forces of anger and grievance flee, and there is no power but She in all the worlds. Her face glows with a heavenly light, and She is crowned from below by the holy people who themselves are enwrapped and crowned with new supernal souls (that come with Shabbat).<sup>8</sup>

### Sabbatical Year—“Shabbat Shabbaton... Shabbat La'Shem”

The *Shemittah* year offers us opportunity for recognition of the unique spiritual values in the land of Israel. Rav Yehudah Halevi in *Sefar Kuzari* discusses how living in the land of Israel assists the Jewish people to spiritually thrive. It is like a grapevine that grows

<sup>4</sup> *Vayikra* 23:3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* 16:31; 23:32.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* 25:4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* 16:31; 23:32.

<sup>8</sup> *K'gavna, on the Secret of Oneness and the Mystery of Shabbat, a reading from the Zohar* (parashat Terumah §163–166 & §169–170); <https://opensiddur.org/prayers/solilunar/shabbat/qabbalat-shabbat/secret-of-oneness-mystery-of-shabbat>.

and bears fruit best when planted in the correct location on the mountainside, where it receives the ideal mix of sun, water and air.<sup>9</sup> The *Shabbat shabbaton* of the *Shmittah* year helps us understand the unique nature of the land of Israel as the preeminent place to nurture the Jewish people to their highest potential with Hashem. As a people we survive anywhere in the world, but we thrive at our spiritual best with G-d in the land of Israel.

*Chazal*, in *Pirke Avot*, identify one of the key causes for the destruction of the First *Bet Hamikdash* and our exile from Israel as the lack of *shemittah* observance, equating this to the three cardinal sins of murder, idol worship and immorality.<sup>10</sup>

### Yom HaKippurim—“Shabbat Shabbaton Hi Lachem”

For Yom Kippur, despite similarities between values of the first two *Shabbat shabbatons*, a divergence in spiritual objective appears. The terms *Shabbat shabbaton* of Shabbat (seventh day) and *Shemittah* are clearly called *Shabbat La'shem*, ultimate Shabbats for G-d. Yet the *Shabbat shabbaton* of Yom Kippur is called *Shabbat Shabbaton hi lachem*—a supreme ultimate Shabbat for the Jewish people. Its object of *shvita* (rest) is not identified as meant for the Almighty as we would expect, but rather for us. Initially this sounds wildly counterintuitive: how can the day that we deprive ourselves from food, drink, and physical nourishment be branded as the Shabbat for humanity, for *Bnei Yisrael*, for us. Is the day not meant to reach out to the Almighty in prayer and supplication to pray for our lives and our needs? How can a day of affliction (*innui*)<sup>11</sup> when we deprive ourselves of food drink and more, be tagged as a Shabbat for ourselves? It seems not to ring true.

The obvious answer is that the spiritual component of Yom Kippur is not tied only to the physical depravation of our bodies and their needs, but that it is the ultimate day of *Teshuvah*, when we can change our live anew, reroute ourselves and begin our lives again with a clean slate. This is the real meaning of the day, and the potential it offers us as *Shabbat shabbaton lachem* (to you). This speaks to the survival of ourselves as humans and members of the Jewish faith community. This day is for us.

### III—Teshuvah as a Precursor to Human Life

I believe that there is a fundamental difference between *teshuvah* and the other spiritual objects and moments. According to a number of sources, at the beginning of time the Almighty set *teshuvah* (of which Yom Kippur is most closely identified with) in place before or at, the creation of the world.<sup>12</sup> Hashem understood that *teshuvah* must be the precursor to the world's existence. This premise *teshuvah kadma le'olam* (*teshuvah* existed before the universe) appears in various Midrashic texts.<sup>13</sup>

9 *Sefer HaKuzari*, Book 2; par. 12.

10 *Avot* 5:9: “Exile comes to the world for idolatry, for sexual sins and for bloodshed, and for [transgressing the commandment of] the [year of the] release of the land.” This idea is developed in *Netivot Shalom*, *ibid*.

11 There are five *innu'im* (afflictions) on Yom Kippur, two prohibited by the Torah (eating and drinking) and an additional three by rabbinic law (washing, anointing and cohabiting).

12 *Netivot Shalom* p. 106.

13 See for example *Breishit Rabbah* 1:4: “In the beginning of G-d's creating...”—Six things preceded the creation of the

A number of sources discuss *teshuvah* as a pre-condition for Man's creation and entry into this world.<sup>14</sup> Yom Kippur, as the day of forgiveness and *kapparah* for man,<sup>15</sup> is therefore made primarily for us (*shabbat shabbaton hu lachem*). It remains the ultimate *chesed* granted to us by the Almighty. It is this prime positive value that allows us to exist, correct ourselves when we err, and maintain viable existence in this world of physical frailness. Therefore Yom Kippur—the day of *teshuvah*—is tagged as *shabbat shabbaton hi lachem*—for you, for us, for the Jewish people, because the very essence of the day—*teshuvah*—needed to be put in play in order for man to be successfully created.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook talks about *teshuvah* of the world itself.<sup>16</sup> According to Rav Kook, the world's attempt to return to its primordial perfection at creation is a form of *teshuvah*. Creation created a distance between Hashem and physical life. Therefore all physical existence wants to return to its original perfect state prior to Creation, being part of the Almighty. This makes *teshuvah* inherent in Creation, “an innate characteristic of creation itself, imprinted in creation by definition, filling all of creation with the continuous instinctive desire to return to its original state and pull back to the Source.”<sup>17</sup> This idea would universalize *teshuvah* as a gift to all humanity and indeed to all existence on this world.

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world; .... Rabbi Ahavah said in the name of Rabbi Ze'ira: Even repentance was [preceded the creation of the world], as it says (Psalms 90:2): “Before the mountains were birthed,” and at the same time (Psalms 90:3), “You turned man to contrition etc.” (translation Sefaria). Also in *Midrash Tefillim* 90: Rabbi Abbahu said: Repentance preceded the creation of the world...,” *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Naso siman* 11, and other locations.

14 See R. Yosef Carmel, *Teshuva Mibreishit*; [www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/4047](http://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/4047). See below n. 15.

15 In truth, *teshuvah* and its insertion into the world is a separate concept from Yom Kippur; however Yom Kippur is identified as the day of *teshuvah* and forgiveness: “*Ki vayom bazei yekhaber alechem letaber etchem*,” *Vayikra* 16:30.

16 See R. Kook's *Orot Hateshuva*, and commentary *Song of Teshuva* by R. Moshe Weinberger, 2011.

17 Rabbi Avraham Y. Sylvestsky, *An introduction to Rav Kook's concept of teshuva*; [www.israelnationalnews.com/news/287476](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/287476).



# Halakhah



# Yitgadal or Yitgadel: A Dialectical Perspective (Part II)

Dr. David Moshe Fischman

## Introduction: Origins of the Contemporary Practice of Pronouncing “Yitgadel”

IN OUR PREVIOUS instalment of this study (see *Hakhmei Lev*, Volume 3), we explored the practices of some worshippers to pronounce the first two words of Kaddish with a *tzeirei*, as opposed to *patah*. This practice, which is contrary to the text of almost all siddurim,<sup>1</sup> is also contrary to the notion that the Kaddish is an Aramaic prayer.<sup>2</sup> It is based upon an assertion that can be found in some books and commentaries that the first two words of Kaddish are Hebrew, and therefore the vocalization of the middle letter of the roots *gdl* and *kdsh* in Hebrew is *tzeirei*, as opposed to the Aramaic vocalization, *patah*.

We explored the possibility that the practice is a living tradition stemming from the Gaon of Vilna<sup>3</sup> as recorded in *Ma'aseh Rav*.<sup>4</sup> In considering *Ma'aseh Rav*, we noted that

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1 The most commonly used currently are ArtScroll, RCA, and Koren. The Birnbaum text is carefully edited but the siddur is now rarely seen. The original editions of Rinat Yisrael used the *patah*, but in more recent show *tzeirei*.

2 The use of Aramaic in reciting Kaddish is mentioned as its significant feature for the first time in medieval literature. See for example Tosafot in Berakhot 3a.

3 Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman of Vilna (1720–1797).

4 *Ma'aseh Rav* 64. Written by Rabbi Saadia ben Rabbi Nosson Nota (1751–1813) and edited by Rabbi Yisakhar Dov Ben Tanhum (1779–1855), students of the Vilner Gaon.

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among his familial and intellectual decedents, questions are raised whether *Ma'aseh Rav* is a faithful record of the practices of the Gaon, whether the practices recorded represent the final stage in the Gaon's thinking, and whether he meant for his personal practices to be taken as halakhic rulings for the community, particularly when they differed from prevalent customs. We pointed out that the pronunciation *yitgadel veyitkadesh* is not recorded in his commentary on the *Shulhan Arukh* and is not universality practiced by his descendants, nor is it part of their collective memory.

We noted anecdotally that among those who pronounce these words with a *tzeirei*, it is commonly done to follow the ruling of *Mishnah Berurah*.<sup>5</sup> The *Mishnah Berurah* cites the rationale found in many earlier works that the opening words of the Kaddish are meant to echo the Hebrew phrase, “*vehitgadilti veyitkadesh*” of Ezekiel 38:23.

We then proceeded to explore the source of the *Mishnah Berurah*, the *Peri Megadim* (*PaMa*”G<sup>6</sup>). We found the language of the relevant passage in the *Mishbetzot Zahav* section of *Peri Megadim*<sup>7</sup> to be truncated and resembling tentative notations. The *PaMa*”G mentions pronouncing the initial words with *tzeirei* and that the words echo Ezekiel, but states that the prayer is in Aramaic. He quotes a number of secondary sources stating that the opening words are Hebrew, and concludes the note with an enigmatic mention of certain words being in Aramaic, with no clear reference to which words are meant.

The *Mishnah Berurah* clearly understood the *PaMa*”G to rule that the initial words of the Kaddish were to be recited in Hebrew. We attempted to substantiate this understanding by checking the sources quoted by the *PaMa*”G. These mention the allusion to Ezekiel 38:23, but they omit mentioning that the initial words of Kaddish should be recited in Hebrew, only that there is a transition to Hebrew in the second paragraph of the Kaddish. The most straightforward understanding that emerges from majority of the sources quoted by the *PaMa*”G is that the first two words of Kaddish, which are a transparent allusion to the verse in Ezekiel, are Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew verse.

## A Source for the *PaMa*”G

We will begin our discussion by taking a closer look at the *PaMa*”G, referred to above, whose ruling guided the *Mishnah Berurah*. Among the number of authorities cited by the *PaMa*”G, the only one explicitly stating that the first words of the Kaddish are in Hebrew is R. Shlomo Zalman Katz Henna (or Hennau), known as the *RaZa*”H (1687–1746),<sup>8</sup> whose works the *PaMa*”G held in extremely high esteem. Such was his admiration of the works of the *RaZa*”H, that he recommended keeping his books on grammar along

5 *Mishnah Berurah* on *Shulhan Arukh*, *Orah Hayim* 66:2. Written by R. Yisrael Meir HaKohen (1838–1933), who adopted the surname Poupko for signing documents, but descendants took the surname Kagan. He was also known as the Hafetz Hayim, after the book by that name that he authored.

6 R. Yosef Teomim (1727–1792).

7 On *Shulhan Arukh*, *Orah Hayim* 66.

8 More on the *RaZa*”H later in this paper.



with dictionaries such as the *Arukh*<sup>9</sup> on one's learning table as companions to all texts that were being studied.

With respect to the opening words of Kaddish, the *RaZa"H* took the position that any phrase in prayer or *piyyut* that is a paraphrase of a biblical expression should be vocalized as in the Biblical Hebrew. To support this position with respect to the words of the Kaddish, the *RaZa"H* quoted an early source, the *Sefer HaPardes*, a work also quoted in *Maaseh Rav*, but using a redaction, the *Likutei Pardes*, rather than the original text. The *Sefer HaPardes* and *Likutei Pardes*, along with other works, such as *Siddur Rashi*, and the widely distributed *Mahzor Vitri* represent a school of learning stemming from the circle of Rashi. The ruling to recite these words in Hebrew appears in all of these works, and also in *Shibolei HaLeket*.<sup>10</sup> It appears, then, that the pronunciation of the initial words of Kaddish as *yitgadel veyitkadesh* likely emerged in Central and Eastern Europe no earlier than the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> The practice seems to have disappeared soon afterwards. Then, after a dormant period of about four centuries, the practice re-emerged influenced by the works of the *RaZa"H*.

## The RaZa"H and Editing the Siddur

Who was this figure, the *RaZa"H*, who was held by the *PaMa"G* in such high esteem? R. Zalman Henna is a name that is not widely known in yeshiva circles, yet his work on Hebrew language and grammar left a deep and lasting influence. Edits based upon his work could be found in siddurim and all available classic Hebrew texts published by Ashkenazim for generations, and his books guided those who sought to standardize a correct Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew. The *RaZa"H* (1687–1746) apparently was an autodidact who, as a young man in his twenties, developed on his own a comprehensive system of Hebrew grammar. His book, *Tzohar LaTeivah*, was one of the most widely distributed books on Hebrew grammar among Ashkenazim for the next two centuries. Since the early Middle Ages, with few exceptions, the study of pronunciation and grammar was a neglected subject in Central and Eastern Europe. When an interest in Hebrew grammar began to emerge among Ashkenazim during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, no doubt his work was seen as filling a gap.

Amid the revival of interest in the study of Hebrew language and grammar, about the time when *RaZa"H* lived, an effort began by prominent rabbinic authorities to standardize the Nusah Ashkenaz siddur. Until that time, there were many more textual variations

9 The earliest known Hebrew dictionary, by R. Natan of Rome, 11<sup>th</sup> century.

10 On the authorship of *Shibolei HaLeket*, see corrections to the first installment of this article, found at the end of this. The *Shibolei HaLeket* was composed in Italy, but it reflects the practices of Central Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth century as known through the *Baalei HaTosafot* (commentators to the Talmud who succeeded Rashi). There is a parallel passage in *Sefer Abudarham* (Rabbi David Abudarham, 14<sup>th</sup> century) as well, but this passage does not appear in all editions.

11 For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that the *Perishah* commentary on the *Tur* considers the first two words of the Kaddish to be Hebrew and a remnant of the Hebrew version of Kaddish that was recited in Geonic times as recorded in *Seder R. Amram Gaon*. He explains that because the words echo the verse in Ezekiel, they were left in Hebrew when the Aramaic version of Kaddish was instituted as standard.

among Ashkenazi siddurim than there are today. Some variations could be attributed to local custom, but many were due to errors made by copyists in manuscripts and later by printers. The corrective to this situation was undertaken simultaneously in two centres of influence for Ashkenazi Jewry.

One of these centres was a body active in Eastern Europe called the *Va'ad HaArba' HaAratzot*, “The Council of the Four Lands.” The *Va'ad* functioned during the 200-year period starting some time during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, extending through the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The body was recognized by the Polish Crown as the representative of the self-governing Jewish community, which enabled it to function as a sort of congress in the regions that it governed. Initially the *Va'ad* governed six regions: Greater Poland, Lesser Poland, Reizn/Podolia, Vohlyn/Vohlinia, Lithuania, and independent Vilna. Early on, Lithuania and Vilna left the greater council and formed a separate *Va'ad*. The original *Va'ad* remained a powerful force in both secular and religious life of the remaining four regions, hence the name by which it is remembered.<sup>12</sup>

The names and works of the scholars involved in the siddur project of the *Va'ad HaArba' HaAratzot* will be recognized immediately by advanced yeshiva students. The *Va'ad* commissioned Rabbi Shabbatai Sofer,<sup>13</sup> a student of Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe (1530–1612), the author of the *Levush*, to undertake the project. The project had the backing of such prominent authorities as: Rabbi Yehoshua Vallach Katz (1555–1614), author of *Sefer Meirat 'Enayim, Sma'* on *Shulhan 'Arukh*, the *Derisha* and the *Perisha* on the *Tur*; Rabbi Shlomo Idels (1555–1631), known as the *MaHarSh”A*; Rabbi Yesha'yahu Horowitz (1558–1630?), author of the *Shenei Lubot HaBerit or SheLa”H*; Rabbi Yoel Sirkis (1561–1630), author of the *Bayit Hadash (Ba”H)* on the *Tur* and others.

A similar project was undertaken in Germany by which the recognized grammarians, Rabbi 'Azriel ben Moshe “Maishl” Vilner and his son Rabbi Eliyahu Vilner (dates of births and deaths unknown). Their work, *Derekh Siyah HaSadeh* appeared in three editions (1704, 1713 and 1721) and included explanations of punctuation and grammar. The siddur was accepted in Frankfurt on the Main by two very prominent rabbis of Central Europe, Rabbi David Oppenheim (1634–1736) and Rabbi Naftali ben Yitzhak Katz (1645–1719). It is difficult to understate the significance of backing by R. David Oppenheim, who was the chief rabbi of Moravia, later of Prague and of Bohemia and held the honorary titles of Nesi Eretz Yisrael and Rav of Yerushalayim due to his financial support of the community that became known as the Old Yishuv. Aside from his scholarly activities, he was politically active and backed by relatives who were financiers and well-connected both within the Jewish community and with government authorities. He was famous as a collector of books and his private library contained 7,000 printed works and 1,000 manuscripts.<sup>14</sup>

12 See Dubnow, Shimon, The History of Jews in Poland in Russia and Poland. Chapters III and IV. Available at <https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/freimann/content/titleinfo/737589>.

13 Exact dates of birth and death unknown. Active towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The siddur, which includes a lengthy introduction on grammar and vocalization and another on the text, was completed in 1617. See יואל הקטן, 78–71 35,3, המעין, סידורו של מה”ר שבתאי סופר מפרעמישלא.

14 [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Oppenheim\\_David](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Oppenheim_David).

The influence of R. Naftali Katz can also not be understated. He stemmed from Eastern Europe and was a rabbi of Posen and head of the *Va'ad HaArba' HaAratzot* before serving in Frankfurt on the Main. As well, he held the title of *Nasi* of Tzefat. R. Naftali was a well-known Kabbalist and advocate for the Zohar in circles where the provenance of this central work of Kabbalah was questioned.<sup>15</sup>

We return now to the activities of the *RaZa"H*. Naturally, as per his interest in grammar and liturgy, the *RaZa"H* examined the Siddur of R. Shabbatai and the *Derekh Siah HaSadeh*. His study of these works prompted him to publish three works of his own: *Binyan Shelomoh*, *Sha'arei Tefilah* and *Bet Tefilah*, which included glosses on the Siddur of R. Shabbatai and *Derekh Siah HaSadeh*. Responses to his critiques were then published in the second edition of *Derekh Siah HaSadeh*.

Needless to say, by placing himself in published opposition to the major authorities of European Jewry, ostracism would be inevitable. Yet it was not only his daring to dispute contemporary scholars of widespread esteem that drew the attention of the rabbinical authorities. He even critiqued early authorities whose works by then considered canonical and beyond re-examination. Among these were Rabbi David Kimhi (1160–1235), known as *RaDa"K*; Don Yitzhak Abravanel (1437–1508); Rabbi Eliahu Levita (1469–1549), known as Eliyahu Bahur and Yitzhak ben Shemuel HaLevi (1580–1646), author of *Siah Yitzhak*.

While the *RaZa"H* did, indeed, incur the ire of the authorities, close examination of his work reveals great esteem for the texts which he studied rather than youthful disrespect for authority. In fact, he shows nuanced and respectful consideration in disputing his predecessors. For example, he attempts to resolve a number of issues raised by some writers who questioned the views of these earlier scholars. On some of these points, he defended the earlier views. On others, he asserted that the later scholar was mistaken and had misunderstood the earlier authority, but that earlier scholar was also mistaken. In these instances, the *RaZa"H* presented what he believed to be the accurate understanding of earlier authority and then proceeded to present his own view. One can recognize in the *RaZa"H*'s manner of debate Hillel's ethic. When disputing other scholars, Hillel first presented his opponents' views in the manner that they wished to be understood and then presented his own view. Whether or not the *RaZa"H*'s own views are convincing—and to contemporary students of Hebrew grammar they are not—the erudition and tone of his work earns him serious consideration.

That being said, the consternation that the work of the *RaZa"H* drew from the established learned community should also be understood within its historical context. While his having dared to dispute contemporary authorities as well as hallowed early scholars would have been enough in traditional circles to lead to his castigation, there can also be no doubt that the acrimony was also fuelled by his youth and the fact that he was self-taught rather than a student of a recognized mentor or established learning circle. No less a factor could have been his status or social position in Jewish society. The *RaZa"H* earned his living primarily as an itinerant Hazan and tutor. It was common then for Hazanim,

15 [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/katz-naphtali-ben-isaac](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/katz-naphtali-ben-isaac).

like preachers, *magidim*, to travel from community to community offering their services. For Hazanim, this lifestyle often defined them as transient Bohemian or artistic types. Then, as today, some pushing of boundaries or unconventionality by artists was regarded as natural and tolerated.<sup>16</sup> This tolerance had its limits, however, and was accompanied by greater scrutiny.

This suspicion was compounded by the fact that the time and places where the *RaZa”H* was active were seeing the beginning years of the Haskalah, a social and intellectual movement regarded in traditional circles as having a corrosive effect upon religious life.<sup>17</sup> Whether or not the *RaZa”H* formally identified with the Haskalah, his scholarly interests bore the markings of a budding Maskil. His focus on the grammatical, linguistic and literary aspects of Tanakh, Mishnah and Hebrew Tannaitic literature, in which he demonstrated erudition, differed from the traditional curricula of Torah study in Ashkenazi communities, and corresponded to the areas of interest characteristic of Maskilim. An Ashkenazi yeshiva student or *Talmid Hakham* during the eighteenth century onward who took an interest in these subjects could expect to draw suspicion.

If the *RaZa”H* was sympathetic to the Haskalah, his beliefs about language were distinctly religious. In the introduction of *Tzohar LaTeivah*, for example, he asserts that the Hebrew language is of Divine origin, and therefore it must be perfect and have no irregularities. He cites this as the reason for his departure from the opinions of early grammarians, which he felt left many anomalies unaccounted for. *RaZa”H* certainly would not have made this argument had he been a secularist. It would have been sufficient to argue from an aesthetic or a scientific basis, as during his age both fields regarded perfection to be the natural state.

Notwithstanding, the Beit Din of Frankfurt on the Main responded to the publications of the *RaZa”H* by ordering him, under threat of *nidui*,<sup>18</sup> to publish a letter of apology for disputing sages of earlier generations. Obviously, this antipathy was not universal, and the divergent treatment of the *RaZa”H* by different authorities is one of the remarkable chapters in the history of Jewish learning. On the one hand, in texts such as the *Peri Megadim* he is called *Moreinu VeRabeinu*. Rabbi Mordechai Disseldorf (also known as Halberstadt, d. 1770), a leading rabbi of Frankfurt, author of *Maamar Mordekhai* and a supporter of *Derekh Siah HaSadeh*, targeted the *RaZa”H* with harsh criticism. Yet he nevertheless referred to him as “the great grammarian who was very exceptional in this knowledge.”

16 This view of Hazanim persists in Haredi communities today. I had a personal experience many years ago one summer in the Laurentians, having a chat with a man who, like me, was wearing a short-sleeved golf shirt and not the black-and-white mode worn by other men who were coming and going. At one point he quipped that I was probably not worried that the way I was dressed would affect my daughters’ shidduchim, since like himself who was a Hazzan, the “oilem” gives more leeway to doctors!

17 The collective memory of the Orthodox community of the Haskalah as an anti-religious need not be applied with too broad a brush. While this characterization of the movement many cases was earned, many Maskilim remained observant Jews their whole lives, and many aspects of the Haskalah program were later embraced by the Orthodox community to a greater or lesser extent. Reasons for the disintegration of religious life in Central Europe and later in Eastern Europe were complex.

18 Ostracism from the community.

Wolf Heidenheim (1757–1832), the editor of the reputable *Siddur Safah Berurah* and the Roedelheim Siddur, *Sefat Emet*, incorporated some of the *RaZa”H*’s corrections.<sup>19</sup> As well, many of the corrections and grammar rules of the *RaZa”H* were incorporated by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the *Ba’al HaTanya*, the author of the *Tanya* 1745–1812), in his edition of the *Nusah HaAR”I* Siddur.<sup>20</sup> It can therefore be said that the *RaZa”H*’s grammatical system and many of his views were taken seriously by leading authorities who concerned themselves with producing grammatically correct siddurim.<sup>21</sup>

The acceptance of the system of the *RaZa”H*’s system of grammar become widespread in Europe, as is evident by the many printings of his book, *Tzohar LaTeivah*, and its influence on many siddurim and treatments of grammar found in Halachic works. However, over the last half century, with deeper study of the grammar of Rabbi Yonah ibn Janah (990–1055), R. David Kimhi, the Tiberian Mesorah<sup>22</sup> and others, his system has become regarded as obsolete in *batei midrash*, in university settings and in the Academy for the Hebrew Language alike. We can still find some old siddurim on the shelves of the BAYT with texts that show the influence of the *RaZa”H*, including the Chabad *Tehillat Hashem*. This influence, however, is largely absent from Birnbaum, ArtScroll, Koren, RCA, or the original edition of Rinat Yisrael Siddurim.<sup>23</sup> Relatively recently, in 2017, the figure of the *RaZa”H* became the subject of heated discussion on the pages of *HaMa’ayan*, the Torah journal of Yeshivat Sha’alvim. These articles are well researched, yet intensity of these discussions, which include ad hominem attacks, seems anachronistic, given that the system of the *RaZa”H* has become mostly of historical interest. The controversy surrounding his work was but one manifestation of a larger social dialectic involving tradition and the Haskalah. Yet is evident that long after the debate ended, the Haskalah has left its fingerprints upon many details of Jewish life, including details of the siddur.

## Sources of the *RaZa”H* and Criticism of R. Ya’akov Emden

Let us now look at what we can learn from an examination of one of the harshest critiques of the *RaZa”H*, those of Rabbi Ya’akov ben Tzvi Emden, known as the *Ya’Ave”Tz* (1697–1776). Readers who are already familiar with the life and work of R. Ya’akov Emden are aware

19 He did not, however, alter the first two words of Kaddish. For balance, it should also be noted that Heidenheim incorporated some glosses by Yitzhak Satanov, a secularizing Maskil who had a reputation in his own circles as having entertained himself by producing forgeries to deceive unsuspecting scholars. He also rejected other glosses.

20 The *Ba’al HaTanya* corrected all relevant Hebrew verbs to read with a *tzeirei* under the middle letter of the root, but left *yitgadal veyitkadash* of Kaddish with a *patah*. Later successors to the Lubavitch rabbinate, Rabbi Sholom Ber Schneerson (the Rebbe *RaSha”B*, 1860–1920) and Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson (the *Friediker Rebbe* or the Rebbe *Raya”Tz*, 1880–1950), pronounced the first two words of Kaddish with *tzeirei*.

21 Among the more familiar glosses that were accepted are the phrases “*befi amo*,” rather than “*befeh amo*” in the blessing “*Barukh She’amar*” and “*mashev baruah umorid hagashem*” vocalized with a *kamatz*, as opposed to with a *segol*. In addition, Ashkenazi siddurim that marked the *sheva na’* (vocalized *sheva*) followed the rules of the *RaZa”H* until the appearance of the ArtScroll and Koren editions, which reverted to the rules of the *RaDa”K*.

22 The system of vowels and accent marks that became prevalent in Tanakh until today, developed in Tiberias between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

23 In the original editions, many, but not all instances of verbs vocalized in Hebrew with *tzeirei* are corrected, but the first two words of Kaddish are left with *patah*. In more recent editions, the initial words of Kaddish appear with a *tzeirei*.

that he did not shun controversy. He is probably best known for his conflict with Rabbi Yonatan Eibenschutz, whom he suspected of being a secret supporter of the Shabbatai Tzvi movement, which had by that time gone underground. Some would regard R. Emden as having been overly suspicious, and R. Eibenschutz's works can be found in the shelves of *batei midrash* today. On the other hand, R. Emden was not radically conservative in his outlook. For example, he believed that Christianity is a form of monotheism that is acceptable for non-Jews to practice. He had a complex approach to modern thinking. He maintained cordial relations with Moses Mendelssohn and was in favour of secular learning, though at the same time, he opposed critiques of religion found in philosophy and shunned discoveries of the scientific revolution that were not consistent with traditional halakhic thinking.

R. Ya'akov Emden's father, Rabbi Tzvi Ashkenazi, the author of *ShU"t Hakham Tzvi*, had given his endorsement to the *RaZa"H*'s *Shā'arei Tefillah*.<sup>24</sup> Yet, *Ya'Ve"tz* accused the *RaZa"H* of forging this endorsement. Regarding the *RaZa"H*, R. Ya'akov Emden wrote, among other things:

He corrupted the old texts that that we possessed which were handed down to us by our elders. He reversed and erased... and in his arrogance entered a realm that was not his, demolished and built [arbitrarily based upon] anything that occurred to him.<sup>25</sup>

The *RaZa"H* was aware of R. Ya'akov Emden's criticism and in his published writings stated that he had attempted reconciliation. According to the *RaZa"H*, he had met *Ya'Ve"tz* while in Amsterdam with the intention of discussing the latter's critiques. *RaZa"H* said that he wished to explain himself in case *Ya'Ve"tz* misunderstood some of his views, and he was prepared to retract opinions that *Ya'Ve"tz* could refute. *RaZa"H* relates that *Ya'Ve"tz* denied the criticism attributed to him. *RaZa"H*, however, maintained that he had been told of the criticisms by honest individuals who had heard them first hand. *RaZa"H* recounts that once again he asked *Ya'Ve"tz* to enter into an intellectually honest discussion. *RaZa"H* ends the anecdote by relating that *Ya'Ve"tz* ignored him.<sup>26</sup>

The book in which *Ya'Ve"tz*'s critiques of the *RaZa"H* appear, *Luah Eresh*, was not published until after the passing of *RaZa"H*. Therefore, there was no opportunity for continued debate either directly or in written correspondence. The following is the most relevant passage from *Luah Eresh*:

*Yitgadal veyitkadash, etc.; Yitbarah veyishtabah, etc.* We have already written (par. 121) that the correct reading for all of these [words] remains *patah* for the *'ayin hap'āl*. ... in truth the author of the *Parde*s is unknown. ...[while] it is known undoubtedly that it includes a number of statements that never came

24 A print copy of the *baskamah* (endorsement) of the *Hakham Tzvi* to *RaZa"H*'s *Shā'arei Tefillah* can be found at <https://beta.hebrewbooks.org/reader/reader.aspx?sfid=7570#p=3&fitMode=fitwidth&hlts=&ocr=>.

25 R. Ya'akov Emden, *Luah Eresh*.

26 *RaZa"H*, *Tzohar LaTeivah*, *Michseh LaTeivah*.



from the mouth of Rashi, z”l; [but] rather his students and later compilers<sup>27</sup> and collectors of oral traditions gathered some statements attributed to him and added to them many such words that copyists and writers falsely attributed to him in order to raise the price of their product, as is with many forged commentaries that are falsely attributed to Rashi... Does not the following demonstrate its strangeness and that it is not from Rashi, the light of the exile...? Who could have said that the Tetragrammaton is Aramaic?<sup>28</sup> Far be it; far be it to say so .... It is also impossible for a single composition of praise such as this to be split between two different languages and joined, as we have no similar example in any sacred liturgy or formula for blessings instituted by our sages of blessed memory; it counters all reasoning ... in addition and in any event, it contradicts the opinions of all interpreters of the language of the Kaddish as explained in *Tur Orab Haim* (par. 56)...<sup>29</sup>

The critique of *Ya’Ave”Tz* rests on the following points: (1) Siddurim, which accurately reflect the tradition that has come down to us, show *yitgadal veyitkdash*, with the *dalet* vocalized with a *patah*; (2) Central authorities state that the Kaddish is to be recited in Aramaic and provide several explanations for this requirement; (3) The *Pardes*, a work quoted by the *RaZa”H* and others and which is attributed to Rashi, is actually of dubious origin. Attribution of this passage to Rashi is especially problematic, since it includes some puzzling, incomprehensible statements and it lacks the elegance characteristic of Rashi’s style; (4) The idea that a single prayer would shift languages between Aramaic and Hebrew defies reason; (5) It is may be possible to demonstrate grammatically that the *patah* is, indeed the correct vowel for the *dalet* of these two verbs.

## The Authenticity of the Pardes

While R. Zalman Henna did not have the opportunity to respond to the critiques of R. Emden, the issues raised by R. Emden have become a subject of study for modern scholars. The assertion of *Ya’Ave”Tz* that the tradition of pronouncing *yitgadal veyitkdash* with *patah dalet* is authentic is supported by writers who have researched available manuscripts and early print editions.<sup>30</sup> We have pointed out in our previous paper that a number of authorities incorporated the view that the words *yitgadal veyitkdash* echo the words of Ezekiel 38:23, but do not suggest that these words should actually be recited in Hebrew.

27 The Hebrew word that I have translated as compilers, “megavevim,” is a decidedly negative or sarcastic expression. “Legavev” means “to pile” up something of little value, such as hay, “gevavah.” One can say “legavev devarim,” piling up words (Yoma 76a) or in Modern Hebrew “legavev milim.”

28 The notion that the Tetragrammaton is actually Aramaic can be found in each of the existing works of Rashi literature: *Pardes*, *Likutei HaPardes*, *Mahzor Vitri*, and *Siddur Rashi*. See also my comments in our previous article on the relevant passage of the *Peri Megadim*, *Mishbetzot Zabav*, where the phrase in question is copied verbatim, but without attribution to any of the texts of the Rashi literature. This phrase, “arami hu,” is not only puzzling in itself, but renders the entire passage unintelligible. This question will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

29 *Luah Eresh*, par. 257.

30 For a list, see הרב דניאל רבינוביץ, בעיית השינויים בסידור: על שינויים בניקוד תפילת הקדיש.

Nor does the observation that a phrase in the siddur echoes the Tanakh make a compelling argument do deviate from the linguistic conventions used in nearly all siddurim. R. Emden takes this position and supports it by quoting authorities cited in the *Tur* who require the Kaddish to be said in Aramaic. We may further observe the *Beit Yosef*, in his commentary on the *Tur*, makes use of a number of earlier works that explicitly rule that the initial words of Kaddish should be recited in Hebrew, yet he makes no mention of this ruling. He does not even quote the practice as a dissenting opinion or alternative custom (*yesh omerim* or *yesh nobagim*). Three possible explanations come to mind to explain this omission.<sup>31</sup> It could be that in light of prevalent practice, he considered the tradition of pronouncing these words in Hebrew to be halakhically inconsequential. One could also adopt the position of R. Emden that these Rashi texts are in such poor condition and have been tampered with so extensively that there is no reliable evidence of any practice of reciting the initial two words of Kaddish in Hebrew, biblical allusions notwithstanding. A third possibility is similar to one that the *Ya'Ve"tz* suggests, that whether the first two words of Kaddish are Hebrew or Aramaic, the correct vocalization is with a *patah*.

Since R. Ya'akov Emden's critique is aimed directly at the legitimacy of the *Pardes*, we should concern ourselves with the origins and authenticity of that text. An examination of available manuscripts and early print editions reveal significant variations, substantiating R. Emden's scepticism. The question then becomes: even if we can accept that there was an original *Sefer HaPardes* that originated in circles close to Rashi, which of the existing variants most closely reflects the original *Sefer HaPardes* and how accurately does it do so? Fortunately, the origin of *Sefer HaPardes* is the subject of a dissertation by Pinhas Rott.<sup>32</sup>

In his work, Rott surveys the various traditional views regarding the authorship of the *Sefer HaPardes*. For example, R. Avraham Zekhut (Zakuto) in his *Sefer HaYobasin* and early commentators who quoted the *Pardes* attributed the book to Rashi. R. Moshe Isserlis, the *ReM"i*, annotated the *Sefer HaYobasin*, and stated that a student of Rashi, R. Shmuel of Bamberg composed the *Pardes* and another student, R. Shimon, composed the related work, the *Likutei Pardes*. Others bibliographers attribute either the *Pardes* or *Likutei Pardes* to Rashi's student and assistant, Shemayah. Whatever its origin, it appears that the *Sefer HaPardes* did not appear in print until several centuries after it was written. Most authorities who quoted rulings attributed to Rashi were familiar with them through the *Likutei Pardes*.

Rott points out that early bibliographers differ with Zakuto regarding the authorship of the *Pardes* but do not cite any sources for their attributions. This further supports the doubts that Rav Emden expressed regarding the authorship of the book. Rott calls attention to the encyclopaedic work by R. Hayim Yosef David Azulai (the *HID"i*) entitled *Shem HaGedolim* in which there are three entries for the *Sefer HaPardes*. In one, the *HID"i* refers to the "*Pardes of Rashi*" as the source of the *Likutei Pardes*. From comments in

31 The outlying opinion, as indicated before, is that of the Perishah.

32 רוט, פנחס. ספר הפרדס: לדרכי הווצרותו של ילקוט הלכתי בימי הביניים. עבודת שוות ערך לעבודת גמר לאוניברסיטה העברית. נ"י תשס"ח.



other entries in the *Shem HaGedolim*, it is evident that the *Sefer HaPardes* indeed was not widely available. In identifying the origins of the *Sefer HaPardes*, the *HID"Á* used cautious language. In one entry, the *HID"Á* wrote that he was in possession of a manuscript on parchment that "is said to be" the *Sefer HaPardes*. In another entry the *HID"Á* asserts that Shmuel of Bamberg composed the *Sefer HaPardes*. In a third entry, this one for the *Shibolei HaLeket*, the *HID"Á* again refers to a "manuscript that is said to be the *Pardes*." In still a fourth reference, the *HID"Á* points to a passage in the *Mordekhai* commentary on tractate *Berakhot* mentioning "*The Sefer HaPardes* which was compiled by Rashi." On this, the *HID"Á* comments, "but what I have seen was compiled by his [Rashi's –D.M.F.] student." It seems that the *HID"Á* is referring here to his copy of the *Likutei Pardes*, as he asserts that the *Likutim* were anthologized from the *Pardes*. Recall, however, that the *HID"Á* expressed uncertainty as to whether the manuscript that was in his possession was actually the *Pardes*.

Proceeding from the uncertainties raised regarding the book's authorship, Rott suggests that two more questions need to be addressed, aside from the question of what the original text actually said: (1) where was the *Sefer HaPardes* produced? (2) when was it produced? Rott points out that the answers to these questions may take priority; because with many ancient and medieval works, there may never have been a single authorized and authentic edition. Often texts were transcripts of oral discussions, but several initial transcripts may have been prepared simultaneously by different students, each one including variations based on individual interpretations, rephrasing, mishearings or errors in transcription. Alternatively, texts underwent revisions, were amended, or were edited. Rott cites the position of late Israeli scholar Yisrael Ta Shma, that especially in Ashkenazi communities, texts were treated as fluid.

In order to address these questions, Rott compared the available manuscripts and early print editions of the *Pardes*. His investigation produced evidence in support of R. Ya'akov Emden's claim that much in the book was added by students and others. He observed that each copy of the *Pardes* includes passages that stand out and do not appear as if they could have been part of the source text from which the existing manuscript was copied. Rott then catalogued sections in which the manuscripts differed from each other and the sections that appear in the print editions but not in the manuscripts. Using this method, Rott produced a core text, which he felt all of the existing copies had in common. To add further insight, Rott examined the source material cited by the *Pardes* and surveyed texts that quoted the *Pardes*. He reasoned that the *Pardes* must have been composed at a later date than the latest text that it quoted, and the earliest copies of the *Pardes* must have been released no later than the earliest work in which the *Pardes* is quoted. Then, by comparing the rulings found in the *Pardes* to those found in other works from that time interval, he flagged sections that must have been added or modified after the release of the first copies, and the location in which the various flagged sections originated. To further assist in this tracing of the origins of sections added after the release of the first copies, he examined the earlier Halakhic rulings that were consistent with those in the

*Pardes*, and where possible, he identified other localities of the scholars who used those sources for their decisions.

With this labour-intensive method, Rott concluded that *Pardes* includes collected material that pre-dates Rashi and has a core of material that has its origins in circles close to Rashi in France. Yet he found that the earliest scholars who actually quote the book were in Sephardic and Mizrahi communities and not in France and Germany (with the notable exception being the *Mordekhai* on tractate *Berakhot*). This suggests to Rott that, like the *Shibolei HaLeket*, *Sefer HaPardes* was anthologized in Italy, where Jews at the time, alongside their indigenous customs, relied heavily on Ashkenazi authorities. Unlike *Shibolei HaLeket*, however, which is a well-organized work, even the core sections of the *Sefer HaPardes* appear to be a loosely-edited anthology. Rott follows Ta Shma's position on this regarding the handling of canonical documents during the Middle Ages. In copying documents from different localities, the main body of the document would mostly be preserved, but adapted for local use by altering, inserting, or omitting a word or phrase. Students of Gemara might be familiar with this method of preserving Mishnayot and Baraitot in which inconsistencies in the literal reading cannot be reconciled through reasoning or legal or logical distinctions. We have already suggested that a similar process might have taken place with early modern commentators of the *Shulhan Arukh*. These writers may have selectively used passages from the works of the of the Beit Midrash of Rashi and the *Shibolei HaLeket*, accepting the interpretation of *yitgadal veyitkadash* as echoing Ezekiel 38:23, but omitting rulings regarding the recitation of these words in Hebrew. This method of treating texts contrasts to our modern regard of the books and articles that we read to be fixed authentic records of the writer's or writers' thinking, and we presume that they have been proofread and refined prior to publication. In medieval times, classical texts were treated with care, but current publications were treated as working documents.

## Understanding the Pardes

As we recall, *Ya'Ve"tz* rejected the *Pardes* as a whole. Nevertheless, following the leads of Ta Shma and Rott, we may find it fruitful to reconsider its use. While the existing text is without a doubt in a damaged state and it may not be possible to reconstruct the original core text from which later editors worked, it may be possible to extract the basic ideas that appeared in the original text or were added by its editors. Support for undertaking such a reconstruction comes from the observations that nearly all material relating to Kaddish in the *Pardes* has parallel passages to be found in the other works from the school of Rashi that were widely disseminated shortly after Rashi's passing. This suggests that ideas found in the original undamaged text and its revisions were reviewed and found wide acceptance. Readers should be cautioned that the remainder of this article will no longer deal with historical origins and authors, but will turn to technical aspects of the text. The text presented here is from the Ehrenreich edition. However, since our discussion and examination of R. Ya'akov Emden's inferences from the poor quality of

the text, I present the text without Ehrenreich's edits. In the Hebrew text, I annotate two obvious copy errors.<sup>33</sup>

יתגדל. לשון הפסוק דכתיב והתגדלתי והתקדשתי ונודעתי לעיני גויים רבים וידעו כי אני ה'. ובמלחמת גוג ומגוג מיירי קרא. וכן משמעו יתגדל ויתקדש שמו של הקב"ה לעתיד לבוא שיהא מגודל ומקודש כדכתיב וידעתם כי שמי ה'.<sup>34</sup> לפי שעכשיו לא כשנכתב הוא נקרא כי נקרא באל"ף דל"ת ונכתב ב"ה. ולשון ארמי הוא. וקמץ הוא, כי הוא השם המיוחד לעבוד וכינוייה הוא באל"ף דל"ת. לפי שהשם המיוחד הוא בלשון ארמי ואין אנו רשאים להזכירו דכתיב זה שמי לעולם<sup>35</sup> כתיב ולכן אנו אומרים יהא שמה רבה בארמית. ולעולם הבא יקרא ככתיבתו דכתיב ביום ההוא יהיה ה' אחד ושמו אחד כדמפורש למעלה. והואיל ומתחיל תחילה בלשון עברי אומר הכל בלשון עברי יתגדל ויתקדש עד שמגיע (בשם) [לשם] הנכתב ארמי, הוא שכתוב בפסוק וידעו כי שמי ה' ומזכירו בלשון ארמי ואומר יהא שמה רבא בעלמא דברא והיינו לעתיד כי מלחמת גוג ומגוג לעתיד.

*Yitgadal*. Scriptural language, as it is written, "I shall become great and I shall become sanctified (*vehitgadilti vebitkadishti*) and known in the eyes of many nations and they shall know that I am Y-H-V-H (Ezekiel 28:33)," and Scripture is referring to the war of Gog and Magog. And the following is its meaning: Great and sanctified will become the name of the Holy One Blessed Be He in the future. [I.e.], that it will become great and sanctified, as it is written, "and they shall know that my Name is Y-H-V-H (Jeremiah 17:21)." Since at the present it is not read as it is written, as it read with *aleph dalet*<sup>36</sup> and written with *yod beh*.<sup>37</sup> And it is of the Aramaic language.<sup>38</sup> And it is [vocalized with] *kamatz*<sup>39</sup> because it is the Singular Name to use in worship, and it is alluded

33 Other possible evidence of reworking the text will be noted as the discussion progresses. Ehrenreich's editing is based upon comparison with corresponding passages in other texts attributed to Rashi or reflecting Rashi's school: *Mabzor Vitri*, *Siddur Rashi*, *Likutei Pardes* and *Shibolei HaLeket*. It seems to me that even without Ehrenreich's editing, the text is fairly readable, though in poor condition.

34 There is actually no such verse. Ehrenreich suggests two possible corrections. The verse in Ezekiel upon which our discussion hinges reads, "וידעו כי אני ה'." This verse includes the motif ידע knowledge, but is missing the motif שם name, which is also a pivotal word for this homily. A verse "וידעו כי שמי ה'" appears in Jeremiah 16:22, and is the one used in the parallel passage in *Mabzor Vitri*, *Likutei Pardes* and *Siddur Rashi*, and is quoted at the end of the passage. This could be the verse that the copyist who penned these words had in mind. There is an additional non-existent verse later in the passage, והתגדלתי והתקדשתי לעיני בני ישראל. In addition to these errors, the reader will observe redundancies. Errors and redundancies suggest clipping and pasting of this passage by more than one hand.

35 The meaning of this passage would only be obvious to a reader who is familiar with the Midrash interpreting the spelling of this word without the letter *vav* to signify the prohibition against using the Tetragrammaton. In the available text, the word is spelled with a *vav*, again suggesting either a copyist who was not knowledgeable or not careful.

36 I.e., *aleph dalet nun yod*: *Ad-nai*.

37 I.e., *yod beh vav beh*: *Y-H-V-H*.

38 What, exactly, is in the Aramaic language? The names of G-d? This will be discussed in the body text.

39 What word vocalized with a *kamatz* could this be referring to? Obviously, this cannot be referring to a vowel in the ineffable name of G-d, because that name is... ineffable! It also seems implausible to explain that this refers to the vowel under the *nun* of the name *Ad-nai*, to distinguish the word used as a Name of G-d from the word that carries the secular translation, "my lord," which is vocalized with a *patah* under the *nun*. The statement is unnecessary and does not fit into the sentence structure.

to with *aleph dalet*. For the Singular Name is in the Aramaic language and we are not permitted to utter it, as it is written, "... this is My Name forever" (Exodus 3:15), and for this reason we recite, "*Yehei Shemeih Raba* (may His Great Name be blessed)" in Aramaic. And in the world to come<sup>40</sup> it will be read as it is written, as the scripture writes "on that day Y-H-V-H will be one and His name will be one (Zechariah 14:9)," as explained above. And since one begins in the Hebrew language, one says all in the Hebrew language,<sup>41</sup> "*yitgadel veytkadesh*" until one comes to the Name that is written Aramaic. This is the reference in Scripture "And they shall know that my name is Y-H-V-H." And he utters it in Aramaic and says, "... *His Great Name in world that He created*," meaning in the future, for the war of Gog and Magog is in the future.

The reader of this passage cannot help but notice that, as R. Ya'akov Emden pointed out, the text does not have the elegance, concision, consistency and clarity to which one is accustomed from Rashi's commentaries on Tanakh and Talmud. Aside from phrases that are unintelligible, the ideas presented are not developed clearly and systematically, there are redundancies and phrasing is clumsy. In the passage that follows the one above, it is suggested that one could consider adding the word *veytivadeya'* in the Kaddish, as the verse in Ezekiel continues with the word, *venoda'ti*. The *Pardes* offers an explanation, seemingly supported by quoting a non-existent verse. All in all, the condition of the above quoted passage is arguably a representative sample of the state of the text of *Sefer HaPardes* as a whole.

As we begin reading this passage, we are not only confused by its sentence fragments, rambling style and misquotes of scripture. The truly problematic phrases are those that appear to identify the language of the Tetragrammaton as Aramaic and the reference to the vowel *kamatz*. The general ideas expressed in the passage are that G-d's diminished greatness, so to speak, is an outcome of a lesser knowledge of G-d and is reflected in the present prohibition of pronouncing His name as it is written, Y-H-V-H, and therefore Ad-nai must be used. "On that day G-d's Name will be one" means that the day will come when the dichotomy between the way His name is written and the way it is pronounced will fall away. Israel and all nations will then "know" that G-d's name is Y-H-V-H. The message, of course, reflects the ancient notion that a name is inseparable from the essential character of the object it denotes and that knowing a name implies intimate knowledge. This contrasts to modern linguistic sensibilities that regard words as arbitrary labels. Writers of the remaining texts from the Rashi school understand the

40 The meaning here is in the Messianic era, when the dead are resurrected, rather than the popular use of the term to mean the dwelling place of the souls of the righteous after death. (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 90a, Mishnah and interpretation of Gemara).

41 The text is confusing here. We have begun the Kaddish in Hebrew, but what is meant by saying 'it all' in Hebrew? Only the opening words are in Hebrew, and followed by a long recitation in Aramaic. It may be suggested that although the word *yitgadel*, no matter how it is vocalized, is unmistakably Hebrew, *yitkadesh* could be either Hebrew or Aramaic. The *Pardes* therefore asserts that *yitkadesh* also follows the verse in Ezekiel and is Hebrew. This point will be elaborated upon later in this study.

passage as explaining that the Aramaic words “*Yebeih Shemei Raba*” are in Aramaic to reflect the Aramaic Tetragrammaton.

How are we to understand this anomalous idea that the Holy Name of G-d, that which signifies intimate knowledge of Him, is in a language other than Hebrew? The apparent supposition that the ineffable singular great name is actually Aramaic, is repeated in this text and has parallels in *Siddur Rashi*, *Mahzor Vitri*, *Likutei Pardes*, and *Shibolei HaLeket*. Yet, this notion in particular is the object of attack by R. Ya'akov Emden. This understanding that the Tetragrammaton, G-d's Eternal and Holy Name, could be in any language other than the Holy Tongue, is not only counterintuitive to Jewish religious sensibilities, it runs counter to Halakhic discussions indicating that the rules regarding the treatment of the written name of G-d and its pronunciation apply primarily to Hebrew, and only as an added stricture to references to G-d in other languages. R. Aryeh Golschmidt, in a footnote in the Otzar HaPoskim edition of *Mahzor Vitri* states that he does not know what this could mean. A marginal note suggests that the name Y-H-V-H is third person for the verb “to be,” compared to “Eh-yeh,” which is first person. When Moses asked G-d His name, G-d answered that he calls himself “Eh-yeh” and others should call him “Y-H-V-H.” The third letter of the name Y-H-V-H is *vav* because it is based on an Aramaic root, whereas in Hebrew the letter would have been *yod* and the name “Yihyeh.” This explanation is forced for a number of reasons. The Aramaic word for *yihyeh* is *yebei*. Y-H-V-H is seen by modern scholars as the participial form of “to be” in Hebrew. As well, this explanation does not address the fundamental anomaly of the notion that the G-d of Creation should have an Aramaic name.

Towards the end of the passage quoted, we notice a second iteration of three points already made: that Kaddish begins in Hebrew, it refers to the outcome of the war of Gog and Magog, and that G-d's name is Aramaic. This section, beginning: “And since one begins in the Hebrew language,” quite lucidly explains that the changes in consciousness of G-d that will be brought about by the war of Gog and Magog are captured in the word “*Yitgadel*.” As long as we have begun the recitation of the passage in Hebrew by echoing the first word of the verse in Hebrew, we should continue in Hebrew with the next word, which also echoes the verse, “*veyitkadesh*.” The passage then instructs us to shift to Aramaic when we refer to G-d's name, with the word “*Shemeih*.”

Perhaps this iteration, which may have been added in a second release of this work, can help us understand what Aramaic usage and what *kamatz* was referred to in the intact version of the first iteration. Rashi, it should be noted, called some vowels by different names than those we use. For example, he used the term *kamatz* or *kamatz gadol* to refer to the same vowel as we do. However, Rashi used the term *kamatz katan* to refer to the vowel that we call the *tzeirei*. But sometimes he referred to our *tzeirei* simply as *kamatz* (for examples see Rashi on Job 36:33, Micah 3:7). Perhaps, the *Pardes*, in referring to the “Name of G-d” to be said in Aramaic, was not referring to the Tetragrammaton, but to the Aramaic words “*Shemeih deKudsha Brikh Hu*,” (the Name of the Holy One Blessed be He). We are instructed to use the *kamatz katan/tzeirei* in the word *Shemeih* as it is to

be said in Aramaic, as opposed to using the *holam*, which would be the vowel to use if the word were Hebrew. In other words, we are instructed to *refer* to G-d's name using an Aramaic phrase, not that G-d's name *is* Aramaic. A similar idea appears later in the passage describing a shift back to Hebrew in the second paragraph, after mentioning "*Hashem Hanichtav Ba'arami*." The proper punctuation would be to place the word "Hashem" in quotes, with a comma following it: "the Name,' which is written in Aramaic," referring to the word "*Shemeih*." Ehrenreich notes that there is an asterisk next to this phrase in the Warsaw edition, indicating that the printer did not understand what it could mean in saying that G-d's name is Aramaic. However, if it is referring to the word "*Shemeih*," the phrase becomes intelligible.

We may never be able to reconstruct the first iteration of this passage. Admittedly, this unpacking is rather speculative and departs from the understanding evident in early texts. In this respect, a caution offered by Moreinu R. Aharon Lichtenstein z"l regarding *girs'ot* (textual corrections) should lead us to exercise restraint. His teachers in Harvard had pointed out that when one is faced with a text that is implausible, it might, in fact be the correct reading. The reasoning is that it is not likely that an editor would have corrected a plausible reading and replaced it with an implausible one. In this instance, we might consider that the notion that G-d's name is Aramaic is stated unambiguously in other texts of Rashi's school and persisted into late medieval and early modern commentaries. Finally, it is important to take into account the mystical flavour of this interpretation of the words of Kaddish. It was common for writers, when recording mystical interpretations, to deliberately use cryptic and confusing phrases so that only the initiated would understand their references.

Those that accept the statement that G-d's name is Aramaic as intact, interpret this idea to mean that a fragmented form of G-d's name, Y-H, is embedded in the Aramaic word "*Shemeih*," "His name." This is how Rabenu Tam understood *Mahzor Vitri*, as quoted in *Tosafot*, *Berakhot* 3a, i.e., that the Hebrew letters of the word "*Shemeih*" spell out "Shem Y-H," "the name, 'Yod-Heh'." The *Vitri* continues to explain that by saying *Yitgadal*, we are asking for the day to come when the name of G-d Y-H is to be expanded and united with the letters V-H to express its full holiness. This is in contrast to our exilic era, when the name of G-d is torn asunder by the presence of Amalek.<sup>42</sup> This interpretation surfaces again in the commentators of the *Tur*, some of whom accept it and some find it difficult because the proper spelling of *Shemeih* is without the letter *yod*. These objections, though, are not serious reasons to reject this interpretation. There are numerous examples of *derashot* that make use of phonetic spellings that do not reflect standard orthography of the *Mesorah*.<sup>43</sup> In conclusion, we may assert that although we may not be able to reconstruct the first iteration in its original form, we can be fairly confident that we understand its

<sup>42</sup> See Rashi on Exodus 17:16.

<sup>43</sup> One example is the *derasha* which adds gematria of the word ציצית to its five knots and eight strings to symbolically equal the 613 *mitzvot*. The symbolism is calculated as if the word had two *yods*. Another is a *derashah* of the words in the first blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, קונה הכל, of which there is a common variant וקנה הכל. The *derashah* states that the letters of קונה are a rearrangement of the letters of the word ונקה, "and He cleanses," inasmuch as Abraham,



message. We are taught that inasmuch as we cannot utter G-d's ineffable name beginning with *yod-heh* and we substitute the name beginning with *aleph-dalet*; when we pray for the day that it will be pronounced as it is written, we also do not pronounce this name directly in Hebrew, but embed it in the Aramaic expression *Shemeih Raba*.<sup>44</sup>

Our lengthy discussion of the *Pardes* should not lead us to forget that the custom of pronouncing the words *yitgadel veyitkadesh* in Hebrew does not seem to have taken hold. Despite its ubiquitous presence in Rashi literature, the custom is not mentioned in Rashi's commentary in the Talmud. The Tosafot in Berakhot previously quoted record Rabenu Tam as having dismissed all mystical meanings given to the words of Kaddish or to its recitation in Aramaic. Specifically, he rejects mystical interpretations of the word, *Shemeih*. In support of his opinion, he cites passages in the Gemara discussing possible reasons for the Aramaic recitation, but concluding that the Kaddish was recited at the close of lectures that were attended by unlearned members of the community who did not understand Hebrew, and the words of the Kaddish mean no more than they seem to mean. Moreover, the notion of reciting the initial words of Kaddish is not to be found in the works of Nahmanides or his school or in those of the schools of Provence. One might have expected the practice to have been recorded by other Tosafists, including Rabenu Asher ben Yehiel (the *RO"Sh*, 1250–1327). The *RO"Sh* immigrated to Spain and had close contacts with Rabbi Shelomo ben Avraham ibn Aderet (*RaShB"A*, 1235–1310), a successor of Nahmanides (Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman, 1194–1270). One might have expected the tradition to have been transmitted by the *RO"Sh* to the *RaShB"A*. Likewise, it would be expected that record of such a practice might have been transmitted by the *RO"Sh* to his son, R. Ya'akov (1269–1343), the *Ba'al HaTurim* (author of the *Tur*), and from there to have found its way into the canonical codes of Halakha and their commentaries. Yet, in a responsum by the *RaShB"A* to a query about recitation of passages of the Kaddish in Hebrew—a custom that possibly dated back to the time of the Geonim and seems to have persisted in some communities in Spain—the *RaShB"A* responds in his usual leniency regarding the language and exact wording of prayers. He emphasizes explicitly, though, that the preferable practice instituted by the Sages was to recite the Kaddish in Aramaic.<sup>45</sup> There seems to be no record outside of the literature attributed to the Rashi school of an alternative pronunciation of the initial words of the Kaddish until the seventeenth century. It seems, therefore, that although R. Ya'akov Emden's complete rejection of the

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the ancestor who is the focus of the blessing, represents the principle of loving-kindness. This *derashah* works for the variant only if וקנה is spelled without a second *vav*, although this would depart from the standard spelling of the word.

44 There is other evidence of cutting and pasting within the text of the passage itself. The excerpt quoted in this study was extracted from a section of the *Pardes* that bears the heading, "Interpretation of Prayers by Our Teacher Shlomo," referring to Rashi. In the passage dealing with Kaddish, after presenting the interpretation of one particular phrase, there appears a concluding phrase, "I have not heard any more." The text then continues with further interpretation and a concluding statement, "From the mouth of Our Teacher Shlomo, of sainted and blessed memory." Afterwards, the text continues still further with a passage that begins with the words, "Explanation of Kaddish" and concludes: "The explanation of Kaddish is completed."

45 *RaShB"A Responsa* 5:54.

texts attributed to the Rashi's school seems radical, the tradition does appear to have become marginal after several generations.

## The Pataḥ

Returning to the notion that the first two words of the Kaddish may be Hebrew, we have noted in our previous article that throughout the siddur, reflexive words stemming from the roots *gdl* and *kdsb* are vocalized with *pataḥ*. Can it be demonstrated from a grammatical point of view, that the correct vowel for the *dalet* of the words *yitgadal veyitkadash* is *pataḥ*, as *YāʾĀVēʾTz* asserts? The simplest solution, which is offered by R. Emden and is widely accepted, is that the siddur was composed in Mishnaic Hebrew, in which the vowel used for these roots is the *pataḥ*. But R. Emden also suggests it can be demonstrated that the vowel *pataḥ* can be correct by comparison with verbs in the Tanakh. This second suggestion does not bear out, though. In the cases where the roots *gdl* and *kdsb* are present in third person reflexive future tense in Tanakh, they show a *tzeirei*.<sup>46</sup> However, we shall see shortly that this is not definitive.

Both early and later discussions of the language used for the words *yitgadal veyitkadash* seem to overlook a glaring point noticed by David De Sola Pool in his dissertation on the Kaddish.<sup>47</sup> The word *yitgadal*, whether is vocalized with *dalet pataḥ* or *dalet tzeirei*, is Hebrew and not Aramaic. The Aramaic word for “will become great” is *yitravrav* or *yitrabei*.<sup>48</sup> While De Sola Pool does not elaborate upon this particular point, De Sola Pool's general view on the language of the Kaddish does offer a deeper understanding of this point. He suggests that the Aramaic of Kaddish is not the Aramaic that Jews spoke either at home or in the market place. Rather, the language is rather a sort of jargon that was used in synagogues and *batei midrash*. De Sola Pool seems to be proposing that Jews in Babylon had speech habits that were similar to those of English-speaking Jews when they allow Hebrew or Yiddish vocabulary and sentence structure to slip in while in synagogue or *beit midrash*. One can imagine that Hebrew words and phrases that are familiar through prayers or study could much more easily pass into Aramaic, a language closely related to Hebrew, than into English. De Sola Pool does not make this case specifically for the root *gdl*, but he points out that the passage starting *yitbarakh* could easily pass for Aramaic even though it includes roots whose usage in Hebrew is different from Aramaic. One example is the word *veyithadar*, which in Hebrew means “become beautiful;” whereas strictly speaking, in proper Aramaic, the root *hḏr* in Aramaic means, “answer,” “return,” “turn back,” “retract,” or “change one's mind.” Another example is the word *yitnasei*. The reflexive usage here obviously conveys a sense of dignity or exaltation, whereas the Aramaic usage of the reflexive of this word is invariably a negative one

<sup>46</sup> Isaiah 10:15, Daniel 11:36, II Chronicles 29:34.

<sup>47</sup> De Sola Pool, David. *The Kaddish*. W. Drugulin: Leipzig. 1909. Retrieved from [www.archive.org/details/kaddishkh00poolrich](http://www.archive.org/details/kaddishkh00poolrich), 10–5–2022.

<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the *Sefer HaPardes*, stating that since one begins in Hebrew one continues in Hebrew, also regarded the first word of Kaddish as unambiguously in Hebrew, while the word *yitkadash* could be either Hebrew or Aramaic.



similar to its use in modern Hebrew, conveying arrogance. De Sola Pool points out, in the spirit of traditional commentators albeit phrased differently, that it would have been impossible to force Hebrew words of praise that were familiar from Psalms into Aramaic. Nevertheless, he says, the Aramaic-speaking Jew could easily have heard Aramaic words as Hebrew and Hebrew words as Aramaic. This could certainly have applied to the words *yitgadal veyitkadash*.<sup>49</sup>

Returning now to the Hebrew vocalization of יתגדל, in his discussion of this topic (pp. 28–29), De Sola Pool makes brief mention of a masoretic note that he found in a ninth century manuscript in the British museum that reads as follows:

על שם הכותב והמנקד יתגדל ל'.

This note is a playful phrase that roughly translates as: “In the name of the writer and the vocalizer, none will become greater.” It is a mnemonic that plays upon approximate rhyming of the words *shem* (name), *kotev* (writer), *menaked* (vocalizer), *yitgadel* (become great) and perhaps also *leita* (there is none). This amusing note refers to the division of labour involved in copying Hebrew texts during the age that preceded printing. The *kotev* first copied the text without filling in the vowels or trope and the *menaked* then filled in the rest. Masoretic notes such as this served as mnemonics for preserving the correct spelling and vocalizing of the Tanakh. De Sola Pool interprets the *yitgadel leta* as meaning “there is no *yitgadel*,” i.e., that a punctuated *yitgdl* is *not to rhyme* with *shem hakotev vehamenaked*. He infers from this that the Masoretes “must have had” a text reading *yitgadal* with a *patah*. It is unclear what De Sola Pool meant by “must have had.” Masoretic notes normally are written or printed in the margins of texts. De Sola Pool does not state whether the text to which this mnemonic refers was not intact or whether it is in a standalone format. In any event, I believe that De Sola Pool had misunderstood the notation. The abbreviation ל' is a frequent masoretic marking standing for *leita*, meaning “none” in Aramaic. It is not used, though, to denote that a possible pronunciation is incorrect. Rather, it invariably marks a word that appears in the given form in Tanakh only once. This mnemonic therefore most likely means that there are no instances of the word *yitgadel* appearing with a *tzeirei* other than Isaiah 10:36. Fact-checking bears this out. The only other time that the word *yitgdl* appears in Tanakh is in Daniel 11:37, where it reads with a *dalet kamatz* since it is at the end of a verse. The next closest is in Daniel 11:36, where it reads *veyitgadel*. In the printed Mikraot Gedolot with Mesorah, there is a marking ל' without the mnemonic in the margins where all three instances appear. The notation is to be understood as meaning that each form of the word, *yitgadel*, *yitgadal* (with *kamatz gadol*), and *veyitgadel* each appear only once in Tanakh. The more likely meaning of the masoretic note in the British Museum manuscript is that the word יתגדל does not appear elsewhere in Tanakh with a *tzeirei*.

<sup>49</sup> Consider whether any English speaker, Jewish or not, when he hears about someone schmoozing, he hears the word in English or Yiddish.

Up to now, we have analyzed texts ruling that the words *yṭḡdl vṭṭkḏsh* not only allude to the verse in Ezekiel, they should be recited in Hebrew, the language used by Ezekiel. Perhaps reinforcing this tradition is the fact that the word *yitḡadal* is not actually Aramaic, but at best possibly Hebreo-Aramaic jargon. It has also been argued that the Hebrew of the siddur is not Biblical Hebrew but Mishnaic Hebrew, in which the tendency is to vocalize with *pataḥ* rather than *tzeirei*. An even stronger point has been made by Hanokh Albeck (1890–1972). In his classic *Mavo LeMishnah* (Introduction to the Mishnah) he notes that in contrast to the Tiberian Mesorah, in which future tense reflexives appear with *tzeirei* under the middle letter of the root, in the Babylonian Mesorah, reflexives of all tenses appear with a *pataḥ*. This observation is reinforced by references in the *Sefer Moznayim* by Rabbi Avraham [ben Meir] ibn Ezra (1089–1164), who, in his examples of reflexive verbs explains that the middle letter of the root is vocalized with *pataḥ*. *RaDa”K*, in his *Mikhlol*, refers to the word *yitḡadal* in Daniel 11:36 as vocalized with *pataḥ*. Other evidence comes from *Sefer HaRikmah* of R. Yonah ibn Janah and other earlier grammarians. Further reinforcement of this reading comes from the work of Prof. Yisrael Yevin who believes that that a comparison of the meter and phonetics of Biblical Hebrew with older Semitic languages suggests that pronunciation of Hebrew at the time that the biblical texts appeared differed from the Tiberian pronunciation and accentuation. He suggests that in the biblical era, Hebrew tended to accent the second to last syllable, much like in the popular Ashkenazi pronunciation. In the older pronunciation, the last syllable of the roots *ḡdl* and *kḏsh* were vocalized with a short *ḥirik*. As the accent later shifted to the last syllable, in Babylonia vowel transformed to a *pataḥ* and in Tiberias it transformed to a short *tzeirei*, but only in future tense. Yevin also noted that these Tiberian *tzeirei* syllables follow the same pattern of *pataḥ* syllables, i.e., whenever they are conjugated and lose their emphasis, they revert back to *ḥirik* (e.g., *veḥitḡadilti*, *veḥitḡadishṭi*, *mekadishḥkem*, and others), and that this pattern even occurs in some words vocalized with *pataḥ* in the Tiberian pronunciation: *pat-pitim-piteḥb*; *dam-dimḥkem*, he infers that even in Tiberian pronunciation, the *tzeirei* may have been a later development. This pattern is known as *ḥok ḥabidakekut* (the rule of attenuation of vowels), and shows a stronger connection of *pataḥ* to *ḥirik* than *tzeirei* to *ḥirik*. An implication of this study in phonetics is if the origin of the Aramaic text of the Kaddish is in Babylon, or even if the Aramaic text was known in northern Eretz Yisrael during the early stages of the development of Tiberian pronunciation, the words *yitḡadal veyitḡadash* vocalized with a *pataḥ* could have been understood as Biblical Hebrew, Mishnaic Hebrew, Aramaic, or Hebreo-Aramaic jargon.

## Summary and Conclusion

Over the course of our exploration, we have learned that the practice of pronouncing the opening words of Kaddish as “*yitḡadel veyitḡadesḥ*” emerged at two junctures spaced several centuries apart. The reason given for use of the *tzeirei* in vocalizing the *dalet* is that the words are Hebrew rather than Aramaic, echoing the phrase in Ezekiel 38:23, expressing hope that the fragmented name of G-d will be repaired, and the ability to utter G-d’s name

as it is written will reflect an intimate knowledge of G-d. The instruction to recite these two first words in Hebrew is traceable to literature originating in the school of Rashi—the *Mahazor Vitri*, *Pardes*, *Likutei Pardes* and *Siddur Rashi* as well as in the *Shibolei HaLeket*. However, these texts are poorly preserved and show signs of elaboration by later editors, the meaning or the relevant passages is not altogether clear, and their provenance can be questioned. It appears that late medieval and early modern commentators accept the interpretation that the opening phrase is intended as an allusion to the theme in Ezekiel and not just an idiomatic use of the phrase that appears there, yet they do not seem to find it compelling to assert that this phrase should be recited in Hebrew. Contrary to the practice recorded in the texts attributed to Rashi's school, Rabenu Tam rejects the mystical reasons for the transition from Hebrew to Aramaic. He also rejects mystical reasons for saying the prayer in Aramaic in favour of the explanation that it was recited in Aramaic at the conclusion of sermons and lectures for the benefit of common folk who attended and did not understand Hebrew. The *RaShB"A* maintains as well that the Kaddish was instituted to be recited in Aramaic, though he lends secondary importance to the exact language of its recitation. The *Zohar* also maintains that the Kaddish is to be recited in Aramaic, but presents elaborate mystical reasons for doing so that go beyond those offered in the texts originating in Rashi's school. The pronunciation of these words vocalized with a *tzeirei* re-emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, when attempts were made to standardize Nusah Ashkenaz and purge it from copyist and printers' errors. At the time, a system of grammar was developed by Zalman Hennau, who also published corrections to the siddur. Hennau supported a reading of *yitgadel veyitkadesh*, and cited the *Pardes*. Hennau's work apparently was widely disseminated, but it was also condemned by prominent authorities in Germany and in Poland. Nevertheless, his system of grammar remained widely studied and was incorporated into the siddurim published by Wolf Heidenheim and R. Shneur Zalman, although both retained the *patah dalet* vocalization of *yitgadal veyitkadash*. The Vilner Gaon may have adopted the *tzeirei* reading, although this is uncertain both from texts and from living traditions practiced by his descendants. The reading with *tzeirei* is supported by the *Peri Megadim* and by the *Mishnah Berurah*.

To conclude the grammar discussion, it has been pointed out that the vocalization of the words *yitgadel veyitkadesh* in Ezekiel with *tzeirei* reflects the Tiberian Mesorah, but the Babylonian Mesorah vocalizes them with *patah*. Thus, if the Aramaic version of Kaddish has its origins in Babylonia, the vocalization would be *patah*, whether the words are meant to be Aramaic, Biblical Hebrew or Mishnaic Hebrew.

A final note by De Sola Pool can be made to the opinion that the Kaddish was composed in Aramaic for the benefit of the common people attending lectures who did not understand Hebrew. De Sola Pool has pointed out that the words "*yitgadal veyitkadash*" could be heard by a synagogue-attending Jew in Babylonia as either Aramaic or Hebrew. He also points out that the second paragraph of the Kaddish is distinctly Hebrew before it transitions into the Aramaic expression for "the name of the Holy One, blessed be He." He is quick to add, in agreement with traditional commentators on the Kaddish, that it

would have appeared artificial to a synagogue attendee to force an Aramaic paraphrase of these words of praise into the Kaddish, as the Hebrew would have been familiar to him through other recitations. Thus, the initial words of the Kaddish as well as the paragraph of praises could have been heard by an Aramaic-speaking Jew as either Hebrew or Aramaic. It seems, then, that R. Ya'akov Emden's criticism of the notion that a prayer may transition from Hebrew to Aramaic in midstream may have been too harsh.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to recapitulate the caution of the *Mishkenot Ya'akov* in his responsa regarding varying prevalent customs regarding recitation of Kaddish, if there is any doubt regarding the custom that should be used, quoted at the beginning of this paper. Additionally, for any practical questions, the *Mara De'Atra* should be consulted, as with all questions regarding applied Halakha. Quoting the *Mishkenot Ya'akov*, I hope that this study will be received in the tone that it is intended:

ולא כתבתי את הדברים האלה לסתור ח"ו ד' רבינו הגאון אשר ידוע לכל חכמי לב  
עומק חכמתו ובינתו אשר כל רז לא אנס ל' רק כתבתי ליישב דעת גדולים ז"ל אשר  
נהגו על פיהם ולתת טעם לשבח לדבריהם ז"ל למען לא יהיו תמוהים למשכיל ודו"ק.

...And I did not write these words to contradict, G-d forbid, the opinion of our teacher the [Vilner] Gaon, whose knowledge and understanding is known to all *hakhmei lev*, and no mystery ever confounded him; I have only written to reconcile the opinions of great scholars z"l according to whose words customs were adopted, and to enhance understanding of their words z"l, so that they should not be puzzling to the intelligent; and so, study this matter carefully.<sup>50</sup>

## Appendix: Corrections to Yitgadal or Yitgadel: At the Crossroads of Convention, Grammar and Mysticism (Part I)

- This Appendix is meant to correct and clarify errors and misunderstandings that appeared in Part 1 of this study, which was published in *Ḥakhmei Lev*, Volume 3.
- Many of the citations from the book of Ezekiel that appear in the article are incorrect. The correct chapter and verse of all references to Ezekiel are in 38:23. I thank Archie Crandell for pointing this out.
- Note 19 cross-references "footnotes 401." This should read "footnote 3."
- In note 38 it is written that the *Shibolei HaLeket* is presumed to have been authored by R. Zedekiah ben Avraham HaRofeh. I thank Ezer Diena for bringing to my attention that that characterizing the authorship of this work as a presumption is erroneous. The identity of the author of this work is evident from within the text. In a number of places, he quotes family members who he identifies by name and their relationship to him. It may nevertheless be said that there was some uncertainty regarding the authorship of volumes bearing the name *Shibolei HaLeket*, which first appeared in print

in 1546 and which did not show the name of an author. These editions were in fact and abridged versions of the original *Shibolei HaLeket*. The abridged versions, in addition to omitting some passages that appeared in the original *Shibolei HaLeket*, passages containing names of family members of the original author are modified. Finally, the abridged volume also included material not appearing in the original *Shibolei HaLeket*. In 1794, an edition of the abridged *Shibolei HaLeket* appeared in which the publishers stated that they had done extensive research and identified the author as R. Zedekiah. Thus, it may be said that before 1887, the printed version of the *Shibolei HaLeket* that was widely used was either accepted as an anonymous but authoritative work or else presumed to be the work of R. Zedekiah. For detailed discussion see: ספר יחיאל דוב ור, ספר שבלי הלקט. מתוך: קובץ תורני זכור לאברהם, אביגדור ברגר (עורך), תשנ"ה. עמ' י"ג-כ"ד.

- Apparently early *poskim*, including the *Beit Yosef*, had access to a manuscript of the full version, while later *poskim*, including the *Magen Avraham* worked with early print editions. The full version of the *Shibolei HaLeket* was first published in print in 1887. From that time onwards, the differences between the early print abridged version and the full version were studied and the abridged version came to be regarded as the work of an anonymous editor.
- In the previous print edition of this article, a biographical footnote on R. Yitzchok Lichtenstein may lead to an incorrect impression of his background. He was not enrolled in Yeshiva University but came to New York to study at Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan (RIETS) under his grandfather, Moreinu VeRabeinu HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l. He later studied under R. Meshullam Dovid Soloveitchik in Jerusalem. The other institutions mentioned were not major influences in his education. A corrected biographical note appears in the on-line version. I apologize to R. Yitzchok for this error.
- In note 54, it is incorrectly stated that R. Moshe Soloveitchik had taught at the yeshiva at Slobodka. I thank R. Yitzchok Lichtenstein and my son, Betzalel, for pointing out this improbable misstatement. Rather, he was assisted by Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel of Slobodka in establishing a yeshiva in the town where he served as rabbi from 1910 to 1912, Raseiniai, Lithuania. The initial group of students of the yeshiva included a group from Slobodka who came to study under R. Soloveitchik.
- As the author of the article, I take full responsibility for these errors.

— David Moshe Fischman

# The Custom of Standing for a Hatan and Kallah Walking to the Huppah: Frum or Krum?

Rabbi Dr. Lazer Friedman

## Introduction

I WAS ATTENDING a wedding at the BAYT when following the *huppah*, a Rabbi approached me and remarked “Rabbi Taub, (Rabbi Baruch Taub, Rabbi Emeritus of the BAYT), was very much against the practice of people standing for the *hatan* and *kallah* walking down the aisle to the *huppah*.” I was startled by his remark, as it was my recollection from a *shiur* Rabbi Taub had taught us, that he was very much in favor of this *minhag*. This incident reminded me of the Gemara (*Bava Batra* 21a–21b), which states that Yoav returned after having killed the males (*zakhar*) of Amalek, but King David questioned him, as his recollection was that his Rebbe had taught him that the obligation was to kill the memory (*zekher*) of Amalek. The Gemara concludes that Yoav went back to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe told him that he remembered the *halakhab* correctly, and that Yoav had erred.

As it turned out, we had an opportunity to resolve this lapse in the Rabbi Taub *mesorah*, as Rabbi Taub fortuitously returned to Thornhill from Israel to attend the BAYT Gala Dinner. At the Friday night *seudah*, I approached Rabbi Taub and shared the anecdote. “So, Rebbe,” I asked, “What is the *halakhab*? Should people stand for the *hatan* and *kallah* walking down to the *huppah*?” This article will review the halakhic literature of this *minhag*, as well as Rabbi Taub’s response.

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## Background

The issue at hand is the halakhic perspective specifically with respect to the practice of standing for a *batan* and *kallah* as they walk down the aisle on their way to the *huppah*. This is in contradistinction to the very appropriate practice of standing for grandparents who walk down the aisle, as this obligation is unanimous based on the *pasuk*, “*vehadarta pnei zakein*” (*Vayikra* 19:32), and codified in the *Shulhan Arukh*.<sup>1</sup>

All activities we encounter in our daily lives must be vetted through the eyes of *halakhab*. Is the activity forbidden, neutral, or a mitzvah? Wearing a neck tie illustrates the point. Is wearing a neck tie forbidden as it may be a gentile custom and is prohibited because it is emulating idolatrous practices known as “*bukat hagoyim*”? Or perhaps it is a neutral activity and simply permissible? And finally, is wearing a neck tie on Shabbos a mitzvah?

Determining the halakhic status of this seemingly innocuous custom of standing for the *batan* and *kallah* walking down the aisle, requires an analysis of its roots and origins. From a secular perspective, standing when a bride enters the room, does not have any religious or pagan origins. Standing for the bride appears to be a simple gesture of respect. It is performed in many different cultures, and during religious and non-religious wedding ceremonies.

From a halakhic perspective, if standing for a bride is a gentile custom, then Jews copying this practice may be in violation of the prohibition of “*bukat hagoyim*.” However, not all practices of gentiles fall under the prohibition of *bukat hagoyim*. The Ran includes only gentile practices which are idolatrous in nature in the category of *bukat hagoyim*.<sup>2</sup> The Maharik further characterizes the prohibition and includes any practice which has no inherent purpose, and thus if practiced by Jews would be classified as *bukat hagoyim*.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, if there are redeeming qualities to the custom, and it does not involve idol worship, the practice would be permissible for Jews to participate in. Indeed, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein accepted the ruling of the Maharik and applied it to the contemporary issue of wearing clothes of modern fashion, addressing our question above concerning a man wearing a necktie.<sup>4</sup> It would appear that the practice of standing for the *batan* and *kallah* as they march to the *huppah*, is not based on any particular idolatrous practice. Moreover, there is a very logical reason for this practice which shows respect for the wedding service. Based on the Maharik, there would be no inherent prohibition of *bukat hagoyim* for Jews to participate in this custom.

Having dismissed the potential prohibition of standing for a *batan* and *kallah* walking down the aisle, we must now analyze whether there is in fact a halakhic obligation to stand for them. There are three different halakhic considerations that need to be analyzed in determining this question.

1 *Yoreh Deah* 244:1.

2 *Avodah Zara* 11a.

3 *Shu"t Maharik* 88.

4 *Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah* 1:81.

## Reasons to Consider Standing for a *Hatan* and *Kallah*

### 1. *Hatan Domeh Limelekh* and *Kallah Domah Limalkah*

One of the most often stated justifications for standing for a *hatan* and *kallah*, is that *Hazal* state that a *hatan* is “*domeh limelekh*,” he is likened to a king.

This notion is first mentioned in *Pirkei di-Rabbi Eliezer* which states that a *hatan* is comparable to a king.<sup>5</sup> As such, the *hatan* is to be praised and dressed in a noble manner, and should not go to the market unaccompanied. Presumably, this would also include standing for him. Although there is no mention of the *kallah* being compared to a queen, it is not unreasonable to extend that logic and afford her the same privileges as the *hatan*.

If we accept the analogy that a *hatan* and *kallah*, are to be treated as a king and queen, it is critical to determine at what point in time, do we confer the status of king and queen on the couple? The *Be'er Haitev* quotes the *Knesset Hagedolah* who suggests that the time of the *birkhot nissuin* determines the time when the *hatan* is to be treated as a king.<sup>6</sup> Once the blessings have been recited, the *hatan* gains the status of a king, and just as one would stand for a king, one stands for a *hatan* (and presumably the *kallah* as well). However, R. Moshe Feinstein was once asked whether one should stand for a *hatan* walking down the aisle on the basis of “*hatan domeh limelekh*,” and he responded simply by saying he is not yet a *hatan*.<sup>7</sup>

The *Orhot Hayim* also quotes the *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, that a *hatan* is compared to a king, and specifically cites the minhag that people stood up for a *hatan* during *birkat erusin* and *nissuin*.<sup>8</sup>

The *Markhei Lev* disagrees with the idea of standing for a *hatan* and *kallah*, strictly on their acquired royal status, for if it were true, one would have to stand for them all 7 days of *sheva berakhot* and this is not routinely done.<sup>9</sup>

The *Mishnah Berurah* rules that *tabanun* is recited at the *shaharit minyan* even where a *hatan* whose wedding will take place that evening, is in attendance.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, the halakhic status of *hatan* does not take effect until the actual *huppah*.

Although there are sources to support the concept of *hatan* and *kallah* being *domeh limelekh* and *limalkah* from a halakhic perspective, this status does not appear to become effective prior to the actual *berakhot* under the *huppah*. Therefore, we must conclude that the reason of *hatan* and *kallah* being *domeh limelekh* and *limalkah* cannot be the sole justification for standing for a *hatan* and *kallah* walking down to the *huppah*.

5 Chapter 16.

6 Commentary to *Shulban Arukh*, *Even Haezer* 62:1.

7 Halacha Headlines Podcast, Shiur no. 399 (December 17, 2022). <http://podcast.headlinesbook.com/?s=shiur%20399>.

8 *Hilkkbot Kiddushin* no. 21.

9 Vol. 2:127.

10 131:21.



## 2. Tradition to Stand During the Huppah

There are several lines of thought to support the idea of standing during a *huppah*. Firstly, standing during a *huppah* is based on ancient Kabbalistic practice. The custom of standing during a *huppah* is mentioned in the *Tikkunei Zohar* where it states that people attending a *huppah* are obligated to stand alongside the *batan* and *kallah* when the *sheva berakhot* are recited.<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Kluger cites this practice as well.<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch writes that the *minhag* Yerushalayim was to stand for the *huppah* based on the *Tikkunei Zohar*.<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Ovadia Yosef writes that all attendees at a *huppah* must stand for the duration of the entire *huppah*, and those who opt to sit should be rebuked.<sup>14</sup>

Others have likened the *berakhot* under the *huppah* to a *davar shebikedushah* (holy words) which obligate one to stand. Examples of *davar shebikedushah* include *Kedushah*, *Barkhu*, and *Kaddish*. Rabbi Mordechai HaLevi writes that it is appropriate to stand for *sheva berakhot* because these *berakhot* have the status of a *davar shebikedushah*.<sup>15</sup>

Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Toledano writes that the practice was for people to stand during the *huppah*, and he suggests that this *minhag* may have simply evolved as there were not enough seats for all guests.<sup>16</sup>

Rabbi Hayim Kanievsky was asked about the *minhag* of sitting during the *huppah*, and he responded that it is incorrect.<sup>17</sup> According to this approach, that there is an obligation to stand during the *huppah*, contemporary weddings which offer attendees seats during the *huppah*, could lead to a breach of the age-old tradition of standing throughout the duration of the *huppah*.

## 3. Standing for a Person Performing a Mitzvah

The *Mishnah* in *Bikkurim* (3:3) records that when the shopkeepers and artisans of Jerusalem would see the throngs of people bringing *bikkurim* (first fruits) to the *Beit Hamikdash*, they would cease working and stand in their honour. In his commentary on the *Mishnah*, Rabbi Ovadiah Mibartenura explains that they stood out of respect for those actively engaged in performing a mitzvah.<sup>18</sup> The *Gemara* in *Kiddushin* (33a) adds that in the case of *bikkurim*, respect is offered to the farmers to encourage them to bring *bikkurim* in the future. The Rambam notes that standing for those bringing their *bikkurim* also have an aspect of *kavod hatzibbur* due to the large crowd involved in the mitzvah.<sup>19</sup>

11 *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Takona Asirtah* 26a.

12 *Haelef Likha Shlomo*, *Even Haezer* no. 115.

13 *Teshuvot Vihanhagot* Vol. 4, *Even Haezer* 286:6.

14 *Yabia Omer*, Vol. 6, *Even Haezer* no. 8.

15 *Shu"t Darkhei Noam*, *Orach Hayim* 3.

16 *Yam HaGadol*, no. 72.

17 Cited in the Halacha Headlines Podcast, Shiur no. 399.

18 *Bikkurim* 3:3.

19 *Peirush Hamishnayos*, *ibid*.

The principle of people standing for a person doing a mitzvah is seen in other areas of *halakhah* beyond bringing of *bikkurim*. At a *brit milah*, Rabbi Akiva Eiger,<sup>20</sup> states that one is obligated to stand for the ones bringing the baby for the *brit*, because they are involved in the performance of a mitzvah.

The *Shulhan Arukh* codifies this principle as *halakhah* and rules that people need to stand when a body is being carried for burial.<sup>21</sup> The Taz extends the obligation to stand for the carrying of a body, to standing for anyone performing a mitzvah.<sup>22</sup>

Rabbi Hayim Palagi supports the concept of standing for a mitzvah and writes that one should stand for the *hatan* and *kallah* as they are doing a mitzvah.<sup>23</sup>

One must pause and analyze what mitzvah is being performed by the *hatan* and *kallah*, that warrants people to stand up in their honour? There is a great debate in the *Rishonim* as to whether marriage is a mitzvah or merely a *bekhsheh mitzvah*—a preparatory mitzvah for the actual mitzvah of procreating and having children. The Rosh is of the opinion that marriage is not in and of itself a mitzvah. He notes that the *berakhah* of *eirusin* is a *birkat hashevah* (praise) and not a *birkat hamitzvah*, as marriage is merely a *bekhsheh mitzvah* for having children.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the Rambam argues that marriage is a mitzvah.<sup>25</sup> A *hatan* and *kallah* walking down the aisle are on route to perform a mitzvah according to the Rambam, and at the very least, a *bekhsheh mitzvah* according to the Rosh.

## Conclusion

Sources have been reviewed which support standing during a *huppah*, either out of respect for the *birkhot eirusin* and *sheva berakhot*, or for Kabbalistic reasons. The concept of the *hatan* and *kallah* being similar to a king or queen and thus warranting people to stand for them as they walk down the aisle is a fallacious argument, since their royal status does not begin until after the recital of the *birkhot eirusin*. In reality, the only justification, and even the obligation, for the practice of standing for a *hatan* and *kallah* walking to the *huppah* is based on the *Mishnah* in *Bikkurim* as explained by the Bartenura, and codified in *halakhah* by the Taz.

So, what did Rabbi Taub respond when asked to clarify the *mesorah* of this practice? He grinned, and said, “Lazer, you are right. We stand for people who perform *mitzvot*. You learn *Mishnah Yomit*, right? Remember the *Mishnah* in *Bikkurim*?”

20 *Yoreh Deah* 265:1.

21 *Yoreh Deah* 361:4.

22 *Ibid.*, 4.

23 *Hayim Vishalom, Even Haezer* no. 28.

24 *Ketubot* 1:12.

25 *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Ishut* 1:2.

# Happy Birthday...Maybe?

## Celebrating Birthdays in Halakhah

Rabbi Simi Grosman

### Background

**BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS ARE** a common practice in both the Jewish and non-Jewish world. In this essay we examine birthdays from a halakhic perspective.<sup>1</sup>

Precedent for birthday celebrations begins in *Sefer Bereishis Parshas Veyeshev* (40:20) which states that Pharaoh made a feast for all of his servants on his birthday.

Later, in the Gemara, there is a reference to a birthday celebration in the first *Mishnah* in *Avodah Zarah* which teaches, “For three days prior to their festivals, one is prohibited from doing business with idolaters.” One of the festivals listed is the *Genusyah* day of the kings which Rashi explains to be an annual event when “on the king’s birthday all the kingdom’s citizens would celebrate and offer sacrifices.”<sup>2</sup>

Based on the above, it would appear that birthdays are rooted in pagan rituals and thus should not only be discouraged but halakhically forbidden.

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1 I draw on a responsum of Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein published in *What If? Parshas Vayeishev* (ArtScroll), Rabbi Zvi Ryzman, *Exploring Modern Halachic Dilemmas* (ArtScroll, 2021), 155–182 as well as various Talmudic sources.

2 Rashi, *Avodah Zarah* 8a.

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## The Case Against Birthday Celebrations

There are, in fact, at least three different halakhic reasons why many are opposed to birthday parties which we will summarize here before analyzing them in-depth below.

### 1. Hukas Hagoyim—Following in the Ways of Non-Jews

The *Yerushalmi* (*Avodah Zarah* 1:1) explains the *Mishnah* about *Genusyah*, the birthday celebration of the king, as a holiday for the entire nation. Clearly, celebrating birthdays was a holiday for the gentiles.

### 2. Noah Lo Shelo Nivra—Better for Him Not to Have Been Created

The Gemara in *Eiruvin* (13b) states that it would have been better if a person would not have been created. What then, is the point of simcha on a birthday? Indeed, it is for this reason that the *Minhas Elazar*, the Munkatcher Rebbe, argues birthday celebrations never existed in Klal Yisroel for this very reason, as we will see below.

### 3. Ayin Hara—The “Evil Eye”

Many refrain from celebrating birthdays so as not to bring an *ayin hara*, “an evil eye” upon themselves.

Considering these halakhic concerns, at face value, it would be quite evident that birthday celebrations should be avoided. However, each of the reasons noted above come with some qualifications.

Regarding *hukas hagoyim*, the *Bais Yosef* quotes the Maharik who maintains that as long as the activity in question is not done in order to imitate the gentiles it is permissible.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, if the birthday celebration is held in the spirit of giving thanks to Hashem for another year of life, it is very different than the way the non-Jews celebrate their birthdays. Under these circumstances there would be no prohibition of *hukas hagoyim*.

In dealing with the Gemara in *Eiruvin* that states it is better for a person not to be born, the *poskim* quote Tosafos who says that is only referring to *rishaim*, wicked people. For *tzadikim* however, “*Asheirav viashrei hador shehu bisokho*—it is praiseworthy for him and for his generation.”<sup>4</sup> The question would be, what about the birthday of an average person? Is that a reason to celebrate?

With regard to *ayin hara*, the Gemara in *Berakhos* (55b) says that one who is afraid of an *ayin hara* should say he is from the children of Yosef and that an *ayin hara* cannot harm them. The meaning of this is that someone who has an *ayin tov*, a good eye, the *ayin hara* has no control over him.

Rabbi Yitzhak Zilberstein records an advertisement that was once placed in the newspaper *Hatzefirah* announcing that the birthday of Rabbi Yitzhak Elhanan Spektor, the Kovno Rav, and one of the *gedolei hador*, was coming up and that a special celebration would be

<sup>3</sup> *Yoreh Deah* 178.

<sup>4</sup> *Tosafos, Avodah Zarah* 5a.

in order.<sup>5</sup> When hearing about this, R. Yitzhak Elhanan made it very clear that he was unhappy with the fact that someone wished to honour him. He went on to say that to make a special day out of his birthday was not something practiced by the Jewish people.

Similarly, the Munkatcher Rebbe and others expressed the view that birthdays are a foreign thing and have no precedent in Judaism. The Munkatcher Rebbe writes that the reason is because of the notion that, “it is better for a person not to have been born in this world, but now that he is born he should do his duties and serve Hashem.” Therefore, he concludes, we should not be celebrating birthdays.<sup>6</sup>

*Derekh Sihab* records that Rabbi Hayim Kanievsky was also of the opinion that birthdays should not be celebrated.

However, these opinions appear to be at odds with many halakhic authorities. For example, the Hasam Sofer, the Kisav Sofer, the Hafetz Hayim and Rabbi Shmuel Salant which will be referenced in the section below.

The *Arugas Habosem* writes that it is improper to celebrate these birthdays and attributes his reason to *hukas bagoyim*.<sup>7</sup> He adds further that the older a person gets, the closer he is coming to his or her *yom ha-din* and his final reckoning in *shomayim* (heaven). As such, celebrations of these birthday milestones may not be appropriate.<sup>8</sup>

## The Case for Birthday Celebrations

Some of the above objections notwithstanding, we do find instances of a birthday *seudah* (meal) being held when individuals reached particular milestones. As a general principle it can be argued that recognizing, acknowledging, and celebrating one's birthday falls under the mitzvah of *Viahavta lireiakha kamokha zeh klal gadol baTorah*—loving others as we do ourselves is a fundamental principle of our Torah. Hazal teach us that it is always important to make others realize that we care about them individually and that we genuinely value who they are. It should not be perfunctory, but real. What better way to do this than to recognize a birthday?

## Gemara and Midrash

The *Gemara* in *Moed Katan* (28a) records that Rav Yosef made a party on the occasion of his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. This was because he had avoided the punishment of *kareis* (being cut-off) which if he were to have been deserving of it, apparently, would have occurred before his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is unclear, however, if this can serve as a paradigm for other birthday parties or just for a 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

5 *What If?* (Parshas Vayeishev) citing *Hatzefirab* Issue no. 66.

6 *Divrei Torah* 5:88.

7 *Siman* 255.

8 Interestingly, the Ben Ish Hai writes (*Shanah Rishonah*, *Parshas Re'eih* 17) that many people keep their birthday on the day of their *bris milah* rather than on the day they were born.

The *Midrash Saikbel Tov* provides an even more pertinent source.<sup>9</sup> The Midrash notes that “most people celebrate the day that they were born and are joyous during this time and hold a party.” The *Yerushalmi* (*Rosh Hashbanah* 3:8) tells us that a person does not quickly fall on his “*Yom Genusyah*.” Rashi in *Bereishis* (4:20) explains that Pharaoh’s birthday is called “*Yom Genusyah*.” This *Yerushalmi* indicates that a birthday is a special day, not just for recognition; it seems also to be an auspicious time to avoid harm. Taking this idea a step further, the Admor (Rebbe) of Gur refers to the Gemara in *Rosh HaShanah* (10b) that teaches us that Yitzhak Avinu was born on Pesah.<sup>10</sup> The Midrash in *Pirkei Derabbi Eliezer* states that it was on *Erev Pesah* that he asked Esav to bring two goats—one for the *korban pesah* and the other for the *korban hagigah*.<sup>11</sup> Since it was his birthday, he said “*lo yadati yom mosi*—I do not know the day of my death”—presumably because people tend to contemplate their lives on their birthday. The Midrash relates that because it was Pharaoh’s birthday, he wished to bless his children as well.<sup>12</sup> According to the Admor of Gur, this indicates that a person has a special power to extend blessings on his birthday.

The Ben Ish Hai states that some have the custom to make the birthday a kind of “*Yom Tov*” and a *siman tov* (celebration of an auspicious occasion). He then he adds, “and so we conduct ourselves in our home.”<sup>13</sup>

Nor was he the only one. The Kesav Sofer writes that he held a fiftieth birthday party.<sup>14</sup> He writes that he made a special *siyum* on *Meseibes Pesachim* for the occasion. He states there that his father, the Hasam Sofer, also did the same thing.<sup>15</sup> He made a *siyum* on *Humash* with his students on the occasion of his birthday on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei. At the celebration, he gave out coins so his students could purchase “*lahmei balav*” (apparently an early prototype of the now ever popular birthday cupcake). In fact, the Rebbe of the Hasam Sofer, Rabbi Nosson Adler, held a birthday party for his mother on her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and invited the whole town!<sup>16</sup>

In a similar vein, the *Havos Yair* writes that on the day he turned 70, he planned to make a *seudah* and would probably recite the *shebeheyanu* blessing. Although there is some discussion as to whether the *shebeheyanu* could be recited with “*shem umalkhus* (G-d’s name and kingship)” none of the *poskim* appeared to be opposed to the celebration itself.<sup>17</sup>

It is noted in the biography of the Hofetz Hayim that he held a birthday party on his 90<sup>th</sup> (some argue it was his 80<sup>th</sup>) birthday on 11 Shevat 5688 and finished his manuscript entitled, “*Beis Yisroel*” for the occasion.<sup>18</sup> In 1909, on the afternoon of Rosh Hodesh

9 *Bereishis* 40:20.

10 Responsa of Maharav, Vol. 2 *Orach Hayim* 61.

11 *Pirkei DiRebbi Eliezer*, Chapter 32.

12 Ibid.

13 *Shanah Rishonah*, *Parshas Re'ei* 17.

14 Responsa *Kesav Sofer*, *Yoreh Deah* Vol. II, no. 148.

15 Responsa *Hasam Sofer*, *Yoreh Deah*, no. 155.

16 *Igros Sofrim* p. 83.

17 Responsa *Havos Yair*, *siman* 32.

18 Rabbi Moshe Meir Yashar, *HaHafetz Hayim Hayav Upa'alo* (Tel Aviv, 1961).

Shevat, on the occasion of Rabbi Shmuel Salant's 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday a party was held at his house right after *hatzos* (midday) with greetings, celebration and a cake. Virtually all of the members of the Jewish community in Yerushalayim were in attendance including the staff of the Bikkur Holim hospital, the Hevra Kadisha and the Beis Din of Yerushalayim.<sup>19</sup>

The *Beis Yisroel* also writes that one should make a *seudah* when reaching one's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday based on the Gemara in *Moed Katan* cited above.<sup>20</sup> He notes that the only reason that people may shy away from these public celebrations might be due to not wanting to bring an *ayin hara* upon themselves. However, the concern for *bukas bagoyim* is completely absent. In a similar vein, Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman was once asked about celebrating birthdays. He answered that it is neither an *aveirah* nor a mitzvah; rather it is a *dvar reshus* (optional). Therefore, he stated that because of *ayin hara* it is better not to make a party.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein is also of the opinion that a birthday *seudah* is a *dvar reshus*. In his *Igros Moshe*, he discusses if a *seudas bas mitzvah* is permitted to be made in a shul.<sup>21</sup> R. Moshe rules that it is not a *seudas mitzvah* and not any different than the *simcha* of any other birthday, and therefore, cannot be made in a shul. It is interesting to note that on R. Moshe's birthday, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Adar, his children and grandchildren would visit him to wish him a *birkas hatov*. Those who were unable to come would call on the phone. If one of them didn't call or come, he would ask about them.

In the journal *Hamaayan*, the ethical will of Rav Yisroel Lipshitz (1782–1860), the author of the *Tiferes Yisroel* commentary on the *Mishnah* and the Rav of Danzig, is cited. In this will, he tells each member of his family that on the occasion of their birthdays all the siblings should send birthday greetings of *mazal tov* to each other. He also writes that this custom should not be negated.<sup>22</sup>

The *Nitei Gavriel* writes that even though there are those who are opposed to celebrating birthdays, that is only if it is done with *holelus* (levity and frivolity). However, if it is done as a *seduas hodaah* (meal of thanks to Hashem) accompanied by *divrei torah*, and a continued recognition of appreciation of *hasdei Hashem* (Hashem's kindness), one can definitely make the argument that birthday celebrations are appropriate and befitting.

## Conclusion

It would appear that, despite several objections to birthday celebrations, there is sufficient evidence to show that celebrating birthdays—when done so in the proper spirit and mindset—is not incongruent with *halakhah* or a proper *hashkafah*. When all is said and done, perhaps it all comes down to the *kavanah* (intent) of the birthday party and of the greeting. The intent should be one of *hakaras Hatov* (appreciation) to Hashem—thanking Hashem for yet another year of existence.

19 The event was reported in the February edition of *Havatzelet*, p. 235.

20 *Beis Yisroel*, *siman* 32.

21 *Igros Moshe*, *Orach Hayim* Vol. 1, no. 104.

22 *Hamaayan* (*Tammuz* 5731).



In the conclusion of his work *Asei Lekha Rav*, Rabbi Hayim Dovid Halevi writes:

[I]t is obvious that the birthday celebrations [of those who do not observe Torah and *mitzvos*] are nothing but frivolous revelry. If we are dealing with children whom we wish to give a good time, why not? But celebrations for adults, where they invite family and friends, even if there is no prohibition, there is no point in them either. *However, those who celebrate their birthday by offering praises and thanksgiving to Hashem at a seudas mitzvah with words of Torah, this certainly is an expression of the joy of a mitzvah* [emphasis added]. Because it is meritorious for a person to have extended days and complete years, and it is only proper to express gratitude to Hashem for having merited this.<sup>23</sup>

To illustrate this point further, the Midrash<sup>24</sup> asks the following: “Why was Adam Harishon punished during his short sojourn in the Garden of Eden?” Contrary to conventional thought, it was not because he ate from the *etz badaas*—the tree of knowledge. Rather, it was his lack of *hakaras hatov*, being someone who expresses gratitude. How so? The Midrash explains that when confronted by Hashem for having eaten from the *etz badaas*, Adam responded to Hashem, “The woman that You gave me, forced me to eat of the fruit.” It was this lack of appreciation for the gift that was Hava, that Adam was punished and evicted from Gan Eden. Celebrating a birthday out of a sense of *hakaras hatov* would indeed involve very lofty thoughts of appreciation and gratitude—but perhaps that would be the moral pre-requisite for such a celebration.

23 R. Hayim Dovid Halevi, *Asei Likha Rav*, p. 26.

24 Cited above.



# Early-Bird Discounts for Camp?

Rabbi Yosef Dovid Rothbart

## Introduction

I received a camp application which stated a regular price while offering an early-bird discount for registering early. Someone said that this is *ribbis* (prohibited interest)! Is that true?

**PAYMENT FOR THE** performance of a service can be made at one of three times: (1) prior to the payment obligation (“pre-payment”); (2) at the time of the obligation (“on-time payment”); (3) after the obligation (“late payment”).

An employer who makes an on-time payment, whether he pays more or less than what he owes, does not stumble into a *ribbis* prohibition, since *ribbis* means interest on a loan and in this case, inherently, there has been no loan. If, however, the employer pays extra on account of the late payment, then there is an appearance of a loan and a *ribbis* prohibition. This is because the late payment is construed as an interest payment on a loan between the employer, who is the borrower, and the employee, who acts as the lender.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a pre-payment is construed as a loan from the employer to the employee, thereby rendering the discount as *ribbis*.<sup>2</sup> In many instances, though, a pre-payment with a discount is permitted in any of the following scenarios:

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1 שו"ע יו"ד (סי' קע"ג סעי' י"ב).

2 ע" שו"ע (סי' קע"ז סעי' ח').

**YOSEF DOVID ROTHBART** moved to Thornhill over ten years ago as a member of the Thornhill Kollel. He has since then joined the BAYT and leads the Beis Medrash Minyan on Shabbos. During the week, he works for the Halacha Institute of Toronto, which is a local organization created to help facilitate and enhance halakhic observance.

1. A pre-payment is prohibited only when a significant portion of the wage is prepaid. If, however, only a small deposit is given to demonstrate a commitment to hiring the employee, then the payment may be discounted. This is because the discount is not an exchange for early payment; rather, it is an exchange for an early commitment.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, if the employee expresses that he is offering the discount in exchange for the early payment then even a small deposit is prohibited as *ribbis*.<sup>4</sup>
2. A discounted prepayment may be provided in the form of a cheque made out to the employee if it is clearly expressed that the cheque may be deposited only when the payment is due. Since the employee has been told not to use the funds early, there is no loan. A cheque is considered a form of payment only once the recipient has the right to deposit it.<sup>5</sup>
3. If the service provided has no set market fee and every individual charges differently, then a discounted prepayment is allowed since it can be construed as a lower wage as opposed to a discount for prepayment. However, the employee may not say that he offers the discount because of the willingness of the employer to prepay.<sup>6</sup>
4. Another case where a discount on a prepayment is permitted is when the employee begins work immediately<sup>7</sup> after receiving the funds.<sup>8</sup> Since the work starts immediately, the funds are construed as payment for those services as opposed to a loan.<sup>9</sup>
5. According to many *poskim*, if the employee is hired in a manner in which neither party can renege on their agreement, then he may discount his fee in exchange for prepayment.<sup>10</sup> The agreement can be finalized by means of a *kinyan* (act of acquisition) or by signing a contract.<sup>11</sup> This applies only to someone who is hired as a *kablan* (one who is hired to perform a defined job as opposed to someone who is hired per hour) because, *halachically*, a *kablan* may not renege on the employment agreement once a *kinyan* is performed.<sup>12</sup> Once the *kablan* cannot back out, the payment is, again, construed as a payment for services, which is not *ribbis* because there is no loan.

However, some limit the application of this *heter* to a case where the *kablan* performs the work himself without having to provide additional materials or resources. If, however, the *kablan* provides material or hires workers to perform the work on his behalf, then the portion of the advance that will be earmarked to pay for these resources is construed as

3 משנת רבית (פ"ט אות א') וע"ע בהער' (שם) מהו נחשב סכום קטן.

4 ברית יהודה (פכ"ד סק"ב).

5 ע"י ברית יהודה (פ"ב סק"ב) שדן אם מותר להשתמש בטשעק לשלם הוצאות שלהם.

6 ע"פ שו"ע (קע"ג סעי' א') וכן מצאתי מפורש בספר הליכות ישראל (פ"י אות כ"ח) וע"י בספר משנת רבית (פ"י אות ו') עד כמה מותר להוֹוֹל.

7 באותו היום כ"כ השו"ע הרב (סעי' י"ד) וע"י בספר משנת רבית (פ"י הער' ב' ד"ה ובנוגע).

8 ע"י בבר"י (פכ"ו סק"ג) בענין אי בעינן שיעבוד הפועל בלי הפסק וע"ע בספר משנת רבית (שם) וע"ע בבר"י (פכ"ו הער' י"ג) בענין קבלן.

9 לבוש (סי' קע"ו סעי' ח') ע'י רשב"ם (ב"ב פז, א ד"ה אבל אם שחר) וברשב"א ובשיטה שם מהרא"ם וקובץ הערות (סי' נג, ט).

10 שו"ת שבט הלוי (ח"ג סי' ק"י) ועוד וע"ש שזה תלוי במח' ראשונים בטעם שאסור להוֹוֹל היכא שהפועל לא מתחיל מיד האם משום שבשעה שמקדים לו הממון עדיין לא נכנס לעבודתו מחזי כאגר נטר או משום דפועל יכול לחזור בו.

11 ע"י שו"ת חור"מ (סי' שלג סק"ד) ופת"ת (שם אות ב).

12 ע"י בחור"מ (סי' שלג סעי' א') ובשו"ת (שם סק"ד יד) וכ"ז דלא כשו"ע הרב (סעי' יד) ואזיל לשיטתו.

a payment to secure a lower price for something that will be delivered in the future and is prohibited.<sup>13</sup>

With this background in mind, let us explore our original question; may a camp offer an early-bird discount?

There are number of ways that offering this early-bird discount can be permitted:

- The camp may ask for a small deposit (a non-significant portion of the camp tuition) and offer the discount in return.
- The early-bird payment may be made for the full tuition amount; however, the camp should make clear that the cheque will not be cashed, or will be placed in a separate account and not be used, until the time that the money is owed. This is applicable to other forms of payment as well.
- *Toras Ribbis*<sup>14</sup> brings from Rav Elyashiv זצ"ל that an administrator of a school has the status of a *kablan* who is tasked with providing all the requisite ingredients to facilitate a child's education. If we apply this line of reasoning to a camp owner/administrator,<sup>15</sup> it would be permitted for the camp to offer an early-bird special if the camp cannot renege on its commitment to accept the camper.<sup>16</sup>

It is questionable whether camps may rely on this last approach since administrators do not perform the services themselves. Rather, they hire others to administrate and act as counselors at the camp. Accordingly, many *poskim* maintain that this *heter* does not apply.<sup>17</sup>

This logic also explains why relying on a potential *heter* that the camp administrators begin working immediately is insufficient grounds to allow for an early-bird discount since part of the payment is earmarked for supplies and counselors. Additionally, in many smaller camps the administrators do not begin working immediately.<sup>18</sup>

(There are potentially other *heterim* that may apply such as when the camp is incorporated, or when the tuition is not being collected because the funds are needed, but rather for other reasons. For example, if the funds are being collected before camp to avoid the need to collect from parents after camp has begun, then the early-bird discount is permitted.<sup>19</sup> However, it is difficult to justify this *heter* unless the prepayment is not used until the money is owed. Another possible *heter* is to follow the *poskim* who allow *ribbis d'rabanan* (such as an early-bird discount) for a *mitzvah* need. However, these *heterim* are also questionable.)

13 משנת רבית (פ"ט בהער' מ"א) הביא מח' בזה וע"ש (בפ"י אות ד' ואות ה').

14 פ"י סעי' ע"ד.

15 וכן מבואר בספר משנת רבית (פ"ט בהער' מ"א).

16 ראיתי בספר משנת רבית שם וצע"ק.

17 ע"י משנת רבית פ"י שמאריך בזה.

18 ויש דיון בפוסקים אי בעינן שיעבוד הפועל בלי הפסק וע"י במה שציינו בהער' 8.

19 משנת רבית (פ"ט בהער' מ"א).

In conclusion: Since there does not appear to be a clear *heter* to collect the entire tuition and offer an early-bird discount, a camp should avoid stepping in to a potential *ribbis* infraction by employing a *heter iska*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> There are many situations which call for a *heter iska* and not all situations would warrant the same form. Due to the complexity of these *halakhos* we recommend consulting with one's Rav for the correct form. One may also reach out to [info@halachainstitute.com](mailto:info@halachainstitute.com) for assistance with the *heter iska*.

**Mahshavah**



# | Tikkun Olam Revisited

Rabbi Shmuel Lesher

**TIKKUN OLAM**, translated as either “healing the world” or “repairing the world” is a phrase that evokes a variety of reactions today. This two-word Hebrew phrase has become known to many even outside of the Jewish world as the Jewish term for social action. In fact, while President of the United States, Barack Obama invoked *tikkun olam* in a speech he delivered in Israel in 2013.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the term’s acclaim, there have been those who have severely criticized its popularity. In 2018, Jonathan Neumann, in his book *To Heal The World? How the Jewish Left Corrupts Judaism and Endangers Israel* writes that the “*tikkun olam* movement” (a term he coined) is one that is born out of a rejection of traditional Jewish law and in practice is synonymous with a politically leftist agenda. In his words:

*Tikkun olam* has no basis in Judaism. It was conceived by Jews who rejected the faith of their fathers and midwived by radicals who saw it as a pretext to appropriate Jewish texts and corrupt Jewish rituals—such as the Pesach Seder—to further political ends. *Tikkun olam* represents ... for all the talk of liberation, the enslavement of Judaism to liberal politics.<sup>2</sup>

Neumann argues that the current popularity of *tikkun olam* actually undermines Jewish peoplehood and “gives sanction to Anti-Zionism and assimilation.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 “Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel at the Jerusalem International Convention Center in Jerusalem” [obamawhitehouse.archives.gov](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/21/remarks-president-barack-obama-people-israel) (March 21, 2013). <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/21/remarks-president-barack-obama-people-israel>.

2 Jonathan Neumann, *To Heal The World? How the Jewish Left Corrupts Judaism and Endangers Israel* (All Points Books, 2018), xvi-xvii.

3 Ibid. xvii.

Neumann is right and he is wrong. He is right that many have used *tikkun olam* to further their own political agenda without much of a basis in traditional Torah sources. He is also correct to challenge those who have jumped onto the *tikkun olam* bandwagon. As none other than Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, a vocal advocate for *tikkun olam* and social action himself, has noted, for some, “social justice has become a substitute for religious observance or G-d.”<sup>4</sup>

This trend is further evidenced by Jack Wertheimer, a professor of American Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and its former provost:

The large majority of non-Orthodox Jews have internalized a very contemporary set of values and ways of thinking about ethical decision making indistinguishable from those of their non-Jewish peers. They have been encouraged in this direction by religious leaders who invented a new commandment in the 1980s—the injunction to engage in *tikkun olam* .... Whatever act a Jew undertakes in a well-meaning way has come to be seen as an act of *tikkun olam*.<sup>5</sup>

However, Neumann is wrong to assert that *tikkun olam*, a concern for the welfare of general society, has no basis in Judaism.

Granted, as R. Jonathan Sacks has argued in the context of “progress” and Judaism’s view of social justice, “it is anachronistic to read back into ancient sources ideas that made their appearance centuries later.”<sup>6</sup> Some of the literature on *tikkun olam* suffers from this mistake. It is intellectually dishonest for an author to use the term “*tikkun*” used in Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism, or in the *Aleinu* prayer, “*li-saken olam bi-malkbus shakay*,” a hope for a world devoid of idol worship that recognizes one single G-d, and repurpose it to support the cause of feeding the hungry, universal health care, caring for those who suffered from AIDS, and other social justice causes.<sup>7</sup> Neumann is certainly on point by noting that the usage of the term “*mipnei tikkun ha-olam*” in the Talmud and in most of rabbinic literature refers to rabbinic enactments specifically for the Jewish community and *not* for the betterment of society at large—a far cry from the way in which the concept is used in Jewish social justice activism.<sup>8</sup> However, if one looks beyond the technical usage

4 R. Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, (Schocken, 2005), 9.

5 Jack Wertheimer, *The New American Judaism* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 41. Also see Paul David Kerbel, “The Tikkun Olam Generation,” *Conservative Judaism* 61(3) (January 2010), 88–91. For more on the misuse of the term, see Rabbi Yitzhak Aharon Korff, “The Fallacy, Delusion and Myth of Tikkun Olam,” *Jewish News Syndicate* (June 3, 2013). [www.jns.org/the-fallacy-delusion-and-myth-of-tikkun-olam](http://www.jns.org/the-fallacy-delusion-and-myth-of-tikkun-olam).

6 R. Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 78–79.

7 Jane Kanarek, “What Does *Tikkun Olam* Actually Mean?” In Or N. Rose, Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, Margie Klein (ed.), *Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call For Justice* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 19–22. With regards to *Aleinu*, Mitchell First argues that a very strong case can be made that the word “*li-saken*” in the original version of *Aleinu* was actually written with a *khaif* (meaning to establish the world under G-d’s sovereignty), and not with a *kuf* (meaning to perfect/improve the world under G-d’s sovereignty). See Mitchell First, “*Aleinu*: Obligation to Fix the World or the Text?” *Ḥakirah*, Vol. 11 (Spring 2011), 187–197.

8 Neumann 133–135. The content of the Talmudic enactments referred to as “*mipnei tikkun ha-olam*,” are generally additional rabbinic rulings made to account for and circumvent potentially negative outcomes of previous legislature for the Jewish community. For examples of Talmudic applications of the term see *Gittin* 33a–35a and *Gittin* 45a. Neuman



and context of this one term, there are certainly traditional sources for the importance of Jewish involvement in the betterment of general society.

## A Light Unto the Nations

When one takes a look at the sources, from the Talmud until the contemporary halakhic literature, it is clear that the recognition that the Jewish people is charged with the improvement of mankind as a whole has widely been accepted among rabbinic scholars.<sup>9</sup>

There is a *Breisa* (a Tannaic teaching) cited in *Gittin* (61a) that states that Jews are to support the gentile poor, visit their sick, and bury their dead along with the dead of Israel, and maintain their poor “*mipnei darkei shalom*—for the ways of peace.” Whereas some authorities interpret this phrase to mean that we adopt a non-discriminatory policy for these social issues in order to avoid non-Jewish animosity,<sup>10</sup> the Rambam appears to see a far-reaching principle in the Mishnah. When codifying this law, his formulation is instructive:

Even with respect to Gentiles, our Sages admonish us (*tzivu Hakhamim*) to visit their sick, bury their dead along with the dead of Israel, and maintain their poor as well as the Jewish poor in the interests of peace (*mipnei darkei shalom*). Behold it is written: “The L-rd is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works” (Tehillim 145:9). It is also written: “Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace (*vikhol nesivoseha shalom*)” (Mishlei 3:17).

The Rambam is advocating for a positive obligation given to the Jewish community by Hazal to engender peace with non-Jews. Complementing this, Rabbeinu Bahya writes that “*tzedeq tzedeq tirdof*—one should chase after justice” (*Devarim* 16:20) includes our obligation to act justly with non-Jews as well.<sup>11</sup>

Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Yohanan state in the Gemara in *Pesachim* (87b) based on a verse in Hoshea (2:25), that the purpose for the exile of the Jewish people among the nations was so that converts would join them. The Maharsha interprets this to mean not to proselytize, but rather “to spread faith among idol worshipers.”<sup>12</sup> These sources clearly demonstrate a legal and moral concern for the nations of the world.

Going even further, Rabbi J. David Bleich notes: “There are sources indicating that the divine intent is that ... the nations of the world adopt the standards that are normative for Jews.”<sup>13</sup> R. Bleich cites the positions of Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger, the author of the

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cites many scholars who have noted the incorrect usage of the term *tikkun olam* to refer to Jewish social action. See Eugene Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew* (Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 51; Gilbert S. Rosenthal, “*Tikkun ha-Olam*: The Metamorphosis of a Concept,” *Journal of Religion*, Vol. 85, no. 2 (2005); Levi Cooper, “The Assimilation of *Tikkun Olam*,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 25 no. 3–4 (Fall 2014).

9 See Rabbi J. David Bleich, *The Philosophical Quest* (Maggid, 2013), 209–252.

10 See for example Ramban, *Bava Metzia* 78b.

11 Rabbeinu Bahya, *Kad Ha-kemah*, Gezel 1:3.

12 Maharsha, *Pesachim* 87b s.v. *lo higlah*.

13 R. Bleich, *Philosophical Quest*, 236–237.

*Arukh Laner*, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, and Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, or the Netziv, in support of his thesis.

The Netziv, in a number of places, emphasizes the Jew's obligation towards general society. In the introduction to *Shemos* in his *Ha-amek Davar*, he writes: "It is Hashem's desire that [gentiles] study Scripture and for that reason [He] commanded it be translated into seventy languages."<sup>14</sup> Netziv comments on the character of our Patriarchs who "conducted themselves with nations of the world, even ... idolaters ... with love and with concern for their benefit since that is what sustains creation."<sup>15</sup> He also writes of the concept of being a "light unto the nations."<sup>16</sup> In his words, "Israel was created to be an illumination to the nations [of the world] and to cause them to achieve knowledge of Hashem."<sup>17</sup>

R. Ettlinger interprets the same sconcept of the Jewish people being a light unto the nations, as serving as a moral example to which they should aspire.<sup>18</sup> R. Ettlinger's student, R. Samson Raphael Hirsch writes at length of the Jewish people's obligation to serve as a moral example for all of mankind.<sup>19</sup>

In his landmark 1964 essay on interfaith dialogue, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik writes of the double confrontation we face with those outside of our faith community:

We Jews have been burdened with a twofold task: we have to cope with the problem of a 'double confrontation.' We think of ourselves as human beings, sharing the destiny of Adam in his general encounter with nature, and as members of a covenantal community .... In this difficult role, we are summoned by G-d, who revealed himself at both the level of universal creation and that of the private covenant, to undertake a double mission—the universal human and the exclusive covenantal confrontation.<sup>20</sup>

R. Soloveitchik refers to the Jewish commitment towards society, the "universal human covenant" as the "story [the non-Jewish faith community] already knows." In his words:

We are human beings committed to the general welfare and progress of humanity, that we are interested in combating disease, in alleviating human suffering, in protecting man's rights, in helping the needy, etc.—but also what is still unknown to it, namely our otherness as a metaphysical covenantal community.<sup>21</sup>

14 Netziv, *Kidmas Ha-emek*. Translation adapted from R. Bleich 238.

15 Netziv, *Ha-amek Davar*, Introduction to *Bereishis*. Translation adapted from R. Bleich, 243.

16 *Yesayahu* 49:6.

17 Netziv, *Ha-amek Davar*, *Shemos* 12:51. Also see Netziv, *Harhev Davar*, *Bereishis* 17:4 and *Ha-amek Davar*, *Bereishis* 9:27.

18 R. Yaakov Ettlinger, *Minhas Ani*, *Bamidbar*. See R. Bleich, *Philosophical Quest*, 236–237.

19 See R. Bleich 239–246. For more on R. Hirsch's belief in Judaism's concern for mankind as a whole see my "For the Love of Humanity: The Religious Humanism of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch," *Hakirah*, Vol. 33 (Fall 2022), 65–98.

20 R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6:2 (RCA, 1964) republished in R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Confrontation and Other Essays* (Maggid, 2015), 100.

21 *Ibid.*, 104.

Notwithstanding the many Torah sources cited above supporting a commitment to the general welfare of society, as well as R. Soloveitchik's words themselves, I have a feeling that this story is regrettably not known to many, neither in the non-Jewish faith community nor in our community.<sup>22</sup>

## The Seven Noahide Laws

The Talmud in *Sanhedrin* (56a) states that non-Jews are obligated in the seven Noahide laws. The Rambam emphasizes a Jew's obligation to encourage non-Jews to adhere to the seven Noahide laws in the land of Israel.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the Rambam writes that the Jewish courts are obligated to establish judges for non-Jewish residents in order to enforce adherence to the Noahide Laws.<sup>24</sup>

Some contemporary *poskim* have strongly cautioned against publicizing and encouraging non-Jews to observe the Noahide Laws. Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch was staunchly opposed to Jews in any way encouraging non-Jews to observe the Noahide laws.<sup>25</sup> Although less adamant than R. Sternbuch, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes that, although it is permitted to teach the Noahide Laws to gentiles, it best not to publicize this.<sup>26</sup>

Rav Yosef states in *Bava Kama* (38a) that Hashem saw that the nations of the world were not observing the Noahide laws and therefore, He permitted the nations to violate them. Based on a number of verses, the Gemara connects Rav Yosef's statement to the moment in history when Hashem chose to give the Torah to the Jewish people. There are a variety of explanations offered for this passage in the Talmud. The Hasam Sofer cites a ruling of the Pnei Yehoshua who explains this passage to mean that after the giving of the Torah, there is no obligation whatsoever for Jews to influence non-Jews to observe the Noahide Laws as they are no longer commanded to keep them.<sup>27</sup>

However, the *Hasam Sofer* himself disagrees and posits that when Rav Yosef stated that Hashem permitted the Noahide laws, he only meant to say that non-Jews no longer receive reward for their obligated observance of the Noahide laws, rather that they receive reward like an "*eino metzuveh*," someone who is not commanded; however they are still punished for violating what they are obligated in.<sup>28</sup> According to this reading of the Gemara, one could argue that Jews should still encourage the observance of the Noahide Laws.

22 For more on this topic in general see David Shatz, Chaim I. Waxman, Nathan J. Diamant (ed.) *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Aronson, 1997); Yosef ben Shlomo Hakohen, *The Universal Jew* (Feldheim, 1995); Dyonna Ginsburg, "Re-anchoring Universalism to Particularism," in Shmuel Hain (ed.), *The Next Generation of Modern Orthodoxy* (Yeshiva University, 2012), 3–22; Rabbi Wiederblank, "Our Responsibility to Humanity," *Yadrim*, Vol. 4, Sivan (Boca Raton Synagogue, 5782), 5–29; R. Jonathan Sacks, "*Tikkun Olam: Orthodoxy's Responsibility to Perfect G-d's World*" (Speech delivered at the Orthodox Union West Coast Convention, December 1997—Kislev 5758).

23 Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Melakhim* 8:9–10.

24 Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Melakhim* 10:11.

25 R. Moshe Sternbuch, *Teshuvos Vi-hanbagos* Vol. 3 no. 317.

26 R. Moshe Feinstein, *Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah* Vol. 3 no. 89.

27 *Teshuvos Hasam Sofer, Hoshen Mishpat*, Vol. 5, no. 185.

28 Ibid. Whether non-Jews are obligated in the Noahide laws after the giving of the Torah is the subject of an earlier debate. *Tosafos* in *Hagigah* (13a) rule that although it is forbidden to teach Torah to non-Jews, there is no prohibition

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, although not an advocate of interfaith dialogue within a religious context, somewhat surprisingly, does support teaching the Noahide laws:

The Torah was not given to non-Jews directly, but the Almighty has offered it to all of mankind indirectly, as a promise, a vision, an eschatological expectation, the ultimate end of history. The Torah was given to us so many millennia ago. Our task was and still is to teach Torah to mankind, to influence the non-Jewish world, to redeem it from an orgiastic way of living, from cruelty and insensitivity, to arouse in mankind a sense of justice and fairness. In a word, we are to teach the seven mitzvot that are binding on every human being.<sup>29</sup>

The strongest case for a Jew's obligation to encourage non-Jewish observance of the Noahide laws can be found in the writings of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, whose approach to social action will be analyzed in depth below. In a letter to Chaplain Brigadier General Israel Drazin, the Rebbe emphasized the importance of the Noahide laws and the Jewish community's obligation to encourage the observance of these commandments.<sup>30</sup>

## The Lubavitcher Rebbe: A 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hasidic Socio-Mystical Thinker and Social Activist

One contemporary Jewish thinker who took an active role in general society stands in a league of his own—the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. One would be hard-pressed to find a better example in the 20<sup>th</sup> century of someone who was both staunchly committed to authentic Torah values and at the same time dedicated to the betterment of general society than the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe developed a comprehensive, holistic, and deeply spiritual mandate for what sociologist Philip Wexler refers to as the “resacralization” of society.

## The Re-enchantment and Resacralization of Society

Borrowing from a term coined by Abraham Maslow,<sup>31</sup> Wexler argues that today's culture is in dire need of “resacralization,” a process of reintroducing values, creativity, emotion, and ritual into society. Instead of the social sciences and education in general assuming a

to teach them the Noahide laws. However, *Tsafos* cited in the *Hagabos Ha-bab* (Ibid. no. 40) disagree and state that after the giving of the Torah, gentiles are not obligated in the Noahide laws and there would be a prohibition of teaching them to non-Jews. For more on this see Dovid Lichtenstein, *Headlines 2: Halachic Debates of Current Events* (Orthodox Union Press, 2017), 125–128.

29 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Abraham's Journey* (Ktav, 2008), 182. Thanks to my father-in-law, Rabbi Hanan Balk for pointing this source out to me.

30 Letter to Israel Drazin from R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson (October 31, 1986). See “What Could Have Prevented the Holocaust, Chabad.org. For more statements of the Rebbe on the importance of encouraging non-Jews to observe the Noahide laws see R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, “The Seven Noahide Laws,” *Sichos In English* Vol. 16 (Kislev-Nissan 5743). This talk was delivered on Shabbos *Parshas Beshalach*, 15th Day of Shevat, 5743 (1983). Also see “Reach Out to the Non-Jews,” Disc 31, Program 123 (Event Date: 4 Tishrei 5747–October 07, 1986) Chabad.org.

31 Feist and Feist: *Theories of Personality*, 7th edition, (The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2009), 303.

totally secularized approach to the world, according to Wexler, we have now reached, what he deems to be, a post-secular era that demands a paradigm shift and a resacralization.<sup>32</sup>

### Menorahs in the Public Square

The Rebbe's campaign for the public lighting of Hanukkah menorahs is likely the most visible example of the Rebbe's mission to bring spirituality, light, and a moral awareness to society at large. The public lighting of a giant menorah began in 1974 at the foot of Philadelphia's Liberty Bell. By the late 1970s, the practice began to gain visibility and traction. In fact, in 1979, President Jimmy Carter left a one-hundred-day self-imposed seclusion during the Iran hostage crisis in order to light the Chabad menorah in front of the White House.<sup>33</sup> But the Rebbe's activities did not go without objections. In 1978, Rabbi Joseph Glaser, the head of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the organization of Reform Rabbis, penned a letter to the Rebbe criticizing the public display of religion:

It has come to my attention that the Lubavitcher Chassidim are erecting Hanukkiot and holding religious services in connection therewith on public property in various locations throughout the United States. This is as much a violation of the constitutional principle of separation of church and state as is the erection of Christmas trees .... It weakens our hands when we protest this institution of Christian doctrine into the public life of American citizens and thus, it is really not worth the value received.<sup>34</sup>

In an additional letter, Glaser indicates the future legal efforts that were to come to the fore to stop the Menorah Campaign.<sup>35</sup> He ends his letter with an appeal to the Rebbe to end the menorah lightings immediately.<sup>36</sup> In the Rebbe's response, he notes that there has already been positive acclaim observed over a number of years as a result of the menorah lightings:

The fact is that countless Jews in all parts of the country have been impressed and inspired by the spirit of Chanukah which has been brought to them, to many for the first time.<sup>37</sup>

Regarding the constitutional issue, an issue that emerged a number of times throughout his career, the Rebbe was more forceful and unequivocal:

32 Philip Wexler, *Mystical Sociology: An Emerging Social Vision* (Westview Press, 2000), 42–46.

33 Joseph Telushkin, *Rebbe* (Harper Collins, 2014), 262.

34 Jonathan Sarna and David G. Dalin, *Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience* (Notre Dame University, 1997), 288–300 cited in Telushkin, 263–268.

35 The most significant legal case made against public menorah lighting was brought before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1989. See *Allegheny County v. ACLU*, 492 U.S. 573 (1989). Today, Chabad's public menorah lightings have become normative in North American society. Several thousand public lightings take place every year under Chabad auspices with an increasing amount of non-Chabad and even non-Orthodox involvement. See Telushkin 269–270.

36 Telushkin, 264.

37 *Ibid.*, 265.

I can most assuredly allay your apprehension on this score. I am fully certain that none of those who participated in or witnessed the kindling of a Chanukah Lamp in a public place (and in all cases permission was *readily* granted by authorities) felt that his or her loyalty to the Constitution of the U.S.A. had been weakened or compromised thereby ... seeing that the U.S. Congress opens [its daily sessions] with a religious invocation ... and surely the U.S. Congress, comprising each and every state of the Union, is *the* place where the Constitution ... should be most rigidly upheld.<sup>38</sup>

In his final letter to the Rebbe, Glaser makes a new argument, one that may be quite surprising to today's reader. Glaser notes that the Rebbe sees some intrinsic value in having Jews attend a public menorah lighting. Glaser counters: "Ultimately the survival of Judaism depends on the home." It is *there* that the menorah should be lit. Having people observing the ceremony in public constitutes a "flamboyant religious exercise instead of sacred home ritual."<sup>39</sup> It is more than ironic that a major figure in the very movement that champions contributing to general society as their *raison d'être*, hence the centrality of *tikkun olam*, claimed that Judaism's rituals should be relegated to the Jewish home.

Although it is not explicitly stated in the Glaser correspondence, the Rebbe's advocacy of menorah lighting was rooted in his deeper conviction in the crucial role religion must play for society as a whole. In a 1990 worldwide menorah-lighting satellite event the Rebbe made this clear:

G-d gave each of us a soul, which is a candle that He gives us to illuminate our surroundings with His light ... We must not only illuminate the *inside* of homes, but also the outside, and the world at large.<sup>40</sup>

## The Educational Model of The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Building on the social theories of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, Wexler argues in his groundbreaking work *Social Vision: The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Transformative Paradigm for the World*, that religion, and specifically the socio-mystical community model of Habad Hasidim, has the potential to usher in a new social paradigm for society today.<sup>41</sup> Wexler documents that the Rebbe's educational program provided the foundation for an all-encompassing revision of social policy and social life in the United States.<sup>42</sup>

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's educational agenda made its way into the public square when in 1978 President Jimmy Carter acted upon a congressional resolution to declare R.

38 Ibid., 266.

39 Ibid., 268.

40 Ibid., 269.

41 Philip Wexler, Eli Rubin, and Michael Wexler, *Social Vision: The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Transformative Paradigm for the World* (Herder & Herder, 2019).

42 Wexler, 148.

Schneerson's 76<sup>th</sup> birthday "Education Day, U.S.A.," recognizing the Rebbe's commitment to general education in the United States for over three decades.

This was a reflection of the active role the Rebbe took throughout his life in the advancement of education in American society. In 1960, R. Schneerson sent a four-person delegation to the White House Conference on Children and Youth where they argued that "children and youth be granted greater opportunities for specific religious education."<sup>43</sup> A decade later, a fuller memorandum of Lubavitch policy proposal was entered into the *Congressional Record*. Here, the Rebbe's vision for education in the United States is sharply articulated:

An educational system must have a soul. Children are not computers to be fed a mass of informational data, without regard for their human needs for higher goals and ideals in life.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, the Rebbe did not stop at what was taught in the classroom. His approach to educational policy is that it is equally important for an educational model to impact the homes, streets, and the entire social context of the students. According to Wexler, in the new social ethos of Hasidism, as conceived by R. Schneerson, lies an alternative to our current educational system. In such a model, using Wexler's terminology, pedagogy can be seen as "initiatory, awakening, interactive ... imaginative divinization."<sup>45</sup>

### **The Non-Denominational Prayer**

The Rebbe's view of the paramount importance of an education with a soul was given concrete expression in his advocacy for non-denominational prayer in public school classrooms in the United States. In 1962, in the Supreme Court case *Engel v. Vitale*, this proposition was deemed unconstitutional.<sup>46</sup> The case sparked a great level of controversy about the nature of education in America and how schools should best negotiate the separation of Church and State. Many Jewish groups applauded the decision of the courts.<sup>47</sup> However, the Rebbe, in two powerful letters, one written in 1962 and one in 1964, made his position clear. I cite excerpts of the 1964 letter below at length because I feel it clearly shows the Rebbe's passion about this issue:

Let me assure you at once that my view ... [has] not changed .... On the contrary, if there could have been any change at all, it was to reinforce my conviction of the vital need that the children in the public schools should be allowed to begin their day at school with the recitation of a non-denominational prayer, acknowledging the existence of a Creator and Master of the Universe, and

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<sup>43</sup> Wexler, 149.

<sup>44</sup> Cong. Rec.—Volume 116, Part 33 (December 28, 1970, 43738) cited in Wexler 173n12.

<sup>45</sup> Wexler, 152.

<sup>46</sup> *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 US 421—Supreme Court (1962).

<sup>47</sup> Most, although not all, of the opposition to the public prayer came from the organized Jewish community. See Telushkin 255.



our dependence upon Him. In my opinion, this acknowledgment is absolutely necessary in order to impress upon the minds of our growing-up generation that the world in which they live is not a jungle, where brute force, cunning and unbridled passion rule supreme, but that it has a Master Who is not an abstraction, but a personal G-d; that this Supreme Being takes a “personal interest” in the affairs of each and every individual, and to Him everyone is accountable for one’s daily conduct.

Juvenile delinquency, the tragic symptom of the disillusionment, insecurity and confusion of the young generation, has not abated; rather the reverse is the case .... The remedy lies in removing the cause, not in merely treating the symptoms. It will not suffice to tell the juvenile delinquent that crime does not pay, and that he will eventually land in jail (if he is not smart enough?). Nor will he be particularly impressed if he is admonished that law-breaking is an offense against society. It is necessary to engrave upon the child’s mind the idea that any wrongdoing is an offense against the Divine authority and order.

According to the Rebbe’s shrewd analysis, for most people, well-reasoned argumentation or rational decision making, is simply not enough of a foundation to compel the observance of universal moral standards. A deep and lasting moral sensibility is best cultivated through a more basic socio-spiritual sense of a personal relationship with the all-knowing G-d.<sup>48</sup> The Rebbe was also a realist. He understood that if society was to change, it would not be enough to relegate his prayer to places of worship or synagogues. Prayer had to be brought to the masses, and especially to the children:

At first glance this seems to be the essential function of a house of prayer and of the spiritual leaders. However, anyone who does not wish to delude himself about the facts of house of prayer attendance, both in regard to the number of worshippers and the frequency of their visits, etc., etc., must admit that shifting the responsibility to the house of prayer will not correct the situation. Nor can we afford to wait until the house of prayer will attain its fitting place in our society, and in the life of our youth in particular, for the young generation will not wait with its growing-up process.

Children have to be “trained” from their earliest youth to be constantly aware of “the Eye that seeth and the Ear that heareth.” We cannot leave it to the law-enforcing agencies to be the keepers of the ethics and morals of our young generation. The boy or girl who has embarked upon a course of truancy will not be intimidated by the policeman, teacher or parent, whom he or she thinks fair game to “outsmart.” Furthermore, the crux of the problem lies in the success

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<sup>48</sup> The Rebbe’s point that morality cannot be properly developed merely by reason and rational thinking, is not dissimilar to sociologist Jonathan Haidt’s theory that moral development happens primarily through intuitive and emotional processes rather than cognitive and reason-based judgments. See Jonathan Haidt, “The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment,” *Psychological Review*, 108 (2001), 814–834.



or failure of bringing up the children to an awareness of a Supreme Authority, Who is not only to be feared, but also loved. Under existing conditions in this country, a daily prayer in the public schools is for a vast number of boys and girls the only opportunity of cultivating such an awareness.

The Rebbe wholeheartedly believed in the civic utility of prayer. In his view, a more prayerful and soulful education for America's youth would lead to a more moral America. Accordingly, the Constitution should not be a barrier to the best interests of the country:

To oppose non-denominational prayer “on constitutional grounds” is, in my opinion, altogether a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the problem. The issue is: Whether a non-denominational prayer wherewith to inaugurate the school day is, or is not, in the best interests of the children. If the answer is “yes,” then obviously it should be made constitutional, for there can be no difference of opinion as to the fact that the Constitution has been created to serve the people, not vice versa.<sup>49</sup>

Following the establishment of “Education Day, U.S.A.” in 1978, the Rebbe delivered a talk at a *farbrengen* in his Brooklyn synagogue to mark the occasion. In this address, the Rebbe stated that the Torah requires Jews to pay attention to the nation's educational concerns and not merely to ensure that their own community's educational needs are met.<sup>50</sup>

In an even broader vision, the Rebbe advocated strongly for a new and independent department of education. Well ahead of his time, the Rebbe encouraged the raising of teacher's salaries and more federal spending to improve the public schools. He believed this would in turn cause diminishing expenses in the penal system, crime prevention, health and welfare. In the Rebbe's words, “a morally healthy, strong and united nation is in itself a strong deterrent against any enemy.”<sup>51</sup> Remarkably progressive, as part of his broad vision for a healthy and morally strong society, the Rebbe also advocated for criminal justice reforms, and for the creation of alternative energy sources, especially solar energy.<sup>52</sup>

### The Moment of Silence Initiative

Later, in 1981, after the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency, the debate over the non-denominational prayer took off once again. In May 1982, Reagan proposed an amendment to the constitution that would support non-denominational prayer. While the Rebbe supported this, he understood that it would be the subject of much debate and may

49 R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, “Prayer in Public Schools and Separation of Church and State,” 26th of Nissan, 5724 (April 8, 1964). [www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default\\_cdo/aid/2051611/jewish/Prayer-in-Public-Schools-and-Separation-of-Church-and-State.htm](http://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default_cdo/aid/2051611/jewish/Prayer-in-Public-Schools-and-Separation-of-Church-and-State.htm).

For the first letter see “Excerpt from the Lubavitcher Rabbi's שליט"א Letter on the Question of the Regents Prayer, (24th of MarCheshvan, 5723, November 21, 1962)” *Chabad.org*. [www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default\\_cdo/aid/1274011/jewish/Non-Denominational-Prayer-in-Public-Schools.htm](http://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default_cdo/aid/1274011/jewish/Non-Denominational-Prayer-in-Public-Schools.htm).

50 R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Sibos Kodesh* 5738, Vol. 2 (*Vaad Hanachot Hatemimim*, 1986), 119–20.

51 “Except from a Letter by the Rebbe שליט"א on the Proposal Creation of a Special Department of Education,” in *Report on “Education Day—U.S.A.” Legislation*, 18–19 cited in Wexler 176n49.

52 Wexler, 194–217.

never be enacted. Therefore, at this time he vied for the establishment of a daily moment of silence in the public schools which he thought had the potential to gain more support.

In a 1983 talk the Rebbe delivered, he voiced his support for a moment of silence and also stressed the need for parents to contribute to their children's education:

The actual situation in this country is that parents have no time—and even those who do have the time do not have the patience—to invest themselves in the education of their children.<sup>53</sup>

The Rebbe's solution to this was a moment of silence each and every morning in school before classes or instructions began. According to Wexler and other scholars, the moment of silence initiative created an opening for a post-secular turn in education. According to the Rebbe, the teacher's role during the moment of silence is not to fill it with educational content but rather to “empower the students to go beyond all the normative axioms of education and find their own ways to make good use of an educational opportunity of an entirely different sort.”<sup>54</sup> More broadly speaking, the Rebbe's support of the moment of silence represents his universalization of contemplative prayer within broader society. Here again we see a shift within the Rebbe's worldview, of how a successful educational model is to be imagined.

## The Contemporary Scene

The Lubavitcher Rebbe notwithstanding, R. J. David Bleich has noted that most community activities done on behalf of *tikkun olam* have been done in the non-Orthodox camp. He attributes the apparent neglect of broader social causes in the Orthodox community to their manifold commitments to intra-communal values such as Jewish Education, *Kashrus*, and other important religious activities that take up much time, energy, and attention.<sup>55</sup>

While it may be true that the Orthodox community has a variety of additional community causes that vie for their attention not held by their non-Orthodox brethren, I believe there is a deeper reason for the Orthodox community's hesitation about involvement in social action. For thousands of years, the Jewish people have been the victims of discrimination, oppression, and antisemitism from the non-Jewish world. This tragic history has caused us to collectively develop a form of communal isolationism as a defense mechanism. Perhaps this is why, on the whole, and understandably so, more traditional communities have generally steered away from taking any active role in promoting religion or values in the public square.

A few notable exceptions should be made. R. Jonathan Sacks is a towering exception to this rule. A central theme within the career and thought of R. Sacks is the belief in Judaism's ability and obligation to influence general society. R. Sacks argued that, if

53 R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, “A Moment to Save the World – Part 2”: 10 Shevat 5743 (January 24, 1983) *Chabad.org* cited in Wexler 168.

54 Wexler, 171.

55 R. J. David, Bleich, “Tikun Olam: A Jew's Responsibility to Society,” YUTorah.org (Oct 26, 1988).

understood properly, religion, and particularly Judaism, can be a source of developing a shared and collective vision for society at large.<sup>56</sup> Often in his writings, he emphasized the importance of religion on the world stage arguing that “a Judaism divorced from society will be a Judaism unable to influence society or inspire.”<sup>57</sup>

There have been others as well. The chief rabbi of South Africa, Rabbi Warren Goldstein has worked to bring the voice of religion and values into the public school system in South Africa. In 2008, as part of the National Religious Leaders Forum, he played a major role in drafting a “Bill of Responsibilities for South African Youth.”<sup>58</sup> However, these exceptions prove the rule. For the most part, the *frum* community has not taken an active role in the betterment of society at large.

Although this is understandable, considering our troubled history with society at large, there can be some collateral damage. Over twenty years ago, Rabbi Berel Wein told interviewer Faranak Margolese, author of the book *Off the Derech*, that he sees a lack of interest in general society and its issues as a contributing factor for today’s youth leaving a life of Torah and *mitzvos*. In his words:

To a great extent, I think one of the greatest problems that Orthodoxy faces is that it doesn’t promise anything. It should. On an individual basis perhaps it does; but [not] on a national basis. I mean let’s say everybody would vote for the Orthodox parties tomorrow. What would be its platform? What are we going to do? We have no idea. The Torah [has ideas], but someone has to articulate them. What’s our attitude toward labor unions? What’s our attitude toward the poorer section of society? Toward the Arabs? Toward anything? So now the attitude is: do Torah and *mitzvot*. But doing Torah and *mitzvot* is not a foreign policy and it’s not a domestic policy either. We don’t promise anything to anyone .... We don’t say that we are going to fix the world; we don’t say those things even though it is part of our heritage, even though that’s part of Torah. We don’t express it. It could be the reason we don’t is that we have

56 See R. Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991). This book is an expansion on R. Sacks’s BBC Reith Lectures (1990). [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00gq0dl/episodes/player](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00gq0dl/episodes/player).

57 R. Jonathan Sacks, “A Judaism Engaged With The World” (2013). Also see his *The Politics of Hope* (Vintage, 1997); *The Home We Build Together* (Continuum, 2009); “Reconciling Religion’s Role in the West: An Interview with Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks,” *Harvard International Review* 38:1 (Fall 2016), 52–54.

During an interview, R. Sacks was asked why should Jews contribute to the conversation in the public square, when in their pasts they have had their words come back to haunt them when public opinion shifted? Why should Jews not concentrate on their internal needs? R. Sacks responded as follows:

The issues that face the collective—the environment, inequities in sharing wealth, the clash of cultures, the loosing of Man from his previous moral moorings—all of these are our problems alongside our fellow world travelers .... Can we afford not to participate in the great conversations that will shape our culture and the human future? .... There is an aspect of Torah—*kedushah*, the code of holiness—that is particular to the Jewish people. But there is a no less significant aspect of Torah—*Hokhmah*, its Divine wisdom—that is universal, addressed by the Creator to the whole of creation. That too is one of the tasks with which we are charged as the People of the Covenant.

See Rabbi Yitzchok Alderstein, “How the Torah Helped Shape the Modern World,” *Jewish Action* (Fall 2010).

58 Jonathan Rosenblum, “Hail to the Chief (rabbi),” *Jerusalem Post* (July 1, 2011). Also see the South African government’s website for the text of the “Bill of Responsibilities.” I thank Rabbi Daniel Korobkin for pointing this out to me.

been under attack for so long; we have been the minority of a minority so we can't afford grandiose dreams. But I think that if we don't express grandiose dreams, we doom ourselves to remain the minority within the minority.<sup>59</sup>

If, as a community, we do not want to remain “the minority within the minority,” devoid of any public policy at the national or global level, it would do us well to consider an alternative model. *Tikkun Olam*, perhaps more accurately understood as care and concern for the society in which we live, is not our only priority. However, following the Lubavitcher Rebbe's example, more attention must be placed on it. In the last century, Orthodox leaders and public figures, including the Rebbe, R. Sacks, and Chief Rabbi Goldstein have made significant contributions to betterment of general society but there is still more work to be done.

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59 Magolese, Faranak, *Off The Derech* (Devora, 2005), 202–203. The interviews with R. Wein were held on August 28, 2000 and January 8, 2001.

# Viahavta Lireiakha Kamokha: What Does It Mean?

Rabbi Asher Frankel

IN PREVIOUS VOLUMES of this journal, references were made to the verse *Viahavta lireiakha kamokha*, employing the common translation, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” While at first glance the words appear to be simple in meaning, there is, in fact, a plethora of rabbinic literature explicating each of the three Hebrew words, and thereby providing guidance as to how this mitzvah is to be performed. Accordingly, this essay shall present selected key rabbinic opinions and shall be organized in the order of the three words.

## The Verse

Prior to an analysis of the text, it is necessary to know its context, as will be evident later in this essay. The verse reads as follows:

*Vayikra* 19:18

לֹא תִקֶּם וְלֹא תִטֹּר אֶת בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה'.

You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself, I am G-d.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The Stone edition of the ArtScroll *Humash* translates *lireiakha* as “your fellow,” while others, such as the Koren Tanakh, translate the word as “your neighbour.”

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## I. Viahavta

What is meant by *Viabavta*? Is the Torah intending an emotional feeling, or that one should perform certain actions? While the Torah may require a person to act in a certain way toward another, is it feasible to expect of someone to emotionally feel love for that person? If the Torah is requiring certain actions, which actions would constitute the fulfillment of the mitzvah?

Rambam (1135–1204) states in his *Sefer Hamitzvot*:

היא שצונו לאהוב קצתנו את קצתנו כאשר נאהב עצמנו ושתהיה אהבתו וחמלתו לאחיו כאהבתו וחמלתו לעצמו בממונו ובגופו וכל מה שיהיה ברשותו אם ירצה אותו ארצה אני אותו וכל מה שארצה לעצמי ארצה לו כמוהו. והוא אמרו יתעלה ואהבת לרעך כמוך.

That which He commanded us to love each other like we love ourselves, and that one's love and compassion for one's brother<sup>2</sup> be like the love and compassion for himself: regarding his money, regarding his body and regarding everything that is in his domain. If he wants it, I want it; and all that I will want for myself, I will want the same for him. And that is His saying, "and you shall love your neighbour as yourself."<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Rambam states in *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Deot*:

It is a commandment incumbent upon every person to love each and everyone of the Jewish people like himself (*kigufu*) as the Torah states, "and you shall love your neighbour as yourself."<sup>4</sup>

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903–1993) understands Rambam's interpretation of "and you shall love your neighbour as yourself" in *Sefer Hamitzvot* and *Hilkhot Deot* as follows:

On the face of it, at least, it appears that that this love requires no actions and no concrete realization in the form of energetic acts and relationships. It is expressed through a spiritual link of esteem and affection, inner warmth and closeness. The commandment is fulfilled through the emotion itself: a person shows concern for the honour and property of the thou; he is dismayed when his friend finds himself in difficult straits or is embarrassed in public. It is all a matter of sympathy, participation in his sorrows, and sharing in his troubles

2 It is noteworthy that the Kapach edition of the *Sefer Hamitzvot* reads "*liabiv biemunah*," for his brother in belief, clarifying that according to Rambam the commandment applies only with respect to a fellow Jew. Similarly, the *Mosad Harav Kook* edition reads "*liben dati*" i.e., for a coreligionist. We will explore this further below under the heading "*Lireiakha*."

3 Positive Commandment no. 206. The translations of Rambam in this essay are by Eliyahu Touger, Moznaim Publishing adapted from Sefaria.org. An excellent resource for the Hebrew reader in Rashi script is the book *Mitzvat Hamelekh* by Rabbi Azriel Cement, which follows Rambam's *Sefer Hamitzvot* and provides commentary on each mitzvah. The book is available on *Otzar Habokhmoh*, and a portion of this essay is based on this work.

4 *Hilkhot Deot* 6:3.

and misgivings .... Therefore, both the essence of the commandment as well as its performance remain enclosed within the borders of faceless inwardness.<sup>5</sup>

Ramban (1195–1270), in his commentary on the verse writes as follows:

וטעם ואהבת לרעך כמוך הפלגה כי לא יקבל לב האדם שיאהוב את חבירו כאהבתו את נפשו ועוד שכבר בא רבי עקיבא ולמד חייד קודמין לחיי חבירך (ב"מ סב) אלא מצות התורה שיאהב חבירו בכל ענין כאשר יאהב את נפשו בכל הטוב ויתכן בעבור שלא אמר "ואהבת את רעך כמוך" והשווה אותם במלת "לרעך" וכן ואהבת לו כמוך (ויקרא י"ט:ל"ד) דגר שיהיה פירושו להשוות אהבת שניהם בדעתו ... יאהב ברבות הטובה לחבירו כאשר אדם עושה לנפשו ולא יתן שיעורין באהבה.

This [the verse "love your neighbour as yourself"] is an expression by way of overstatement,<sup>6</sup> for a human heart is not able to accept a command to love one's neighbour as oneself. Moreover, Rabbi Akiva has already come and taught,<sup>7</sup> "Your life takes precedence over the life of your fellow-being."<sup>8</sup> Rather, the commandment of the Torah means that one is to love one's fellow-being in all matters, as one loves all good for oneself. It is possible that since it does not say "and thou shalt love 'et reiakha',<sup>9</sup> as thyself," but instead it likened them in the word 'lireiakha' [which literally means "to" thy neighbour], and similarly it states with reference to a proselyte, and thou shalt love 'lo' (him) [but literally: "to" him] as thyself,<sup>10</sup> that the meaning thereof is to equate the love of both [himself and his neighbour, or himself and the proselyte] in his mind. [A] person should love to do abundance of good for his fellow-being as he does for himself, and he should place no limitations upon his love for him.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, according to Ramban fulfillment of the commandment is through action, by doing "an abundance of good for his fellow-being."

On initial examination there appears to be a significant difference of opinion between Rambam and Ramban as to the nature of *Viavavta*, "and you shall love," the former describing it as an emotion devoid of any action, while the latter describing action. However, elsewhere in Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, in *Hilkhot Avel*, we find this commandment

5 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Morality: Essays on Ethics and Masorah*, Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler (ed.) (Maggid, 2017), 165.

6 An alternate translation of "haflagah" is exaggeration.

7 Talmud *Bava Metzia* 62a. This teaching applies to a case in which two people are together on a journey and one has a pitcher of water; if they both drink from it, they will both die, but if only one drinks, he will survive. Rabbi Akiva came and taught: from the verse that thy brother may live with thee (further 25; 36) thy life takes precedence over the life of thy brother.

8 The question being: if I am to love my neighbour as myself, how is it possible that my life should take precedence?

9 In that case the command would have been to love the person of one's neighbour as much as one loves one's own self. But instead, the verse says *lireiakha*, which means "to" [or "for"] your neighbour, thus teaching that which is good "for" your neighbour you should love.

10 Further Verse 34. Here too the thought conveyed is "that which is good 'for' the proselyte you should love."

11 The above translation and footnotes are from the Chavel edition of Ramban Commentary on the Torah, Shilo Publishing House, Inc., New York.

explained very differently. Instead of passiveness, there appears to be an obligation to be actively involved in the lives of our fellow Jews:

It is a positive rabbinic commandment to visit the sick, to comfort the mourners, to bring out (*lihotzi*) the deceased, to provide for the needs of the bride, and to escort guests .... All of the aforementioned are in the category of physically demonstrated acts of kindness (*gemilut hasadim shebguf*) and, as such, have no upward limit. Even though all these mitzvot are rabbinic in nature, they are in the category of “and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” All those things that you would like others to do for you; you should do for your brother in Torah and *mitzvot*.<sup>12</sup>

This ruling of Rambam provides a detailed formulation of how to fulfill the commandment of “and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Rambam teaches us that this is achieved through the performance of clearly defined rabbinic acts of kindness “*gemilut hasadim*.” These actions “have no upward limit” as to how often they may be performed. R. Soloveitchik explains the meaning of this passage as follows:

Love is understood as performing physical acts of kindness .... Internal sympathy does not suffice .... The external manifestation is essential to the fulfillment of the commandment of love, and without it the person has not fulfilled his obligation. If that is the case, this commandment is similar to others insofar as it is fulfilled through concrete action. Although its fulfillment focuses on the heart, its realization is objective.<sup>13</sup>

Upon reflection it appears that Rambam’s statements in *Sefer Hamitzvot* and *Hilkhot Deot* contradict his position in *Hilkhot Avel*. In other words, is the mitzvah “and you shall love your neighbour as yourself” fulfilled solely through passive contemplation, or does it demand decisive and clearly defined external acts of *gemilut hasadim*? Answers R. Soloveitchik: both notions of Rambam “are accurate, for they are complementary, not contradictory.”<sup>14</sup> This is the case, since “[T]he Torah is not content with the passive-contemplative form of love,” it also “demands a dynamic love with respect to the thou.”<sup>15</sup> At this juncture R. Soloveitchik explains exactly why Rambam’s two approaches to the mitzvah of loving one’s fellow Jew are truly complementary:

In *Hilkhot De’ot* [and *Sefer Hamitzvot*] where Maimonides discusses character traits, moods and states of mind, he mentions only the axiological [value-related] action that is expressed in a feeling of warm affection .... Accordingly, it does not mention the concretization of the quality of love. However, the energetic

12 *Hilkhot Avel* 14:1. Note Rambam’s language of “your brother in Torah and *mitzvot*” is consistent with the variant readings of “*liabiv*” in the *Sefer Hamitzvot* cited in note 2 above.

13 R. Soloveitchik, 165.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.



love that is channeled into concrete actions is important as well [i.e., *Hilkhot Avel*]. Internal, subjective feelings of affection are not enough. A person must ... give them the concrete form of showing kindness and love to others. And thus, the commandment to perform acts of kindness emerges, manifesting dynamic love that motivates one's conduct toward others.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, we see that based on both Ramban and Rambam, as elucidated by R. Soloveitchik, the commandment of “and love your neighbour as yourself” is a positive commandment comprised of both emotion and action. However, the following approach presents a very different perspective.

In *Gemara Shabbat* (31a) we are told of the well-known story of the gentile wishing to convert who asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel replied, “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend, the rest of the Torah is commentary [on this], go and study it.”

Moreinu Harav Shmuel Adels, or Maharsha (1555–1631), in his commentary on this Talmudic passage asks (as do others) why did Hillel reformulate the positive Biblical command in the negative, as opposed to stating in positive terms that one should treat another as oneself? Maharsha answers, Hillel understood our verse of *viahavta lireiakha kamokha* should be interpreted in the negative, i.e., to mandate that nothing undesirable to oneself should be done to one's neighbour. In other words, the verse mandates what should not be done to one's neighbour. However, according to Maharsha, there is no requirement to fulfill the mitzvah by way of positive action.

Maharsha adduces contextual proof to his position: as quoted at the beginning of this essay, the verse begins “You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your people” followed by “and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” According to Maharsha, the two parts of the verse, (joined by the word “and”) are to be interpreted as meaning: how shall you best not take revenge or bear a grudge? By not doing to your neighbour that which is objectionable to you, i.e., the entire verse is to be read as mandating a negative. Maharsha concludes:

ואהבת לרעך כמוך שלא תעשה לו רעה מכל דסני לך אבל לגבי לעשות לו טובה  
לא קאמר ואהבת.

The commandment of love your neighbour as yourself applies only [in the negative sense], that one should not do to one's neighbour evil of any sort that is hateful to you, however, performance of that which is good is not included [in this mitzvah of] *viahavta*.<sup>17</sup>

While a few commentators follow this view that the mitzvah only proscribes what “not to do,” and does not include any call to positive action, most are aligned with the interpretation of the verse as requiring both positive action in addition to dictating inaction.

<sup>16</sup> R. Soloveitchik, 168.

<sup>17</sup> Translation is my own.

## II. Lireiakha

What is meant by “*reiakha*—your neighbour”? Is the commandment to love everyone, Jew and gentile alike, or is it limited to only fellow Jews? What if the other is not a good person, must we love him too? The verb “to love” is normally connected to its object via the preposition “*et*” rather than “*li*.” What is the significance of the formulation of our verse, why not simply state *Viavavta reiakha*, with no preposition?

Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (1085–1174), or Rashbam, writes:

ואהבת לרעך כמוך – רעך הוא אם טוב [הוא], אבל לא אם הוא רשע, בדכתיב:  
יראת ה' שנאת רע.

He is truly your colleague, *reiakha*, if he is good; however, if he is wicked you need not love him, as even G-d hates him as is written in the verse “to fear the L-rd is to hate evil” (*Mishlei* 8,13).<sup>18</sup>

Rashbam, as well as other commentators, are of the opinion that *reiakha* refers to a “good” person, as opposed to one who is wicked, for whom one need not feel love. However, Rashbam does not appear to distinguish between Jew and non-Jew. As was seen above, in defining the mitzvah, Rambam uses the term *liabiv* rather than *lireiakha*. We noted in footnote 2 that there are two variant readings in Rambam both implying the mitzvah need only be observed if the recipient is Jewish.

These interpretations, however, appear to have no basis in the text. Indeed, there are sources that may be understood as refuting these aforementioned interpretations. The Talmud (*Sanbedrin* 45a) rules that in choosing the death for a recipient of capital punishment, the court should choose an “easy death” based on the verse *viavavta lireiakha kamokha*. Presumably, one subject to the death penalty is not a “good” person. That the term “*reiah*” generally refers to all people, including Jews and non-Jews alike, is evident from *Shemot* (11:2):

וישאלו איש מאת רעהו ואשה מאת רעותה כלי כסף.

And each man requested from his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels.

In this verse, “*reiah*” refers to an Egyptian man and woman.

Therefore, Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman (1843–1921) in his commentary on the Torah suggests that the command applies to all, as per the simple understanding of the word “*reiah*” which is used to refer to any fellow, as opposed to “*bnei amekha*”—members of your people—used in the first part of the verse, which clearly references only fellow Jews.<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (1092–1167) has a different perspective. He writes:

ואהבת לרעך. על דעת רבים שהלמ"ד נוסף כלמ"ד לאבנר ועל דעתי שהוא כמשמעו  
שיאהב הטוב לחברו כמו לנפשו.

<sup>18</sup> Translation is by Eliyahu Munk, *Habut Hamesbulash*, Lambda Publishers, adapted from Sefaria.org.

<sup>19</sup> R. David Zvi Hoffman, Commentary on *Kedoshim* 19:18.

Many are of the opinion that the *lamed* of *lireiakha* (your neighbour) is superfluous. It is like the *lamed* of *liavner* (Avner) (Shmuel II 3:30).<sup>20</sup> I believe that *lireiakha* is to be taken literally. Its meaning is that one should love that which is good *for* (emphasis added) one's neighbour as he does for himself.<sup>21</sup>

Ibn Ezra suggests that the formulation *lireiakha* implies that the command obligates that one should love the good that belongs (using the letter *lamed*) to another fellow, rather than obligating one to love the fellow himself. He might say that the verse reads as if written *viavavta* asher (emphasis added) *lireiakha kamokha*. Ibn Ezra's interpretation is similar to Ramban's with respect to *lireiakha* excluding love of the person himself, however, unlike Ramban, Ibn Ezra falls short of attributing a call to action to the mitzvah.

Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (mid-13<sup>th</sup> century), known by his Torah commentary Hizkuni, offers yet another interpretation:

ואהבת לרעך כמוך אם תעשה כן תאהבהו, והלמ"ד בו יתרה, דוגמא לכל חיל פרעה, לכל כליו תעשה נחושות.

If you will practice this virtue you will contribute to peaceful relations between man and his fellow. The prefix letter *lamed* before the word *reiakha*, “your fellow-man,” is superfluous. Other examples of the Torah using such a letter *lamed* as an unnecessary prefix can be found in *Shemot* (14:28): “*lakol heil pharaoh*—of the whole army of Pharaoh” compare also *Shemot* (27:3): “*lakol keilav taaseh nihoshet*—all of its appurtenances you shall construct out of copper.”<sup>22</sup>

Hizkuni continues with an alternate interpretation: the Torah was careful not to write *viavavta reiakha*, (without the letter *lamed*), which would mean “love your neighbour as you love yourself,” as this is something impossible for human beings to do. It is, however, possible to love things that belong to your fellow human being as much as you love the things that are your own. “You are to put yourself mentally into the position of your fellow human being, and therefore not do anything to him that you would not have others do to you. By the same token you should love as much to do favours for him as you would have others do favours for you.”<sup>23</sup>

Hizkuni is suggesting on the one hand the letter *lamed* of *lereiakha* is superfluous, contrary to Ibn Ezra's position. On the other hand, the Torah deliberately did not state *viavavta reiakha*, without the *lamed*, because that would require loving the person of the other, which Hizkuni rejects as impossible, a notion we saw previously expressed by Ramban. Hizkuni ultimately interprets the mitzvah as contemplating both a positive and negative commandment.

20 The verse reads *Viyavav viavishai abiv bargu liavner*, and Yoav and Avishai his brother killed (*li*)Avner. Ibn Ezra cites this verse as another example of an extraneous *lamed*.

21 Ibn Ezra, *Vayikra* 19:18. Translation by Norman Strickman, Menorah Publishers adapted from Sefaria.org.

22 Hizkuni, *Vayikra* 19:18. Translation by Eliyahu Munk adapted from Sefaria.org.

23 Ibid.

### III. Kamokha

“As yourself?” What does the addition of the word “*kamokha*,” to the command to love the other imply? Is it intended to limit the extent to which one must go to fulfill the mitzvah?

Rabbi Eliezer ben Samuel of Metz (d. 1198) writes in his *Sefer Yereim*, a code organized along the lines of Rambam:

ואהבת לרעך כמוך. פי' ואהבת וכו' שלא לעשות לו ולא לאמר דבר המסור ללב. וא"ת האיד אדע וכי נביא אני לכך נאמר כמוך פי' ממך תלמוד דבר שאתה יודע שמסור ללבך. ע"א [ענין אחר] למדנו מכאן שמצוים ישראל לאהוב את חבריהם להיות בלב טוב זה עם זה יכול לכל ת"ל כמוך לרעך שהוא כמוך שמכניס עצמו בעול שמים ואוהב מצות כמוך.

“Love your neighbour as yourself,” meaning not to do or say anything negative to one’s neighbour. If you will ask, how will I know [what is negative to my neighbour], am I a prophet to know? Therefore, the verse says “*kamokha*,” meaning you can learn from yourself [from self-observance] what is undesirable. Alternatively, from this [the word *kamokha*], one might have thought a Jew is commanded to love everyone, the verse teaches us that the commandment applies only to one who is *kamokha*, “like you,” who has accepted upon himself the yoke of heaven and a love of performing *mitzvot*.<sup>24</sup>

*Sefer Yereim* understands the mitzvah in the negative, what not to do or say, and derives two lessons from the word *kamokha*: (1) it limits the extent of what not to do to one’s neighbour, to that which I would not want to be done to myself; and (2) it defines the person on the receiving end of the mitzvah as one who is like myself in the performance of *mitzvot*, and, by implication, there is no obligation to love an evil-doer or a non-Jew.

### IV. Summary

A good source to integrate the traditional sources cited above with today’s modernism is that of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888), a German scholar who wrote on Jewish law and thought, as well as an extensive commentary on the Torah often containing novel interpretations, still very much relevant today.

Following are excerpts from the English translation of R. Hirsch’s lengthy commentary on our verse:

*Viahavta lireiakha kamokha* is the summarising final maxim for the whole of our social behaviour, in feelings, words and deeds. The most noble fundamental feeling towards G-d and Man is Love. It is *havah* with the individualising *aleph*, and means equally giving oneself up for others, and bringing others most intimately near to oneself .... This is something which is required of us even toward somebody whose personality may be actually highly antipathetic to us. For the demand of this love is something which lies quite outside the

<sup>24</sup> *Sefer Yereim*, no. 224. Translation adapted from Sefaria.org.

sphere of the personality of our neighbour, is not based on any of his qualities. *Ani Hashem* is given as the motive for this command. It is something that is expected from us towards all our fellow-men in the Name of G-d, Who has given all men the mutual calling of *reim*. Everyone is to find and recognise in everybody else his *mareh*, “the pasturage of his life,” the furthering of his own well-being, the conditions for his own happiness in life .... In exactly the same way, and from the same consciousness of duty he directs his love to the well-being of his neighbour, he loves him as being equally a creation of G-d. He proclaims his love of G-d, by his love to His creatures: *ohev et hamakom viohev et haberiyot*.<sup>25</sup>

R. Hirsch understands the mitzvah of *Viahavta lireiakha kamokha Ani Hashem* to encompass “feelings, words and deeds,” toward all fellow men, even to one “whose personality may be highly antipathetic to us.”<sup>26</sup> According to R. Hirsch the last words of the verse, “*Ani Hashem*,” is the motivation for this commandment, because we are all creations of G-d, and the way to achieve love of G-d is through love of our fellow human beings.

## V. The Approach of Hasidism

This volume has been dedicated to the memory, among others, of my late father, Rabbi Dr. Israel Frankel z”l, who proudly traced himself through eight generations directly to the Baal Shem Tov, as well as other great Hasidic leaders, such as Rebbi Naphtali of Ropshitz. Accordingly, this essay shall include their interpretations of the mitzvah.

Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760), also known as the Baal Shem Tov explains that our verse is to be read with a pause between the beginning of the phrase *Viahavta lireiakha* and the end of the phrase, *kamokha ani Hashem* as follows:

And you shall love your neighbour like yourself, [I am the L-rd]: the explanation of the verse, “and you shall love your neighbour,” is [that] just like you act towards your neighbour with love and unity—“like yourself, I am the L-rd”; that I the L-rd will be like yourself. And this is according to the secret of, “the L-rd is your shadow” (*Tehillim* 121:5), that is explained in the words of our G-dly teacher, the Baal Shem Tov: that like a person behaves below with his friend and neighbour, with love and with proper traits, so too will the supernal King behave towards him. And it is like a shadow—that every movement that a person makes, the shadow corresponds to it. So too is He, may He be blessed, with man. And that is [the meaning of], “and you shall love your neighbour”—that like yourself, “I am the L-rd,” to also act towards you with love and all goodness.<sup>27</sup>

25 R. Hirsch, *The Pentateuch: Translated and Explained by Samson Raphael Hirsch*, rendered into English by Isaac Levy (The Judaica Press, 1971), 527.

26 Ibid.

27 *Otzar Habayim, Kedoshim*, p. 172, column 4. Translation is adapted from Sefaria.org.

Rebbi Naphtali of Ropshitz (1760–1827) is quoted as explaining *Viabavta lireiakha kamokha Ani Hashem* as follows:

The Hebrew letter *yud* represents the ‘*yid*’ (the Jew) through a play on words. When two of the Hebrew letters *yud* are positioned one above the other they form the Hebrew vowel *sheva* (“:”), signifying the inequality of one Jew ‘above’ the other. However, when both letters *yudin* are side by side, signifying the equality and unity of two Jews, they form the *shem Hashem*, the name of G-d. R. Naphtali explained this is what *Viabavta lireiakha kamokha* means. If you take the *sheva* under the *vav* and reposition the two *yuddin* from one on top of the other to both beside each other, i.e., *Viabavta lireiakha kamokha*, then *Ani Hashem*, the *shem Hashem*, G-d’s name appears. The thought being, if you love your neighbour and view him as being one with you, *kamokha*, then *Ani Hashem*, the two *yuddin* / *yiddin* form a holy pair.<sup>28</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

We previously cited the story in the Talmud involving a gentile who came before Shammai and said to him: “Convert me on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot.” Shammai pushed him away with the builder’s cubit in his hand. The same gentile came before Hillel who converted him and said to him: “That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go study.”<sup>29</sup>

Rabbi Ephraim Solomon of Luntshitz, (d. 1619), known as by his work the *Kli Yakar*, explains that the gentile is not intending to mock Judaism but rather to find a guiding principle in life, as a convert to the Jewish faith.<sup>30</sup> Hillel responds by saying to him the negative formulation of the entire verse of *Viabavta lireiakha kamokha Ani Hashem*, including *Ani Hashem*, even though the Talmud only references Hillel’s answer as saying the first part of the verse. *Kli Yakar* states that “*Ani Hashem*” was also said to the convert, based on the end section of tractate *Makkot* (24a), where the Gemara relates a discussion about finding a single concept to present the fundamental of Jewish belief. The Talmud

28 Cited in *Sefer Likutei Basar Likutei*, a collection of sayings and thoughts on the Torah by R. Shmuel Alter, p. 152. Translation is my own.

29 I saw a most novel explanation of the Shammai and Hillel story on the Yeshivat Har Etzion website on our verse in *Vayikra* 19:18, as follows: The convert understood that every structure needs to stand firmly upon two legs. While he understood that he could, therefore, not be a “complete” Jew, he still wanted to acquire at least the one leg. Shammai maintained that there can be no such thing as a structure that stands on only one leg, and therefore he pushed him away using a builder’s cubit—signifying to him that no building can stand on one leg. Hillel, on the other hand, understood that some aspects of the Torah pertain to the man-G-d relationship, while other aspects address themselves to inter-personal relationships. What Hillel was telling the convert was that although the latter could not yet practice the laws between man and G-d, he certainly could start with the precepts defining our relationships with others, and from there he could progress. See Rabbi Yehuda Amital, “*Parasbat Kedoshim*: Shammai’s Approach to Loving Your Neighbor,” *Yeshivat Har Etzion-Israel Koschitzky VBM Parsha Digest*, Year V, *Parashiyot Acharei Mot -Kedoshim* (5783), adapted by Rabbi Dov Karoll. This explanation is similar to that of *Kli Yakar*, described below.

30 *Kli Yakar*, *Vayikra* 19:18.

eventually settles on the statement of the prophet *Habbakuk* (2:4) “*Vitzadik biemunato yihyeh*”—And the righteous man shall live through his faith.

Kli Yakar comments that this *Gemara* is not inconsistent with Hillel’s guiding principle in life of “don’t do to others what is hateful to you.” Kli Yakar explains that Habakkuk is referring to the *mitzvot* between man and G-d, which depend on the level of *emunah*, or faith, of the individual. When Hillel was asked by the gentile for his guiding principle, he responds with *mitzvot* between man and man as well as between man and G-d. According to Kli Yakar the commandments between man and man are covered by the part of the verse, *Viavavta lireiakha kamokha*, and the *mitzvot* between man and G-d are covered by the end of the verse, *Ani Hashem*, based on the principle of faith established by the prophet Habakkuk as reflected in the Talmudic discussion in *Makkot*. Kli Yakar concludes that both elements of mitzvah observance are reflected by Hillel in that famous story.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion, our deeper understanding of what is meant by *Viavavta lireiakha kamokha Ani Hashem* through the lens of this essay gives us a perspective on Jewish life relevant to us year-round, and particularly relevant during the upcoming High Holy Day period, when we conduct a *heshbon hanefesh*, an introspection of our spiritual lives, and our inter-relationships with others, in preparation for the Day of Judgment.

## Postscript

The verse *Viavavta lireiakha kamokha* has special significance to me as it is contained in *Parshat Kedoshim*, my bar mitzvah *parsha* (that year *Kedoshim* was read alone, unattached to *Parshat Aharei Mot* to which it is joined in most years). The Torah reading was taught to me by my father z”l, who, together with my mother a”h, as I reflect on their lives, were in many ways embodiments of the mitzvah of *Viavavta lireiakha kamokha*. It is my fervent hope that this essay, containing words of Torah, will be an *aliyah* for their *neshamot*.

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31 Ibid.



# Jewish Renewal: Rashi's View

Dr. Marc Herman

**FULFILLMENT OF THE** commandments and the study of Torah, for all of their loftiness, carry an almost inherent risk of rote performance. Few who are accustomed to religious life have avoided the pitfalls of monotony or of daily, humdrum experiences. Critics of the halakhic system are certainly not wrong to note that religious rituals are no antidote to feelings of dryness or to perfunctory, matter-of-fact execution; a staleness that can gnaw at the soul or even undermine one's deeply held commitments.

Remedies to this problem are varied. Some look for inspiration in moments of awe, some in supplements to or the beautification of the *mitzvot*, and some in diverse pathways of *talmud Torah*. Other tools remain available as well. With these diverse enhancements in mind, it is imperative to note that the need to constantly invigorate religious life and to identify aids that might enrich connection are not some sort of external value that is artificially layered onto Jewish practice. Instead, it is a deep-seated charge, woven into the very fabric of Israel's covenant.

Several times in his commentary on *Moshe Rabbeinu's* farewell addresses, Rashi identified a requirement that Jewish life be perpetually invigorated.<sup>1</sup> Such a requirement apparently devolves on every Jew. A typical example of Rashi's claims pertains to the condition that certain rewards are available only to those who adhere to the commandments offered "today" (*Devarim* 11:13).<sup>2</sup> Rashi wrote:

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1 For the suggestion that repeated themes in Rashi's biblical commentaries indicate that he sought to inculcate an important message, see Avraham Grossman, *Rashi*, trans. Joel Linsider (Oxford: Littman Library, 2012), 167. All translations are my own.

2 In addition to the comments discussed below, Rashi to *Devarim* 11:18 wrote that commandments be performed outside of the Land of Israel "so that they are not new (*badashim*) to you when you return." The controversial implication,



מצוה אתכם היום – שיהיו עליכם חדשים, כאלו שמעתם בו ביום.

Commanded to you today—that they should be for you as new, as if you heard them this very day.

Rashi here transformed what might have been understood as a mere statement of fact—Moshe is, after all, speaking “today” about requirements that will long outlast him—into an eternal exhortation. “You,” the immediate listeners to Moshe’s speech, as well as those who will recall it throughout the generations, have an obligation to treat this command as if it were hot off the presses. Receive it with excitement, Rashi urged us. Imagine that you, too, were commanded on this very day.

Piecing together Rashi’s several comments about this mandate uncovers a picture of what he might have hoped to impart to his readers. In the above remark, Rashi indicated that one must act as if he has “heard” the commandments today. Somewhat differently, at *Devarim* 26:16, Rashi interpreted the report that G-d offers the commandments “today” as follows:

היום הזה ה' אלקיך מצוך – בכל יום יהיו בעיניך חדשים, כאלו בו ביום נצטו עליהם.

On this day, the L-rd your G-d commands you—Every day they should be new to you, as if on that very day you were commanded about them.

What might the difference be between treating revelation as something “heard” anew and something “commanded” anew? It seems that these different aspects might refer to two different elements of a Jew’s relationship to the experience of revelation. Emphasis on commandedness, especially when contrasted with the idea of “hearing” revelation, underscores the content of revelation, that is, the commandments themselves. In this second comment, perhaps Rashi was suggesting that one must strive to approach the *mitzvot* with the excitement of a new task. Think of, for example, enthusiasm for a holiday that comes only once a year or the anticipation that young children display when they are old enough to stay up for their first Seder. It is this feeling, I believe, that Rashi is calling attention to here.

And what of “hearing” the commandments anew? This attitude might conceivably refer to two different ideas, either to a perspective on revelation itself, i.e., the Sinaitic experience, or to refreshed energies in *talmud Torah*. The former possibility recalls the Torah’s warning not to forget our standing at Sinai (*Devarim* 4:9). The Ramban even counted this exhortation as a discrete commandment among the 613. In his comments on the Rambam’s *Sefer Hamitzvot*, the Ramban underlined that remembrance of *Har Sinai* testifies to the veracity of revelation.<sup>3</sup> But in his commentary on the Torah (*Devarim* 4:9), he adds an additional reason: that recalling the Sinaitic experience undergirds *yirat shamayim*, the fear of heaven. The purpose of revelation at Sinai, Ramban wrote there,

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beyond the scope of this short essay, seems to be there is less value to performance of the commandments outside of the Land of Israel; see, e.g., Ramban to *Vayikra* 18:25.

3 Supplemental negative commandments, no. 2.

is “so that they may learn to fear Him forever and so that you may teach your children for all generations.” What I think he meant, at least in part, is that the direct encounter with G-d created a new kind of relationship, one that resulted in a different caliber of awe and wonder.

Returning to Rashi, the experience of “hearing” the commandments refreshed also calls to mind the requisite attitude towards Torah study. Rashi might be insisting that the Torah be approached as a novel text, because new information or new insights mold new encounters with the divine word. *Talmud Torah*, at its best, is both an intellectual and a spiritual experience. It invigorates the mind as well as the heart. But Rashi reminded us that the proper approach to *talmud Torah* requires preparation and the correct attitude. The opportunity provided to every Jew in Torah study cannot be passively discharged. “The crown of Torah,” the Rambam wrote, “is set aside, ready, and prepared for any Jew.”<sup>4</sup> It is set aside, but it requires a champion, individuals and communities who must seize it and uphold it.

In other places, Rashi clarified what an attitude of excitement might be with a bit more detail. The first paragraph of *Shema* commands the love of G-d, followed quickly by the instruction that the words that G-d offers “today” be on your heart (*Devarim* 6:5–6). Rashi explained that love of G-d’s words results in placing them on one’s heart, and thereby:

והיו הדברים האלה – שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את המקום ומידבק בדרכיו.

These words shall be—through this you will recognize the Omnipresent and cling to His ways.

But, Rashi asked, how might one recognize G-d through the study of Torah? He suggested:

אשר אנכי מצוך היום – לא יהו בעיניך כדיוטגמא ישנה שאין אדם סופנה, אלא  
חדשה שהכל רצין לקראתה.

That I command you on this day—do not look at them like some antiquated ordinance that nobody attends to, but like a new one, that all rush to greet.

Rashi proposed that an excited attitude to learning will induce religious passion.

There is more to this as well. In another remark about the importance of being open to the newness of Torah, Rashi cited a passage (*Talmud Bavli Sukkah* 46b) about the doubled verb that might be translated, overly literally, as “if you listen you will listen” (*im shamō’a tishma’u*; *Devarim* 11:13), writing briefly:

והיה אם שמוע תשמעו – אם תשמע בישן תשמע בחדש.

If you listen you will listen—‘if you listen’ to the old ‘you will listen’ to the new.

4 *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhbot Talmud Torah* 3:1. See also his comments to *Avot* 4:13.

This short statement might be further clarified by Rashi's own comments on this *midrash* when it appears in the Talmud:

ד"א אם אתה שומע בישן – מחזור על תלמודך ששמעת.  
תשמע בחדש – תתחכם בו להבין דברים חדשים מתוך דברים ישנים.

If you listen to the old—review your learning that you heard.

You will listen to the new—ruminate upon it in order to understand new matters out of the old matters.

Rashi here explained what “listening” to the new matter might entail. Through review and careful consideration, one can develop new insights into older material. That is, seeing the Torah with fresh eyes produces novel ideas, *biddushim*, that can provoke excitement. In sum, if Torah is not treated as an “antiquated ordinance” but as something new and exciting, and if one reviews what has been studied with an eye towards new applications and understandings, then one’s learning can be a wellspring of knowledge and a source of inspiration.

For Rashi, the directive to bring excitement to Jewish life does more than add additional flavor to *mitzvot* and *talmud Torah*. He might be saying that the creation of *biddush* is an intrinsic product of the interface of old and new. Through careful study, any Jew can bring new insights to the table and can contribute to conversations that traverse generations.

# | Of Sheep and Cattle

Dr. Samuel Silverberg

THE RELEVANCE OF animal sacrifices to our lives has been obscure since the destruction of the second Temple 2,000 years ago. Nevertheless, they are unavoidable for a practicing Jew, particularly on Shabbat and Jewish Holidays, when we read the scriptural record of the sacrifice of the day in the *mussaf* prayer. If you're like me, your eyes glaze over during that part of the *mussaf* service while you dutifully complete the prayer.

The objects of sacrifice include animals, wine, flour, and incense that seem to have no apparent rhyme or reason. Bulls, sheep, goats, pigeons and turtle doves are all candidates for the altar, but not deer or chickens. There are strict rules for where and when the sacrifices can be eaten, and who can eat them: often the *kohanim*, sometimes any ordinary Jew, and sometimes nobody at all. Is it possible to decipher these details to provide some meaning to our recitation of the sacrifices in our prayers?

Into this tangle of rules and regulations, bravely marches Professor Jonathan Grossman of Bar Ilan University with a book meant to untangle these details and possibly give them meaning to enhance our worship of G-d. Titled "*The Sacrificial Service, Gestures of Flesh and Spirit*," written entirely in Hebrew, and spanning over 600 pages, this book draws on traditional and modern academic sources to create a remarkably readable guide to the Jewish world of animal and organic sacrifices. I will draw on a very small excerpt from this book which attempts to explain the meaning of cow and sheep sacrifices in the Temple.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Jonathan Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service: Gestures of Flesh and Service* [Hebrew] (Maggid, 2021), 109–121.

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## Observations in the First Chapter of Vayikrah

The first chapter of *Vayikrah* opens with an explanation of the voluntary *olah* sacrifice, which was burnt completely on the altar. Within this first chapter, two animal options are provided for the sacrifice: cattle and sheep. What is the significance of the different animal choices? The simplest approach maintains that the rich are expected to offer the more expensive cattle sacrifice, while the poor man can get by with the less expensive sheep or goats. Professor Grossman suggests that there may be a deeper significance to the choice of animals for sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> He observes that the Torah consistently employs different wording for cattle and sheep when describing the sacrificial process, implying that a cattle sacrifice transmits a different theological message than a sheep sacrifice.

## Bringing the Sacrifice to the Temple

The Torah begins chapter one of *Vayikrah* with a description of the cattle option, which includes bulls and rams, for the voluntary *olah* sacrifice:

ויקרא פרק א  
(ג) אם עלה קרבנו מן הבקר זכר תמים יקריבנו אל פתח אהל מועד יקריב אתו  
לרצנו לפני יקוק:

(3) If your offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall make your offering a male without blemish. You shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before Hashem.<sup>3</sup>

The Torah advises that a cattle *olah* sacrifice (*min habakar*) must be brought to “the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (*el pesah ohel moed*).” In the same first chapter, seven verses later, the Torah introduces the sheep option (*min batzon*) for the same *olah* sacrifice without any mention of the “entrance of the Tent of Meeting”:

ויקרא פרק א  
(י) ואם מן הצאן קרבנו מן הכשבים או מן העזים לעלה זכר תמים יקריבנו:

(10) If your offering for a burnt offering is from the flock, of sheep or of goats, you shall make your offering a male without blemish.

## Where the Animal is Slaughtered

The divergence of language continues as the Torah indicates the location for the slaughter for these two animal categories.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> All translations have been adapted from Sefaria.org.

ויקרא פרק א

(ה) ושחט את בן הבקר לפני יקוק והקריבו בני אהרן הכהנים את הדם וזרקו את הדם על המזבח סביב פתח אהל מועד:

(5) The bull shall be slaughtered before G-d; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall offer the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

The cattle *olah* sacrifice must be slaughtered “before G-d” (*lifnei Hashem*), presumably anywhere in the courtyard of the *mishkan*. The Torah is more specific and more confining in its description of the location of the slaughter of the sheep *olah* sacrifice:

ויקרא פרק א

(י) ואם מן הצאן קרבנו מן הכשבים או מן העזים לעלה זכר תמים יקריבנו: (יא) ושחט אותו על ירך המזבח צפנה לפני יקוק וזרקו בני אהרן הכהנים את דמו על המזבח סביב:

(10) If your offering for a burnt offering is from the flock, of sheep or of goats, you shall make your offering a male without blemish.

(11) It shall be slaughtered before G-d on the north side of the altar, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar.

The slaughter of a sheep *olah* must also take place before G-d, but more specifically “on the north side of the altar (*al yerekh hamizbeah tzafona*).”

Read plainly, the narrative provides a very specific site for the slaughter of an *olah* sheep—“before G-d on the north side of the altar”—while providing an indeterminate site for the cattle sacrifice—“before G-d”—somewhere within the inner courtyard of the Temple. In practice, our Sages ruled, using scriptural exegesis, that both sacrifices were slaughtered in the same space in the Temple, on the north side of the altar. However, the textual emphasis of the north side of the altar for the sheep sacrifice, and its absence in relation to the slaughter of a bull for the same *olah* sacrifice, suggests a stronger connection to the altar for the sheep than the bull.

## Sprinkling the Blood of the Sacrifice

The scriptural divide continues with the description of perhaps the most essential part of any animal sacrifice—the sprinkling of the blood on the altar.

This aspect of the sacrifice also employs different narratives for the sheep and for the cattle:

ויקרא פרק א

(יא) ושחט אותו על ירך המזבח צפנה לפני יקוק וזרקו בני אהרן הכהנים את דמו על המזבח סביב:

(11) It shall be slaughtered before G-d on the north side of the altar, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar.

The blood of the sheep must be sprinkled “against all sides of the altar (*al hamizbeah saviv*).” However, the Torah adds another parameter to the location of the blood sprinkling for the parallel cattle sacrifice:

ויקרא פרק א  
(ה) ושחט את בן הבקר לפני יקוק והקריבו בני אהרן הכהנים את הדם וזרקו את  
הדם על המזבח סביב אשר פתח אהל מועד:

(5) The bull shall be slaughtered before Hashem; and Aaron’s sons, the priests, shall bring close the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

The blood of the cattle must be sprinkled “against all side of the altar which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (*al hamizbeah saviv asher petah ohel moed*).” Once more, the entrance of the Meeting Tent is mentioned for the cattle sacrifice, but not for the sheep sacrifice. The Meeting Tent was the inner sanctum of the *mishkan* and designated as G-d’s official “residence” within the *mishkan*. Thus, the language surrounding the cattle *olah* sacrifice suggests the desire to glimpse G-d’s revelation in His inner sanctum. On the other hand, as described above, a sheep sacrifice appears scripturally to be strongly tethered to the altar in the courtyard outside the tent.

A further examination of the details of Verse 5 (above) reveals a remoteness of the blood of the cattle sacrifice from the altar. Verse 5 indicates that the *kobanim* must “bring” the blood of the cow “close” (*vehikrivu*) to the altar. On the other hand, in the parallel verse for the sheep offering in Verse 11 (above), there is no mention of the need to bring the blood of the sheep offering close to the altar, which implies that its slaughter takes place within close contact of the altar.

Professor Grossman points out that the difference in language for the two different animal species persists for the *hatat* sin offering, as described in the fourth chapter of *Vayikra*. It appears, therefore, that there is a critical thematic difference between sheep and cattle as the instrument of sacrifice. Each category of animal is connected to a geographic centre in the Temple with its own particular religious consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas the cattle *olah* is repeatedly linked to the entrance of the inner Meeting Tent of the *mishkan*, the sheep *olah* sacrifice is related to the sacrificial altar in the outer courtyard. Although practically both animals were slaughtered in the identical place at the north side of the altar, thematically the cattle sacrifice is peering through the entrance into the inner workings of the Meeting Tent, the place where G-d “dwells” and reveals Himself to the world. In contrast, the sheep *olah* sacrifice is strongly associated with the altar, which is the ultimate destiny of most sacrifices, and the final step in man’s attempt to approach and worship G-d through sacrifices. We offer a cattle sacrifice to establish a glimpse of G-d who reveals Himself to the Jewish people in the Meeting Tent, and openly manifests Himself in world history. We offer a sheep sacrifice to worship and devote ourselves at

4 Grossman, 116–117.

the altar of the same G-d who is hidden behind the natural laws of the world in which we live. Applying this concept allows us to understand the choice of animal for sacrifice at Jewish religious events and rituals.

## Revelation Versus Worship in Sacrificial Offerings

The ultimate revelation of G-d to the Jewish people occurred at Mount Sinai, where the Jewish people “saw” G-d, as described the book of *Shemot* (24:10):

שמות פרק כד

(י) ויראו את אלקי ישראל ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר וכעצם השמים לטהר:

(10) And they saw the G-d of Israel—under whose feet was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity.

On the day prior to that great revelation at Mount Sinai, the Jewish people were ordered to congregate at the foot of the mountain to offer sacrifices,

שמות פרק כד

(ה) וישלח את נערי בני ישראל ויעלו עלת ויזבחו זבחים שלמים ליקוק פרים:

(5) He designated some assistants among the Israelites, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed bulls as offerings of well-being to Hashem.

Consistent with the analysis that views a cattle sacrifice as a celebration of G-d’s revelation, only bulls were offered for sacrifice on the day leading up to the greatest Divine revelation in human history.

In contrast, the altar in the courtyard of the *mishkan* begins and ends its daily operation with the *korban tamid* (the daily sacrifice), an *olah* which was exclusively a sheep sacrifice. No sacrifice could precede the morning *tamid* sacrifice, nor could any sacrifice follow the evening *tamid* sacrifice. This practice is consistent with the role of a sheep sacrifice to define the daily order of worship at the altar, to pray for our daily needs, and to acknowledge G-d’s hidden dominion over the world through the laws of nature.

## The Mussaf Offerings on Shabbat and Jewish Holidays

Specific additional (*mussaf*) sacrifices were offered in the Temple to commemorate *Shabbat* and the Jewish holidays. After the destruction of the Temple, descriptions of these sacrifices were incorporated into the *mussaf* prayer for *Shabbat* and the Jewish holidays. The *mussaf* sacrifice for *Shabbat* consists exclusively of two sheep *olah* sacrifices (*shenei kevasim*—two yearling lambs):

במדבר פרק כח

(ט) וביום השבת שני כבשים בני שנה תמימים ושני עשרנים סלת מנחה בלולה בשמן ונסכו:

(9) On the Sabbath day: two yearling lambs without blemish, together with two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in as a meal offering, and with the proper libation.



In contrast, the *mussaf* offering on each of the Jewish holidays requires a mixture of sheep and cattle, for example, on the first day of Passover:

במדבר פרק כח  
(יט) והקרבתם אשה עלה ליקוק פרים בני בקר שנים ואיל אחד ושבעה כבשים בני  
שנה תמימים יהיו לכם:

(19) You shall present an offering by fire, a burnt offering, to Hashem: two bulls of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs—see that they are without blemish.

The Jewish holidays are a consequence of G-d's intervention in world history, thereby revealing Himself to humanity. It is therefore appropriate to celebrate those holidays with cattle sacrifices. *Shabbat* celebrates creation, the antithesis of revelation, in which G-d's overt presence is hidden from the world through the constancy of the laws of nature. *Shabbat* is therefore best celebrated by the two sheep sacrifices, as an act of worship to G-d for His constant and hidden sustenance of the world. The two sheep sacrifices specific to *Shabbat* serve as a *Shabbat tamid* sacrifice, parallel to the daily *tamid* sacrifice, which acknowledge the Creator of the natural world.

### The Omer Sacrifice and the Sacrifice of the Two Breads

We are commanded to bring the *Omer* barley sacrifice on the second day of Passover, an event which allows the Jewish people to consume the new crop of wheat that was grown prior to Passover. However, the *Omer* sacrifice does not permit the bringing of the new crop for sacrifices within the Temple. Seven weeks later, on *Shavuot*, we are commanded to bring an offering of two loaves of bread, which then permits the new crop to be used, as components of the sacrifices in the Temple. Both the *Omer* and Two-Bread offerings must be accompanied by animal sacrifices. Despite the similarity of the two organic offerings, the *Omer* sacrifice is accompanied by one sheep *olah* sacrifice (*Vayikrah* 23:12), whereas as the Two-Bread sacrifice is accompanied by a mixture of bull, ram and sheep sacrifices (*Vayikrah* 23:18). An explanation of this difference could revolve around the principles mentioned above.

The *Omer* sacrifice allows consumption of new wheat in the natural world outside the Temple, but not within the Temple where G-d's presence is revealed. Therefore, the appropriate accompanying animal sacrifice is a sheep rather than a cattle sacrifice. The sacrifice of the Two Breads allows the new crop to “see the countenance of G-d” in the Temple, a revelation that demands the presence of the sacrifice of cattle.

### Cattle and Sheep as Symbols of Human Experiences

Why were cattle specifically chosen to represent G-d's revelation to humanity, while sheep were considered the appropriate representative of man's worship of G-d who created the natural world? Is there something intrinsic to these species which determines their use

in particular sacrificial offerings? In his *Guide to the Perplexed*,<sup>5</sup> Maimonides downplays that possibility, suggesting that the choice of a ram or a sheep for any particular sacrifice may be arbitrary.

Professor Grossman cites Rabbi Itamar Eldar who argues otherwise.<sup>6</sup> Cattle are completely subservient to their masters, whether carrying a burden or ploughing a field, and thereby relate to their masters as slaves to their owners. In contrast, sheep are directed but never enslaved by their shepherds. On the contrary, in many ways, the shepherd serves his flock, leading them to water and pasture. The sheep understand that its destiny resides in the hands of its shepherd, much like a subject to his king rather than a slave to his master.

The self negation of the cattle is compatible with a man standing before G-d who is revealing His greatness and His glory. The relative independence of the sheep represents a subject who is seeking direction from G-d while appreciating his autonomy to make his own choices.

I found this thoughtful glimpse into the process of sacrifices to be both enlightening and fascinating. It is my hope that it will enhance the quality of my prayers as well as yours.

*I dedicate this article to the memory of my Mother Evelyn Silverberg,  
Hava Bat Shmuel z"l, who passed away on the 26<sup>th</sup> of Adar, 5783.*

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5 *The Guide to the Perplexed*, Section 3, Chapter 26.

6 Personal communication; Grossman 120.

**Tanakh**



# The Mistranslation of Ox and Sheep in Tanakh

Archie Crandell

## Introduction

MANY OF US study Humash or Tanakh with help of an English translation. Given the limitations of Modern English, translations may be incorrect especially when there is no one-word equivalent of a Biblical Hebrew word. Specifically, in this article I would like to discuss the English translation of the Tanakh word *shor* (שׁוֹר) which is usually translated as an ox and the word *seh* (שֶׁה) which is usually translated as a lamb or a sheep. A brief review of livestock breeding practices will also be discussed so that we can better understand how sacrifices were allocated in the time of Tanakh.

## What are the Difficulties When Translating a Shor as an Ox?

When the word *shor* (שׁוֹר) is used in Tanakh, it is usually translated as an ox and the current definition of an ox is a bull that has been neutered.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of neutering a bull is to turn it from an aggressive animal that could be used in bull fights into a docile creature used as a draft animal to draw heavy loads. In pre-modern times, draft oxen were used for heavy work like plowing, pulling carts or wagons, threshing grain, and turning grinding wheels. Oxen are slow but are able to draw heavy loads. When a *shor* is translated as an ox there are a number of difficulties.

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1 Ox: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ox>. This modern definition for an ox is used throughout this article.

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First, after Moshe brought down the second set of Tablets from Mount Sinai, B'nai Yisrael are commanded to give every firstborn animal to G-d. The text states, "All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of a *shor* [ox] and a *seh* [sheep]" (Exodus 34:19). Obviously, it is impossible for an ox, a neutered bull (which is not a female animal) to have an opening of the womb. So, what is the verse referring to?

Second, when B'nai Yisrael are commanded that blemished animals are not acceptable for private sacrifices, the verse states, "Any animal that has its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut you shall not offer to the L-rd" (Leviticus 22:24).<sup>2</sup> This verse talks about not sacrificing blemished animals. It would appear that the translation has created a contradiction when it states, "Then he [the priest] killed the *shor* [ox] and the ram, the peace offerings for the people" (Leviticus 9:18). Since a blemished animal cannot be offered as a sacrifice, how can an ox, a neutered bull, be used as a sacrifice? So, we have to ask ourselves, what exactly does Tanakh mean when it uses the word *shor*?

Third, when the Torah talks about fatal damages caused by an animal, it states, "When a *shor* [ox] gores a man or a woman to death, the *shor* [ox] shall be stoned" (Exodus 21:28). Why would an ox that is neutered for the sole purpose of making it docile be the paradigm example of an animal that gores? After all, we have all heard of bull fights where the matadors are gored to death. Wouldn't the verse be better served if an intact bull, a *par* (פר), was used as the example of an animal that gores? These are some of the inconsistencies that arise when a *shor* is translated as an ox. These difficulties will be explained and resolved in the following sections of this article.

## What are the Difficulties When Translating a *Seh* as a Lamb or Sheep?

The usual translation of the word *seh* (שֶׁה) in Tanakh is a lamb or a sheep. A lamb refers to a young sheep. A sheep can refer to either a female or male of the species.<sup>3</sup> When a *seh* is translated as a lamb or a sheep there are a number of difficulties.

First, when the Torah talks about the Passover sacrifice it states five times that you should take a *seh* (lamb)<sup>4</sup> then the verses states "a male a year old, you may take it from the sheep or from the goats" (Exodus 12:5). Thus, the Passover *seh* (lamb) can either be from the sheep or goats. How can a *seh* (lamb) be from the goats? Similarly, at the Binding of Isaac, Abraham says "G-d will provide for Himself the *seh* [lamb] for a burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22:8). But a few verses later the verse states, "behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns" (Genesis 22:13). How can a *seh* (lamb) be a ram? A lamb is a young animal and a ram is a mature male. Lamb, Goat, Ram—three completely different animals. We are here to sort out the menagerie.

Second, when the Torah talks about kosher animals, it states, "These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the *seh* [sheep] of the sheep, the *seh* [sheep] of the goats" (Deuteronomy 14:4). What is a sheep of the goats? After all, they are different species. These are some

<sup>2</sup> Also, Deuteronomy 17:1 and Leviticus 3:1.

<sup>3</sup> Sheep: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheep>.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 12:3 (×2), Exodus 12:4 (×2), Exodus 12:5.

of the inconsistencies when a *seh* is translated as a sheep or a lamb. These difficulties will also be explained and resolved in the following sections of this article.

## What is the Correct Translation of Shor and Seh?

Now that we know the translation of *shor* and *seh* are not correct, what is the correct translation? Most of us would probably look online or in any Modern Hebrew dictionary for the definition of these words. This is not the correct place to look since Modern Hebrew was Ben Yehuda's idea of how to transform an ancient language, Biblical Hebrew, into a modern language.<sup>5</sup> Modern Hebrew has about 60,000 unique words in its vocabulary yet biblical Hebrew has only about 8,200 words. Ben Yehuda took the 8,200 Biblical Hebrew words and added words or their derived roots from Mishnaic Hebrew, Medieval Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and other foreign languages to form Modern Hebrew.<sup>6</sup> In addition, speakers themselves who immigrated from other countries added foreign words and phrases from their native languages to the mix. Ben Yehuda also took the liberty of changing the meaning of some Biblical Hebrew words and redefined them for modern usage. He redefined obscure words like *mekhonah* (מכונה), which was a base for the washing basin in the First Temple (1 Kings 7:27) but happens to sound like “machine,” so he redefined it into a machine or an engine. This word gets even further transformed into a *mekhonit* (מכונית) or car. Even common words were redefined. For example, the Modern Hebrew phrase “Where do you live?” or *Eifo atah gar?* (איפה אתה גר?) in Biblical Hebrew would translate as “Where do you sojourn or dwell for a short time?”

There are two possible Biblical Hebrew dictionaries or lexicons<sup>7</sup> that we can use to verify the translation of Biblical Hebrew words. These lexicons are used in academic circles, not yeshivas.<sup>8</sup> The first choice is *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, or more commonly known by its authors as Brown, Driver & Briggs or BDB.<sup>9</sup> It is a standard reference for Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic that was published in 1906. The second choice is *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, or more commonly known as HALOT.<sup>10</sup> It is a newer publication that was published in 2000.

Looking into these lexicons, the word *shor* is defined as a single animal of the herd irrelevant of age or gender, and the word *seh* is similarly defined as a single animal of the flock, either a sheep or goat, irrelevant of age and gender. Using these definitions, a *shor*

5 Modern Hebrew: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern\\_Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Hebrew).

6 The general rules for the development of Modern Hebrew are as follows. The pronunciation is based on Sephardi pronunciation. The word order is the modern subject–verb–object word order instead of the Biblical Hebrew verb–subject–object word order. The syntax is mainly Mishnaic.

7 Lexicon is a dictionary for an ancient language.

8 There is a dictionary written by Marcus Jastrow for *Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*. This is a dictionary for post-Biblical literature, which includes a dictionary of Talmudic Aramaic and Midrashic Hebrew, not Biblical Hebrew.

9 *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, F. Brown, S. Driver, C. Briggs. Online: [www.ericlevy.com/revel/bdb/bdb/main.htm](http://www.ericlevy.com/revel/bdb/bdb/main.htm).

10 *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT), L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner.

could be a single calf, heifer, cow, or bull.<sup>11</sup> A *seh* could be a single lamb, ewe, ram,<sup>12</sup> kid, she-goat, or he-goat.<sup>13</sup>

## Showing that our Translation of Shor and Seh is Correct

If we translate *shor* correctly as “one of the herd” we can now understand the problematic verses, and all the difficulties discussed above become resolved. The *shor* that has an opening of the womb is talking about “one of the herd” or specifically a cow. The offering of a *shor*, as a peace offering, is referring to “one of the herd” or specifically an unblemished bull or cow as explained in Leviticus 3:1. The *shor* that gores is talking about “one of the herd” or specifically a bull.

Similarly, if we translate *seh* correctly as “one of the flock” we can now understand the verses, and all the difficulties discussed above become resolved. Regarding the Passover sacrifices the verses talk about *seh* in general terms as “one of the flock,” and finally the verses reveal that the Passover sacrifice can be either a sheep or goat. In the binding of Isaac, the same technique is used to talk about a *seh* in general terms as “one of the flock,” and finally the verses reveal that the sacrifice is a ram. Also, the expression “sheep of the goats” in reference to kosher animals should be more accurately translated as “a goat, one of the flock.”

When translating *shor* or *seh* as “one<sup>14</sup> of the herd or flock” it may appear that we lack the information to exactly identify the animal referred to in the verses. This is not the case since the Torah will either specify the exact animal in a subsequent verse as in the cases of the peace offering or the Passover sacrifice, or it will be painfully obvious from the context as in the case of the opening of the womb which of course must be a cow, a female.

## Why Wasn't the Translation of Shor and Seh Ever Corrected?

Why did the translators of Tanakh choose to use the word ox for *shor*? At one time, the term ox was commonly used as the singular noun<sup>15</sup> for any domestic bovine animal. A male ox would refer to a bull and a female ox would refer to a cow, and at that time the word ox would have been understood by the readers as “one of the herd.”

Why did translators choose to use the words lamb or sheep for a *seh*? Translating *seh* as a lamb or a sheep does not include goats which should also be included in the definition

11 Calf in English is a young nursing bovine irrelevant of gender. In Hebrew there is a masculine and feminine form for a calf (עֵלָה, עֵלָה). Heifer in English is a female bovine older than a calf that has not yet given birth. There is no term for heifer in Hebrew so either calf or cow is used. Cow (פָּרָה) is a mature female. Bull (פָּר) is a mature male.

12 Lamb in English is a young sheep irrelevant of gender. In Hebrew there is a masculine and feminine form and a form with the middle letters transposed (כֶּשֶׁב, כֶּשֶׁב, כֶּשֶׁב). Ewe (כֶּשֶׁבָה) is a mature female. Ram (אֵיל) is a mature male.

13 Kid (גִּידִי) is a young goat irrelevant of gender. She-goat (Doe or Nanny) (עֵז, שְׂעִירָה) is a mature female. He-goat (Buck or Billy) (עֵזִיר, שְׂעִיר) is a mature male.

14 *Shor* and *Seh* are only used to designate a single animal. Multiple animals are usually designated by a number as well as the words *bakar* (בָּקָר) or *tzon* (צֹאן). If there is no number than *bakar* and *tzon* are used for herds and flocks.

15 [www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ox](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ox).



of “one of the flock.” Why were they not included? The reason may be that in the UK, where the original English translation took place, there are very few goats. Even today there are over 200 times more sheep than there are goats.<sup>16</sup> Translators chose the closest word. To the average person, goats and sheep are perceived to be similar enough so that no one would notice even if the verses clearly included both sheep and goats when using the word *seh*.

There is an actual word for a lamb or sheep in Tanakh, which is *keves* (כֶּבֶשׂ) or *kesev* (כֶּשֶׁב). This fact increases the ambiguity of a translation since when the word lamb or sheep is used in the English translation you have to look at the Hebrew word to see if it is *keves/kesev* which should be translated as a lamb/sheep or *seh* which should be translated as “one of the flock.”

But, why didn't translators update their translations to correct these discrepancies? Someone over the last hundred years must have realized that there was a discrepancy with the translation. The problem is that there isn't any single word available in modern English that can convey the correct meaning or even a better meaning. The words ox and sheep could be replaced by “one of the herd” and “one of the flock,” but this was never done since the translators may have felt it would lead to a very awkward translation which was not congruent with the holiness of the text. Therefore, *shor* and *seh* could be considered untranslatable into Modern English.

A present-day reader using an English-only translation does not have a chance of understanding the correct meaning of the words *shor* and *seh* or their translations as ox, lamb, or sheep. It would be wise to always use the English translation in conjunction with the Hebrew.

## Were Oxen ever Used in the Time of Tanakh?

In the time of Tanakh, were there actually any oxen, neutered bulls, used as draft animals by B'nai Yisrael? In the laws of the *parah adumah* (red heifer)<sup>17</sup> the Torah specifically states that a red heifer must be one “on which a yoke has never come” (Num. 19:2). If the heifer was used as a draft animal with a yoke, it could not be used for ritual purification. Also, in the laws of unsolved murders, the decapitated female calf (*eglah arufah*) must be one “that has never been worked and that has not pulled in a yoke” (Deuteronomy 21:3). In both these cases we are referring to female bovine animals that would normally be yoked and used as draft animals. In addition, when the Philistines returned the Ark of the Covenant to B'nai Yisrael, they “took two nursing cows and yoked them to the cart” (1 Samuel 6:10). It appears that no oxen were used, but female bovine animals.

16 Number of sheep: [www.statista.com/statistics/412069/united-kingdom-uk-sheep-numbers-head](http://www.statista.com/statistics/412069/united-kingdom-uk-sheep-numbers-head). Number of goats: [www.statista.com/statistics/530771/number-goats-and-kids-united-kingdom-uk](http://www.statista.com/statistics/530771/number-goats-and-kids-united-kingdom-uk).

17 Usually, *parah* is translated as a cow. A cow is an animal that has had a calf. Maimonides in his laws of the *parah adumah* (1:7) states that if the animal is pregnant, or even if a male has mated with it, it is disqualified as a *parah adumah*. Thus, in this case a *parah* is translated as a heifer or an animal that has not had a calf.

When G-d commands Gideon to, “take your father’s *par hashor* (פר השור)<sup>18</sup> [bull], and the second bull that is seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has” (Judges 6:25), there were no oxen used but bulls, i.e., intact males.

Thus, from the verses, we know that cows or bulls were used as draft animals, not oxen. Oxen were probably never used in the land of Israel since the Torah forbids the neutering of animals. It states, “you shall not do it within your land” (Leviticus 22:24), referring to the first part of the verse about neutering of animals. In addition, there is no Biblical Hebrew word or term for an ox,<sup>19</sup> a neutered bull.

## What Are the Breeding Practices in Use Today and in the Time of Tanakh?

Today, most male calves are neutered and turned into docile steers<sup>20</sup> that are raised for meat. The reason for this practice is that only one bull is needed for the breeding of thirty cows<sup>21</sup> and any surplus male calves are turned into steers. A 500 kg. aggressive bull requires special attention on a farm, but a docile steer does not.

The fact that only a smaller number of male animals are required for breeding is also known in the Torah. Genesis 32:15–16 gives a list of the animals that Jacob gave to Esau. In the case of bulls and cows, Jacob gave Esau one bull for four cows. Rashi comments about the ratio of male to female animals and states that “males according to what are required by the females.” The practice of neutering male animals also applies today to other domestic animals like sheep and goats.

If neutering was not an option in the days of Tanakh what happened to all the surplus male calves, lambs and kids that were not used for breeding? If we look carefully at the Temple sacrifices used by B’nai Yisrael, we can see that most of them were male animals.<sup>22</sup> Thus, many of these surplus male animals were used for sacrifices in the Temple. You can easily verify this by paying attention to the holiday Torah readings or Mussaf prayers which specify the animals sacrificed in the Temple.

## Conclusions

I hope this article has provided some clarity about how the words *shor* and *seh* should be translated in Tanakh. The words *shor* and *seh* should be considered untranslatable into Modern English since there is no single word that can convey their correct meaning. If you see the word ox or oxen in a Tanakh translation you should realize that it is an archaism

18 The term *par hashor* is more correctly translated as “the bull, one of the herd.” This expression is not used anywhere else Tanakh. It may refer to the one special bull used by Gideon’s father to breed his herd. This concept is explained in the next section.

19 Remember an ox is not a *shor*.

20 The name changes depending on the neutered bulls desired purpose. If it is raised or used as a draft animal, it is called an ox. If it is raised only for meat, it is called a steer.

21 <https://beef-cattle.extension.org/how-many-cows-can-a-bull-service-in-a-normal-breeding-season>.

22 Stone Chumash. ArtScroll Series, Mesorah Publications, Listing of all Animal Offerings.

translation that has no modern equivalent and should be translated as “one of the herd.” If you see the word lamb or sheep in a Tanakh translation it may be an incorrect translation of the Biblical Hebrew word *seh* that should be translated as “one of the flock,” or it could actually be the correct translation of the Hebrew words *keves* or *kesev*. You would need to look at the Hebrew text to clarify the translation.

Another fact that is important to realize is that most of the sacrifices used in the Temple were male animals that were not required for breeding. Instead of neutering them and letting them mature for meat as is done today, they were used for sacrifices.

# Confronting Textual Problems in the Torah: A New Approach That May Be a Thousand Years in the Making

Dr. Dan Diamond

IN THE TEXT of the Torah, there are certain *pesukim* or phrases that grab one's attention and give the reader pause. This is not a new phenomenon; for hundreds of years, biblical commentators have written volumes based on certain words or phrases that seemed out of place, peculiar, or anachronistic. For me, the recurring phrase, "*ad hayom hazeh*," has always struck me as odd. It occurs several times in the Torah. When the narrative says, "Until this day," it gives me the same impression as do movie characters when they break the proverbial fourth wall and speak directly to the audience. Who is saying, "Until this day?" Moshe? Hashem? What is "this day?" Is it to indicate the time of the giving of the Torah? The eternal?<sup>1</sup>

There are many instances of the phrase, "*ad hayom hazeh*," in the *Nevi'im* (among others, *Yehoshua*, *Shoftim*, *Melachim*), which are generally straightforward to explain; the Talmud states the authorship of the books of *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*,<sup>2</sup> so it would follow that "until this day" in *Nevi'im* or *Ketuvim* would normally reference the time when that particular book was written. For example, in *Yirmiyahu* 7:25:

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1 There are other *pesukim* in the Torah which have similar issues (see *Shemot* 10:14 regarding the plague of *Arbeh*), but for simplicity's sake, I am going to focus in this essay only on those with the identical phrase of *ad hayom hazeh*.

2 *Masekhet Bava Batra* 14a-15b.

למן-היום אשר יצאו אבותיכם מארץ מצרים עד היום הזה ואשלח אליכם את כל עבדי הנביאים יום השכם ושלה:

From the day your fathers left the land of Egypt until today. And though I kept sending all My servants, the prophets, to them daily and persistently.

It seems inherently obvious that Yirmiyahu is referencing the time he is giving his *nevuah*. When the phrase is part of a direct statement by a biblical character, it is anchored to that time and place and need not be accorded any relevance to any time that occurs after the phrase is uttered.

Can this same logic apply to the instance of the same phrase in the Torah? And what about other similar phrases that seem to imply reference to a certain time?

Regarding the usage of the term in the Torah, let us look at a few examples. There are some in the Torah that, as in the above example in *Yirmiyahu*, are rooted to time and place by context.

For example, *Bereshit* 48:15:

ויברך את־יוסף ויאמר האלקים אשר התהלכו אבתי לפניו אברהם ויצחק האלקים הרעה אתי מעודי עד־היום הזה:

And he blessed Joseph, saying, “The G-d in whose ways my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, walked, the G-d who has been my shepherd from my birth *to this day*...”

When Yaakov uses the phrase while blessing Yoseph, it is clear that “*ad hayom hazeh*” means until the time Yaakov says it. Much like the example above from *Yirmiyahu*, one does not need to extrapolate the meaning to refer to any time after that.

A search on Sefaria finds more examples of the phrase in the Torah. These, by contrast, are not rooted to time and place. I have separated them into two groups. Three instances of the phrase in the Torah seem to indicate one set of similar intentions:

## 1. Bereshit 32:33

על־כן לא־יאכלו בני־ישראל את־גיד הנשה אשר על־כף הירך עד היום הזה כי נגע בכף־ירך יעקב בגיד הנשה:

That is why the children of Israel *to this day* do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since Jacob’s hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle.

## 2. Devarim 34:6

ויקבר אתו בגי בארץ מואב מול בית פעור ולא־ידע איש את־קברתו עד היום הזה:

[G-d] buried him (Moshe) in the valley in the land of *Moab*, near *Beth-peor*; and no one knows his burial place *to this day*.

### 3. Bereshit 26:33

ויקרא אתה שבעה על-כן שם-העיר באר שבע עד היום הזה:

He named it *Shibab*; therefore, the name of the city is *Beer-sheba to this day*.

In the above three examples, the use of the phrase, seen through the lens of being read in today's day and age, seems to imply eternity. Although written during the time of Moshe, all three are relevant today; Jews continue to not eat the sciatic nerve of animals (to the dismay of sirloin lovers), we still do not know where Moshe is buried, and there continues to be a city named Beer Sheva (although it is far from a given that today's modern city of Beer Sheva is the same place mentioned in *Bereshit*).<sup>3</sup> In all cases, these examples seem to lend credence to the idea that when the Torah was written, it was given by Hashem to Moshe, and the words of the Torah were intended to have relevance, through a combination of the *nevuah* of Moshe and the word of Hashem, for eternity.

But let's now look at three other examples of the phrase:

#### 1. Devarim 3:14

יאיר בן-מנשה לקח את-כל-חבל ארגב עד-גבול הגשורי והמעכתי ויקרא אתם על-שמו את-הבשן חות יאיר עד היום הזה:

Yair son of Manasseh received the whole Argob district (that is, Bashan) as far as the boundary of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and named it after himself: Chavot Yair—as is still the case to this day.

#### 2. Bereshit 47:26

וישם אתה יוסף לחק עדה-יום הזה על-אדמת מצרים לפרעה לחמש רק אדמת הכהנים לבדם לא היתה לפרעה:

And Joseph made it into a land law in Egypt, *to this day* (i.e., which is still valid), that a fifth should be Pharaoh's; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.

#### 3. Devarim 11:4

ואשר עשה לחיל מצרים לסוסיו ולרכבו אשר הציף את-מי ים-סוף על-פניהם ברדפם אחריכם ויאבדם יקוק עד היום הזה:

What [G-d] did to Egypt's army, its horses, and chariots; how יקוק rolled back upon them the waters of the Sea of Reeds when they were pursuing you, thus destroying them *to this day* (i.e., once and for all).

Regarding the first example from this set, there is, according to Google Maps, a *Chavot Yair*, but instead of the Bashan area, which is now within Syria, it is in the Shomron,

3 R. Amnon Bazak, *To This Very Day* (Maggid, 2020), 252.

and was established in 1999. The Yair it is named for is Yair Stern, leader of the pre-state Lehi group. So the *Chavot Yair* established by Yair Ben Menashe does not in fact exist to this day. Both of the second two examples also seem to be inapplicable today—that is, Pharaonic law and its military history ended with the Pharaohs.

What are we to make of this? If the first three instances that we have cited seem to provide support for the authenticity of the divine source of the Torah and its eternity, is that support then shattered by the second three? What are the implications of this inconsistency? Is it possible that these *pesukim* were not part of the same original text as the others?

Traditionally, there have been several ways of answering these types of questions. The adoption of a rationalistic approach has been generally presumed to be heretical by Orthodox rabbis, who have chosen either to not address these issues at all or to explain them by way of creative *midrashim*. Any serious consideration of these apparent inconsistencies was to adopt the mantle of *kofer b'ikar*, as was the case with Baruch Spinoza.<sup>4</sup> However, there is a growing branch of scholars who are *yirei shomayim* who are taking questions like these seriously and attempting to tackle these issues without abrogation of their *emunah*. Notable among these scholars is Rabbi Amnon Bazak of Yeshivat Gush Etzion, who authored a book entitled *To This Very Day*, which takes on many of these textual challenges without compromising the notion of Divine authorship or in any way minimizing the holiness of the texts.

Surprisingly, one of the first to adopt this approach was not a modern bible critic, but the medieval Spanish commentator Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164).

Ibn Ezra was not explicit or overt about his approach, perhaps aware of how it might be misinterpreted. It appears from some of his commentary that he believed that certain *pesukim* in the Torah were not written by Moshe, but were added later, perhaps by Joshua, perhaps by other *nevi'im*; but he made reference only by alluding to this as a “secret” that is understood by the “wise, who will remain silent.” We first see this in his commentary on *Beresheet* 12:6:

ויעבר אברם בארץ עד מקום שכם עד אלון מורה והכנעני אז בארץ:

Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

Ibn Ezra writes:

“והכנעני אז בארץ” – יתכן שארץ כנען תפשה כנען מיד אחר. ואם איננו כן יש לו סוד. והמשכיל ידום:

“The Canaanites were then in the land”—It could be that the Canaanites took the land of Canaan from a different group, but if this is not correct, then there is a secret here, and the wise will remain silent.

4 Baruch Spinoza (1632–1637), a Dutch philosopher, was placed in *cherem* (excommunicated) by the Talmud Torah community of Amsterdam for his radical views, some of which included non-Mosaic authorship of the Torah.

The wise will remain silent! A strange statement to make! Ibn Ezra notes that the phrase “והכנעני אז בארץ” seems out of place. The Canaanites were in Canaan during both the time of Avram and the time of Moshe, so why mention it at all, unless, according to him, the *pasuk* was written after the time of Moshe.

Quite a thing to say! His meaning is best explained by the super-commentary on Ibn Ezra, written in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century by the *Tzafnat Paneah*.<sup>5</sup>

The *Tzafnat Paneah* explains:<sup>6</sup>

“והכנעני אז בארץ, יתכן שארץ כנען תפשה כנען מיד אחר” – פירוש: ידוע כי מלת “אז” היא רמז על זמן ידוע לעתיד או לשעבר, והנה פירושה כמו “בעת ההיא”. ועל כן הוצרך לפרש שמלך הכנעני בעת ההיא, כי אז לקחה מיד אחר.

ואם איננו כן יש לו סוד והמשכיל ידום – פירוש: אם לא באה מלת אז להודיע שאז תפשה מיד אחר יהיה הפירוש קשה וסתום וראוי להעלימו, והוא רמז סודו בתחילת פרשה אלה הדברים (א:ב), ופירושו הוא כי איך אמר בכאן מלת “אז”, שמשמעה אז היה בה אבל עתה אינו בה? הלא משה כתב את התורה ובימיו היתה הארץ ביד הכנעני! ולא יתכן שיאמר משה “אז” כי הדעת נותן שנכתבה מלת “אז” בזמן שלא היה הכנעני בארץ, ואנחנו ידענו כי לא סר הכנעני משם כי אם אחרי מות משה כשכבשה יהושע. ולפי זה נראה שלא כתב משה זאת המלה בכאן, רק יהושע או אחד משאר הנביאים כתבוה.

“The Canaanites were then in the land”—It could be that the Canaanites took the land of Canaan from a different group.” The meaning: It is known that the word “then” implies either a later or an earlier period of time. It has the same basic meaning as “at that time.” Therefore, it is necessary to explain that the Canaanites ruled at that time to mean that the Canaanites took it from a different group [who were there before them]. “*But if this is not correct, then there is a secret here, and the wise will remain silent.*” The meaning: If the word “then” is not there to teach that [the Canaanites] took the land from a different group, then the other possibility is difficult and veiled and it would be best to hide it. He (Ibn Ezra) hinted to his secret in the opening of Deuteronomy, and the meaning is this: How could [the Torah] use the word “then” in this context, which implies that [the Canaanites were there] then but that they are not there now. But didn’t Moses write the Torah and in his time the Canaanites ruled the land? It makes no sense for Moses to write “then,” for reason dictates that the word “then” could only have been written at a time when the Canaanites were not occupying the land, and we know that the Canaanites were not removed from the land until after Moses’ death during the conquest of Joshua. According to this, Moses did not write that word here, rather Joshua or one of the later prophets wrote it.

5 Bazak, p 40.

6 All translations of the *Tzafnat Paneah* by Rabbi Zev Farber “Seven Passages of Non-Mosaic Origin According to Ibn Ezra and R. Joseph Bonfils” from thetorah.com.



It would seem that Ibn Ezra was of the belief that certain parts of the Torah (and not just the last eight *pesukim* of *Sefer Devarim* which describe Moshe's death, an idea introduced in the *Gemara*<sup>7</sup>) were not written by Moshe, and this *pasuk* is but one example. However, this does not seem to shake his belief in the divinity of the Torah, and the mere fact that he references it cryptically and not outright, as well as his language of "the wise will remain silent" seems to indicate that he was concerned that ideas of this sort could easily be misconstrued by those seeking to claim that the Torah was not given by Hashem to Moshe.

But what of the idea that one cannot add or subtract anything to the Torah? Does that not make one a *kofer*? The *Tzafnat Paneah* addresses this too:

ואם תאמר: הנה כתוב "לא תוסיף עליו" (דברים יג:א)! התשובה: דע כי ר' אברהם בעצמו פירש זה בפרשת ואתחנן (דברים ה:ה), כי המילות הם כגופות, והטעמים כנשמות, ועל כן יש פרשיות שנכתבו בתורה פעמים גם שלש, ויש באחת תוספת על האחרת ואינו נחשב התוספת. ועוד, כי בפירושו הראשון בפרשת לך לך (יב:ד) אמר כי לא נאמר "לא תוסיף עליו" רק על המצות. כלומר, מה שהזהירה התורה "לא תוסיף עליו", לא הזהירה כי אם על מספר המצות ועל עיקרם, אבל לא על המלות. על כן אם הוסיף נביא מלה או מלות לבאר הדבר כאשר שמע מפי הקבלה אין זו תוספת. והראיה מן הזקנים כשתרגמו התורה בלשון יוני לתלמי המלך כאשר הזכרתי בפרשת נח, ששינו יג דברים, כמו שכתוב במסכת סופרים (א:ט) ובמסכת מגילה (ט).

And if one were to argue that the Torah said (Deut. 13:1): "Do not add anything." The answer is that one should know that R. Abraham Ibn Ezra himself explained this in *Parshat Vaetchanan* (5:5) that words are like bodies and meanings are like souls, and, therefore, there are sections which are repeated two or three times in the Torah, and each has something new relative to the others and this is not considered an addition. Furthermore, in his first comment to *Parshat Lech Lecha* (12:4) [Ibn Ezra] says that the rule about adding only refers to mitzvot, meaning, the Torah is only warning us not to add to the number of commandments and their overall structure, but this has nothing to do with [adding] words [to the Torah]. Therefore, if a prophet were to add a word or two to explain something known from tradition, this is not an "addition." A proof to this effect comes from the elders who translated the Torah into Greek during the rule of Ptolemy, as I explained in *Parshat Noah*, that they adjusted 13 matters, as is described in Tractate Soferim (1:9) and Tractate Megillah (9a).

According to the *Tzafnat Paneah*, the allowance for certain *pesukim* to have been written by other *nevi'im* and added later is still consistent with the idea that the Torah was given by Hashem to Moshe. This is quite different from other concepts in biblical criticism, such as the Documentary Hypothesis, which, in short, claims multiple authors of the

7 *Masekhet Makkot* 11a, *Masekhet Bava Batra* 15a.

Torah and does not preserve the idea of *kedushah*. Ibn Ezra's approach, while still relatively radical, is one that can still be adopted by mainstream Orthodox thought.

With this in mind, let's look at the other *pesukim* which Ibn Ezra considers to have been written by someone other than Moshe.

For example, in *Beresheet* 22:14, it states:

וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יָקוֹק יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יָקוֹק יִרְאֶה:

And Abraham named that site YKVK-Yireh, whence the present saying, "On the mount of YKVK there is vision."

Ibn Ezra seizes on the words *אשר יאמר היום* which seem to be spoken at a time later than that of Avraham, or perhaps even after that of Moshe.

The *Tzafnat Paneah* elaborates:

"וטעם 'בהר ד' יראה' באלה הדברים" – פירוש: בתחילת הפרשה (דברים א:ב). ודעתו היא כי הר ד' הוא הר המוריה שנבנה בו בית המקדש, כמו שכתוב בדברי הימים (ב ג:א). משה לא כתב בתורה אי זה הר הוא, רק כתב "המקום אשר יבחר ד'" (דברים יב:יא) משמע שהוא לא ידע אי זה הר הוא, כי לא גלהו השם עד ימי דוד, ואיך אמר בכאן "בהר ד' יראה", שמשמע שידעו משה. ועוד שאמר "אשר יאמר היום" שמשמע כאלו אמר, "זה הוא מה שאומרים עתה בדורנו כשעולים לרגל, 'בהר ד' יראה'". כלומר, הוא עולה לעשות המועד בירושלם ולהשתחוות בהר ד'. ולא יתכן שיאמרו כן בימי משה. ולפי זה לא כתב משה זה הפסוק רק כתבוהו הנביאים האחרונים, כאשר פירשתי בפסוק "והכנעני אז בארץ" בפרשת לך לך (בראשית יב:ו), ומשם תבין זה.

"The meaning of 'on the mount of the L-rd there is vision' is explained in *Parshat Devarim*." The meaning: At the beginning of the *parshah* (Deut. 1:2). His opinion is that "the Mount of the L-rd" is Mount Moriah, upon which the Temple was built, as is written in Chronicles (2 Chron. 3:1). Now Moses never wrote in the Torah which mountain [the Temple would be built on], he only wrote "the place which the L-rd will choose" (Deut. 12:11). This implies that Moses did not know which mountain it would be, since [G-d] did not reveal its name until the days of David. So how could [Moses] say here that "on the Mount of the L-rd there is vision," which implies that Moses knew [that this was the mountain.] Furthermore, he says here "whence the present saying," the meaning of which is "this is what people say nowadays in our generation when they go up for the festival, that on the Mount of the L-rd there is vision." In other words, he is going up to celebrate the holiday in Jerusalem and to do obeisance on the Mount of G-d. It is impossible that people would have said this in the time of Moses. Therefore, Moses could not have written this verse. Instead, the later prophets wrote it, as I explained on the verse, "the Canaanites were then in the land" in *Parshat Lech Lecha* (Gen. 12:6). Look there and you will understand this.

Another example appears in *Devarim* 1:1–5:

אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל-כל-ישראל בעבר הירדן במדבר בערבה מול סוף בין פארן ובין-תפל ולבן וחצרת ודי זהב אחד עשר יום מחרב דרך הר-שעיר עד קדש ברנע.

These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan. Through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab, it is eleven days from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the Mount Seir route.

Ibn Ezra reads these verses and asks about the words *b'ever haYarden*: If the other side of the Jordan includes the wilderness, the *Aravah* near *Suf*, between *Paran* and *Tophel*, *Laban*, *Hazeroth*, and *Di-zahab*, then is it not being said while on the west side of the Jordan, which would mean that it is after the death of Moshe?

In his commentary, Ibn Ezra lists four other *psukim* which are part of his “secret” (the secret being that they were seemingly added after the giving of the Torah).

“בעבר הירדן, במדבר, בערבה – ואם תבין סוד [השנים] עשר, גם “ויכתוב משה” (דברים לא:כב), “והכנעני אז בארץ” (ברא' יב:ו), “בהר ד' יראה” (שם כב:יד), “והנה ערשו ערש ברזל,” (דברים ג:יא) תכיר האמת.”

“On the other side of the Jordan, through the wilderness, in the Arabah”—If you understand the secret of the twelve<sup>8</sup>—as well as “and Moses wrote” (Deut. 31:9), “and the Canaanites were then in the land” (Gen. 12:6), “on the mountain G-d will appear” (Gen. 22:14), “here is his bedstead, an iron bedstead” (Deut. 3:11)[4]—you will recognize the truth.

The *Tzafnat Paneah* further elucidates:

וזה ראייה כי אחר כן נכתב זה הפסוק כתורה ולא כתבו משה, רק אחד מהנביאים האחרונים כתבו. “תבין האמת” – פירוש: אם תבין סוד הפסוקים האלה שלא כתבם משה, אז תבין כי הפסוקים, החמשה שהם מתחלת הפרשה הזאת עד תחלת “ד’ אלקינו דבר אלינו”, לא כתבם משה, רק אחד מהנביאים האחרונים כתב אותם. ופסוק “ד’ אלקינו”, שהוא תחלת הענין, הוא קשור עם פסוק “אלה המצות והמשפטים” שהוא סוף ספר וידבר (במדבר לו:יג). ומי שיסתכל היטב בענין הפסוקים האלה יבין האמת, ויעיד על זה כי כל החמשה הפסוקים האלה מדברים בלשון איש אחר, כאלו אחר מגיד הענין. ואם תאמר, כל התורה כלה גם כן מדברת בלשון אחרים? דע כי יש בכאן הפרש כי נתן בהם סימנים על המקומות שנאמרו בהם המצות האלה, והסימנים הם “במדבר, בערבה וגו’.” ואלו כתבם משה לא היה צריך לתת סימנים, כי כל ישראל היו שם והיו יודעים המקומות, ומה צורך היה לו להגיד להם סימני המקומות שהם שם, הואיל והם יודעים אותם? וזה הכריחו לפרש כן.

8 The “secret of the twelve” refers to the last twelve *psukim* in *Devarim*, which, along with the others mentioned here, are, according to Ibn Ezra, post Mosaic. The prior footnote from the *Gemara* mentions the last eight *psukim* of *Devarim* possibly being post-Mosaic. The difference between eight and twelve is that the *Gemara* considers everything from the words “*Vayamat Moshe*” in 34:5 to be problematic, and Ibn Ezra’s concern starts in 34:1 “*Vayaal Moshe*.”

Thus Moses did not write it but rather one of the later prophets must have written it. “You will recognize the truth”—the meaning: If you understand the secret of these verses, i.e., that Moses didn’t write them, then you will understand that these five verses, from the beginning of the *parshah* until the words “the L-rd our G-d spoke to us” were not written by Moses either, but rather one of the later prophets wrote them. The verse “the L-rd our G-d” is the beginning of the book, which connects with the words “these are the commandments and statutes” that form the end of the book of Numbers (36:11). Anyone who looks carefully at these verses will understand the truth, and can certify that all five of these verses are speaking in the third person, as if someone else were telling the story. And if one were to respond that the rest of the Torah also speaks as a third person narrator, note that there is a difference. [The author] gives allusions, “in the wilderness,” “in the Arabah,” etc. If Moses had written it, he would not have needed to offer any allusions, since all of Israel had been there and knew these places, so what need would there be for him to give them short-hand cues about places they had been, since they knew about them? This is what forced [ibn Ezra] to explain the passage as he did. I already posed a number of difficulties with his position in [my comments on] *Parshat Lech Lecha* (Gen. 12:6), when glossing the secret of “the Canaanite was then in the land.”

Again, it seems that Ibn Ezra is both quite open to the idea that certain *pesukim* were added after the time of Moshe (according to the *Tzafnat Paneah*, not just by Joshua but by the later prophets as well) and, at the same time, is willing to state it, but only discreetly and cryptically, for fear of it being misinterpreted. This fear seems to have been justified, since 500 years after the death of Ibn Ezra, one of the first biblical critics, the aforementioned Baruch Spinoza, made the following statement: “In these few words, Ibn Ezra discloses and, at the same time demonstrates that it was not actually Moses who wrote the Pentateuch, but some other person who lived much later, and that the book Moses wrote was a different work.”<sup>9</sup> This is quite divergent from the actual words of Ibn Ezra and from his exposition as explained by the *Tzafnat Paneah* and renders substantial weight to Ibn Ezra’s admonition that “the wise will remain silent.” Ibn Ezra, in other words, would not have been happy with Spinoza’s inflammatory conclusions.

It should be noted that Ibn Ezra’s opinion is a minority opinion among the commentators. Ramban, for example, specifies that anyone who claims that *pesukim* were added to the Torah is a heretic.<sup>10</sup> Ibn Ezra, while perhaps espousing variant views, is nevertheless considered mainstream enough to be part of our *Mikraot Gedolot*. Interestingly, lesser-known rabbis, such as Rabbi Yehuda HeHasid (Germany, 1150–1217) had their

9 Bazak, p 53.

10 *Kitvei Ha-Ramban*, vol. 2, p. 548.

commentaries on the Torah redacted for making similar claims about post-Mosaic *pesukim* in the Torah.<sup>11</sup>

To circle back to the original question of the inconsistencies inherent in the recurring phrase of *עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה* in the Torah, the actual answer, in my opinion, is less important than the realization that it is entirely within the sphere of proper Torah study to ask the question in the first place. In fact, as I have previously noted, there is a growing school of thought within the yeshiva world, centered in Yeshivat Gush Etzion, that aims to address issues like this head-on instead of avoiding the topic. I am sure we can all remember knowing someone in elementary or high school who, after applying modern day knowledge to their Torah studies, asked a deep or probing question and was given a wholly unsatisfying answer. It is very easy for a young mind to be turned away from a religious lifestyle when intelligent questions that demand answers are avoided. It does not have to be that way; the worlds of logic, science, and reason and the world of the yeshiva can coexist. As quoted by Rabbi Abraham Issac HaKohen Kook:

For every view that appears to contradict some matter in the Torah, we must first not necessarily deny it, but rather build the palace of Torah upon it. We are thereby elevated and as we are elevated, ideas are revealed. Then we are untroubled and we may wholeheartedly confront these difficult ideas.<sup>12</sup>

Asking the questions, even the difficult ones, is to be embraced. Perhaps it is time for the wise to no longer be silent. We should continue to inquire about things that appear strange or out of place in the Torah—*עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה*.

<sup>11</sup> Bazak, p 46.

<sup>12</sup> *Igrot Hareaya*, volume 1.

# The Downward Spiral: Based Upon a Concept by Avi Shinnar

Karyn Goldberger

## Preamble

IN NUMEROUS LOCATIONS within the Bible, the text juxtaposes two ideas that, on the surface, do not necessarily relate to one another. Nevertheless, despite the seeming disparity, biblical commentators often seek to uncover an enriched meaning for each by extracting an inherent link between these adjacent concepts.

For example, a verse in *Vayikra* states:

לֹא־תִקֶּם וְלֹא־תִטּוֹר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה'	You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the children of your people. Love your fellow as yourself: I am Hashem. <sup>1</sup>
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The Netziv, in his commentary *HaAmek Davar*, links the ideas of “not taking revenge” and “loving your fellow as yourself.”<sup>2</sup> Citing the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, he notes that if one were chopping meat and one’s hand slipped and cut the other hand, it is inconceivable that one would wish to take “revenge” on the offending hand by similarly slicing into

1 *Vayikra* 19:18. Please note that the English translation has been modified from the JPS translation of Sefaria. A further discussion of this alteration will ensue during the course of this essay.  
2 *HaAmek Davar* on *Vayikra* 19:18.

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it—on purpose!<sup>3</sup> The love of self supersedes any purported desire for “revenge” in this case. Similarly, as all Jews share in the same G-dly soul, it should be inconceivable that one would want to hurt or take revenge on another, due to a similar, but more expansive love one should feel for his “fellow” as he would for himself.

Introduction

This essay investigates two verses in the book of *Vayikra*. Similar to the way in which the Netziv has connected two of these biblical dicta, it is my contention that all of the injunctions contained within these two passages, although seemingly divergent, are linked in a meaningful way. Moreover, I will suggest that they hearken back to a specific narrative within the Bible. In connecting these mitzvot to an original “source text” and to each other, we will find that each is enhanced in its depth and significance.

Understanding the Text

In the *Parshah* of *Kedoshim*, we identify a number of seemingly diverse directives:

לֹא־תִשְׂנֹא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְךָ הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא:	1	You shall not hate your brother in your heart.
	2	Reprove your people
	3	and incur no guilt on his account.
לֹא־תִקֵּם וְלֹא־תִטֹּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ	4	You shall not take vengeance
	5	or bear a grudge against the children of your
	6	people. Love your fellow as yourself:
אֲנִי ה':	7	I am Hashem. <sup>4</sup>

Before proceeding with an analysis, it is important to elucidate how our Sages understand the concepts outlined in the verses. One prevalent way to comprehend the injunction not to hate your brother in your heart is that when you perceive that you have been slighted by another, it is not good to hold that resentment inside.<sup>5</sup> The second portion of the verse indicates what you should then do—reprove your fellow. Speak to him and attempt to work it out. Maybe it is not as you assumed at all. And if it is, you are giving him the opportunity to apologize. Accordingly, the third portion of the verse, “and incur no guilt on his account,” would then mean you would subsequently not incur the sin of hating him in your heart were you to have spoken with him.

3 Talmud Yerushalmi, *Nedarim* 9:4.  
4 *Vayikra* 19:17–18.  
5 See Ramban, Rashbam, Chizkuni and others on *Vayikra* 19:17. Another common understanding is that if you feel another is not keeping a Torah law as he should (and that causes you to be upset with your brother) you should then speak with him in order to help him correct that behaviour, as indicated in the next injunction—to reprove your people. (See Rav Yitzchak Kara, Abarbanel and *Tur HaAroch*.) In this latter instance, the final portion of that verse would then be understood that if you do not do so, you too will carry the sin that he is committing that you have not helped him correct.

Proceeding to the next injunctions, we encounter the pairing of the prohibition against exacting revenge and that of bearing a grudge. However, there is something incongruous in the ordering of these restrictions: bearing a grudge is mentioned *after* the prohibition of taking revenge. The normative understanding of “bearing a grudge” is that it occurs in the heart or mind. One might even consider it a transitional state between the occurrence of the slight and the exacting of revenge, with the latter, of course, being manifest in physical action. Hence, logic dictates that the warning against bearing a grudge appears prior to the admonition against taking revenge. For if one does not bear a grudge, then, in this understanding, one would not be likely to take revenge. So why does the text place the injunction against (active) revenge first?

Moreover, regarding an “act” of vengeance, whereas the common assumption is that it entails physical action (for example, striking the other, stealing from him, etc.), the example utilized by our Sages is actually one of inaction: Reuven requests a tool from Shimon, and Shimon refuses. Later, when Shimon comes to borrow a different tool from Reuven, Reuven refuses in kind. No activity was undertaken; rather, we might say that this “revenge” is, in fact, a non-active action—in that it is a withholding.<sup>6</sup>

With respect to “bearing a grudge,” as noted, *prima facie*, this is considered to be enacted through the internal mechanism of thought.<sup>7</sup> However, by contrast, the Gemara outlines that the paradigmatic way this plays out in real life is through speech. As in the prior case, Reuven requests to borrow a tool from Shimon, and Shimon refuses. Later, when Shimon comes to ask Reuven to borrow a tool of his, Reuven responds, “Although you did not lend me your hammer, I will nevertheless lend you my saw—for I am not like you.”<sup>8</sup> Although an action has taken place (the lending of the saw), it is within the realm of the spoken word that the sin occurs, for it is the words that are hurtful and indicate that Reuven does indeed bear a grudge. For, had he simply lent him the saw without uttering a word then neither would he have exacted revenge (as he does when withholding the saw from him) nor would he have borne the sin of carrying a grudge.

Regarding our prior dilemma with respect to the ordering of the two prohibitions, a case can now be made based on the Sages’ understanding that “bearing a grudge” is indeed a more severe sin. When you refuse to lend the saw without explanation, the other party might assume that you are being vengeful. But there is always the possibility that you did not lend it for a wholly different reason.<sup>9</sup> If your negative intention was not explicitly stated, a more benign option cannot be dismissed, and a doubt remains.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, when

6 *TB Yoma* 23a. Although the Gemara mentions that the one who refuses to lend the item states, “As you refused to lend to me, I refuse to lend to you,” it is my contention that the key element is in the withholding action, and not the statement. For, had the potential lender simply stated, “No. I refuse,” the petitioner would intuit the unstated sentiment. Moreover, although certainly perturbed, the petitioner might, in fact, see an element of “justice” in this tit-for-tat refusal. (See Shadal on *Vayikra* 19:18 re: “justice.”)

7 Chizkuni on *Vayikra* 19:18.

8 *TB Yoma* 23a.

9 For example: It is a favourite tool, given to you by your grandfather.

10 Chizkuni on *Vayikra* 19:18. The reasoning behind the non-lending of the tool could apply equally to the original non-lender as to the subsequent non-lender.



it is categorically stated that “I am not like you” (when lending the item in the “bearing a grudge” scenario), that stinging statement may well be remembered for a longer period than the simple act of withholding the saw. According to this understanding, a case could be made that bearing a grudge is indeed a more grievous trespass than revenge exacted.<sup>11</sup>

Whereas, until this point, the dicta have been primarily exhortations against bad behaviour, the text now turns to the positive injunction of loving your fellow as yourself. It can be noted that this command and that of not hating your brother, form bookends to the passage as a whole. Thus, the antipodal concepts of hate and love are highlighted, both occurring within the realm of thought.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the final notation of “I am Hashem,” creates quite the query, as we are left pondering its meaning within the context of these exhortations and specifically, its function at this particular juncture.

A Further Problem

A further difficulty which may be noted is the varied assortment of terminologies used for “your brother” within the passage: your brother, your people, the sons of your people and your fellow.<sup>13</sup> Pause must be given to consider the necessity of utilizing all of these various forms. Is there a message contained within each or within this changing terminology as a whole?

Two Framing Structures

Having gained a basic understanding of the meaning of the verses, albeit having a few outstanding questions remaining, it behooves us to examine the organization as a whole in order to extract any meaning and context we might derive from it. We will consider two structures.

A. A Basic Framework

Utilizing the numbering system from the previous chart, we note that the text can be divided into two sets of three directives, as rendered according to the division of the verses (1, 2 and 3 from verse 17, and 4, 5 and 6 from verse 18), with the additional notation of “I am Hashem” (7) appended to the final verse. However, another way to view the structure is according to the substance of the topic under discussion. Viewed in this manner, we find:

Directives 1 and 6	Thought
Directives 2 and 5	Speech
Directives 3 and 4	Action

11 And, of course, all the while that you are holding that resentment in your heart, you are transgressing the first prohibition of not hating your brother in your heart.

12 Abarbanel on *Vayikra* 19:18.

13 As noted in footnote 1, upon surveying a number of English translations, I have chosen to include this wording as I feel it best fits with the original Hebrew.

As a brief overview, let us consider how this organization can be understood.<sup>14</sup> It is axiomatic that hate (1) and love (6) are emotions that occur in the realm of thought. Moreover, the text itself notes that you will hate “in your heart”—confirming this animosity as an internal construct. For (2), a reproof or chastisement must, perforce, be verbal in nature. And regarding the bearing of a grudge (5), as noted above, our Sages consider this transgression to be enacted through speech. The taking of revenge (4) is most certainly an action, or, as our Sages expound, the withholding of an action which should have occurred. And finally, the carrying of a sin, although involving no physical action, could be considered a metaphysical action. It is “picked up” and “carried” until you are able to release it and “put it down.” Thus, metaphorically, this sin can be thought of as a physical entity—a “sin-burden,” if you will.<sup>15</sup>

**B. A Narrative Complement to the Text**

In introducing our second approach to viewing the text, we will continue assessing the concept of sin. If we were to consider other locations within the Biblical narrative where sin is not only conveyed as a material object, but where it is animated, or possibly even personified, the very first time this occurs is within the story of the murder of Hevel by his brother, Kayin. In that account, prior to the murder, G-d notes that Kayin is dejected because his offering has not been accepted whilst his brother’s has. The text then continues:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-קַיִן לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ:	Hashem said to Kayin, “Why are you angry and why has your face fallen?”
הֲלוֹא אִם-תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת	If you improve, will you not be uplifted?
וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב לִפְתָּח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ וְאַלְדִּי תִשׁוּקְתּוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ:	But if you do not improve, sin is lying at the entrance; for you it lusts, but you may rule over it. <sup>16</sup>

Sin is conveyed as an animal lying in wait to pounce or alternately as a person whose desire is to entice.<sup>17</sup> However, G-d counsels Kayin that he is capable of overcoming this adversary.

We see then that there are resonances between the Kayin story and the precepts in *Vayikra* 19. The hating of a brother and the desire for revenge are clear instances of

14 Additionally, these pairs form a chiasm, but, as this fact is not pertinent to the analysis at hand, it was worthy only of this brief footnote.

15 Other instances of this metaphorical “sin-burden” within the Bible: Psalms 38:5, Isaiah 1:4.

16 *Bereishit* 4:6–7.

17 Note the wording of וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ וְאַלְדִּי תִשׁוּקְתּוֹ resonates with a similar phraseology only a few verses prior (*Bereishit* 3:16) where G-d tells Hava וְהָיָה יְקַשְׁלֶכֶךָ וְאַתָּה תִּשְׁרָץ וְאֵל-אִשְׁךָ תִּשְׁוָקְתְּ. This similarity would support the contention that sin is being personified. (A further analysis of the similarity in wording is beyond the scope of this essay.) Whereas, although the wording is not similar, twice (*Bereishit* 1:28 and *Bereishit* 9:2) humankind is commanded to “rule over” the creatures of the Earth—supporting the assertion that the organism representing sin that is crouching is animal in nature and not human.

conjunction. However, could there be further points of intersection? I suggest that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the language in each location.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, I will outline how these correlations form a framework for understanding the story, and in doing so, clarify the questions raised with respect to the precepts in *Vayikra*.<sup>19</sup> In the following sections, I will interweave the two corresponding verses, citing in parentheses the texts from which they are drawn.

Identify The Problem

To begin, we note that G-d is engaging Kayin in conversation. As He did with Kayin’s father, Adam, after he sinned, G-d opens the conversation with a question in order to allow for a frank response.<sup>20</sup> It is necessary for the one who wishes to change to first acknowledge that there is a problem that must be addressed. With G-d’s question to Kayin, He seeks to guide Kayin in the recognition of the quagmire in which he now finds himself.

<i>Bereishit</i>		<i>Vayikra</i>
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-קַיִן לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ:	Identify	לֹא-תִשָּׂא אֶת-אַחֶיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ

It is evident that, through the framing of the question, G-d is signalling His knowledge that Kayin is egregiously upset.<sup>21</sup> It is clear that an omniscient Creator would have discerned this. As indicated in the corresponding verse in *Vayikra* (לֹא-תִשָּׂא אֶת-אַחֶיךָ (בְּלִבְבְּךָ)), Kayin’s heart was seething with hatred for his brother. Hence, there is a clear connection between what was said to Kayin by G-d and the dictum in *Vayikra* not to hate your brother in your heart.

Advice

As any good parent would, G-d now attempts to guide his precious child out of the morass. Two paths are outlined: one positive and one negative. G-d’s first directive to Kayin is: Improve yourself and your situation (הֲלוֹא אַם-תִּיטִיב).

<i>Bereishit</i>		<i>Vayikra</i>
הֲלוֹא אַם-תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת	Advice 1: Positive	הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת-עַמִּיתְךָ
וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב לִפְתָּח חַטָּאת רֵגֶךָ וְאֶלֶיךָ תִּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ	Advice 2: Negative	וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חַטָּא:

18 Except for one point, which will be explained.

19 For a complete chart of the corresponding texts, please see Appendix 1.

20 Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak on Bereishit 3:9. Note that although these commentators compare the query G-d made to Adam to the query G-d made to Kayin, “Where is Hevel, your brother?” (Bereishit 4:9), I believe the reasoning holds true even for this prior interaction with Kayin (Bereishit 4:6).

21 This is supported with the double terminology regarding his condition—Kayin is vexed AND his face has fallen.

To see how this might be accomplished, we can turn to the *Vayikra* text: Speak with your brother (הִכֹּחַ תִּכְּרַח אֶת-עֲמִיתְךָ). Find out why his offerings are being accepted, and then do the same. Let your brother know how you are feeling and he will surely attempt to resolve the issue. And if you do so, you will be able to carry (שָׂאת) this burden (of the first rejected offering) and you will be uplifted (שֻׂאת) to go forward with a positive outlook.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, if you do not seek (self-)improvement (וְאִם לֹא תִּטְיֵב), G-d continues, I am warning you that this “creature” will accompany you wherever you go (לִפְתָּח חֲטָאת) (רִבֵּץ)—just waiting to guide you into wrongdoing (וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשׁוּקָתוֹ). Sin (חֲטָאת/חֲטָא) will never be far away. And if you were to act upon your desires—you would ‘carry the (resultant) sin’ on account of your hatred towards your brother (וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא עָלֶיךָ חֲטָא).

It is significant that the terminology of “sin” (חֲטָא) occurs in both source texts, thus adding lexical support to the thematic confluence between them. Note too that there are two occurrences of the word שָׂאת in this pairing, again suggestive of the strong connotative link between these texts: one related to Kayin’s constructive action (*Bereishit*), resulting in a renewed positive energy going forward, and the other (*Vayikra*), in which he rejects the constructive path, and as a result, carries sin and negative energy into the future. Either way, Kayin will be carrying *something* forward. It is his choice as to what.

To conclude His advice, G-d sums up with a note of encouragement: I have faith in you, my son, that you are capable of doing the right thing, because I know you are able to rule over these impulses (וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ). It is important to note that, at this juncture, any wrongdoing that Kayin is contemplating exists merely within the realm of thought. Moreover, in His encouragement that Kayin can still emerge the victor over his desires, G-d believes that the possibility still remains that Kayin will do what is good and right.

Action

With the completion of this Heavenly guidance, Kayin is left to take action. Indeed, it would seem that he attempts the positive route; he does speak with his brother, but to no avail, eventually succumbing to his baser desires, and killing him.

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו	Kayin said to his brother Hevel—
וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:	While they were in the field, Kayin rose up against his brother Hevel and killed him. <sup>23</sup>

22 The commentators are divided on which understanding is the correct one for the term שָׂאת. Some (Radak, Rashbam on *Bereishit* 4:7) consider it to be a referent to Kayin’s offering/sin. Others (Ibn Ezra, Shadal) consider that it revises the previous state of Kayin’s face from having fallen (4:5) to now being lifted up. I contend that both explanations can be correct simultaneously. Additionally, due to the ambiguity of wording, I would submit that Hashem’s “face” will also be pleased with the resultant improved “Kayin 2.0,” as per the terminology within the priestly blessing: וְשָׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִשָּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

23 *Bereishit* 4:8.

It is unclear from the text how Kayin opened the conversation. Was it with a question? Did he seek reconciliation or was he overcome with animosity the moment he laid eyes upon his brother and consequently released a torrent of accusations?<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it seems that Hevel did not have a response. Or, his response is not recorded, because whatever it was, it did not placate the aggrieved Kayin.

Now overlaying our *Vayikra* text with the verses of the Kayin story, we see:

<i>Bereishit</i>		<i>Vayikra</i>
וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו	Advice 1: Positive	—
וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בֹּשֶׂדָה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:	Advice 2: Negative	לֹא-תָקָם

We observe that there is no corresponding verse from *Vayikra* in the chart with respect to Kayin speaking with his brother. For, despite G-d having modelled a positive approach to interacting with another, both by speaking directly with Kayin about his concerns vis-a-vis his state of mind and by advising him (implicitly) that similarly, he too should approach his brother seeking dialogue, it appears that Kayin could simply not manage to constructively interact with his brother. And therefore, the “null set” on the *Vayikra* side of the chart might indicate that, at least in this case, all actions in this regard were fruitless.

We can postulate then that there was a deterioration in the mindset of Kayin. At first, he was only contemplating internally the hatred he felt towards his brother. His disquiet then moved from the realm of thought to that of speech in order to try and resolve the matter. Yet, since this proved ineffective, we might surmise that he became even more agitated at this point and, in all likelihood, began planning his nefarious next step—that of action.

Kayin, unable to heed the positive advice given him, instead chose to follow the negative path. He did take revenge (תָּקָם). And how did he do so? He found an opportune moment, while in a field (וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בֹּשֶׂדָה), and seized upon it to kill his brother (וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ). It is interesting to note that this phraseology would be all that is necessary for the reader to understand that Kayin slew Hevel. However, the intervening wording of Kayin “rising up” against his brother (וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו) appears. Although the root of the word “to rise up” in the *Bereishit* text (קָם) and the root of the word for revenge in the *Vayikra* text (נָקַם) are not the same, in their timbre, they resonate with each other.<sup>25</sup> This could be another indication that these texts, when read in unison, are meant to elicit the greater elucidation of each.

In our basic framework of the *Vayikra* text, we designated the terminology of taking revenge as within the category of “action.” In the usage of the wording “Kayin arose” there

24 Ibn Ezra and Radak on *Bereishit* 4:8 explain that Kayin was so upset about this perceived chastisement from G-d, that *that* is what he told his brother and, in doing so, he became even more angry and resentful.

25 Rabbi S.R. Hirsch on *Bereishit* 4:15 (“נָקַם” קרוב לִ“קָם”).

is an emphasis on the exertion of effort—even prior to the realization of his nefarious deed. In the detailing of this “extra step,” the text might be highlighting that often, within the context of a desire for revenge that one has nursed for some time, there is not only the limited act at the moment the revenge is executed, but there are also the “planning” stages preceding this event. We can speculate that this excess verbiage might be alluding to this intermediary “action.” Additionally, just prior to noting that Kayin arose, the text supplies the location of this action—in the field (וַיְהִי בְּהִיטָם בְּשָׂדֶה). Had they been in the field *prior* to the “conversation,” then this terminology would have appeared in the text *before* it states that Kayin spoke to Hevel, and not afterwards.<sup>26</sup> Seemingly then, time has passed between the conversation and the murder. Time to plan and prepare for revenge.<sup>27</sup> Thus, further credence is given to the notion that this act of “rising up” by Kayin is not a simple (nor spontaneous) physical action resulting in murder, but is integrally tied to the longer process of preparing for revenge.

Concluding this section of text, an interesting anomaly can be noted. It is the odd wording of “Kayin rose to Hevel his brother.” (וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו).<sup>28</sup> This is an ungrammatical and rare formulation.<sup>29</sup> Hence, it catches the reader’s attention. I would like to suggest that it parallels wording just prior to it:

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו -
(וַיְהִי בְּהִיטָם בְּשָׂדֶה)
וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו - וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:

I contend that the identical construction in both these phrases intentionally emphasizes the brotherly bond between the siblings. In the initial and positive action by Kayin—his attempt to dialogue with Hevel and resolve the issue—the noting of the brotherhood was meant to outline the intention to restore that bond as it should be, and to implicitly praise Kayin for this attempt. By contrast, the noting of the bond in the second instance, just prior to the murder, is a harsh condemnation of Kayin’s actions, for *despite* his relationship of brotherhood, he nevertheless chooses the negative path, and murders his sibling.

Attempt At Resolution

With this culminating action, G-d once again intervenes to question Kayin.

26 Although the normative understanding of these events is that both the discussion and the murder happen contemporaneously, Radak on *Bereishbit* 4:8 supports the contention that there was a time lag between them.

27 Shadal on *Vayikra* 19:18 states that the meaning of “bearing a grudge” is actually “revenge” that occurs after time has passed. (See also Rabbi I.S. Reggio there.)

28 Radak and Shmuel David Luzzatto (שד"ל b. 1800, Italy) on *Bereishbit* 4:8 designate it as (what would be the more grammatically correct) “על” and explain that it is often used as a substitute formulation.

29 It occurs only one other time in the Bible, under similar circumstances of potential murder. In Shmuel 1 24:7, David exhorts his troops not to inflict mortal harm upon King Shaul, “וְלֹא תָהֶנּוּם לְקוֹם אֶל־שָׁאוּל.”

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-קַיִן אֵי הֵבֶל אָחִיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי:	Hashem said to Kayin, “Where is your brother Hevel?” He said, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”
וַיֹּאמֶר מָה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן-הָאֲדָמָה:	He said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.” <sup>30</sup>

In this interchange we observe G-d attempting to elicit a penitent response from Kayin, but to no avail.<sup>31</sup> Once again we are able to amalgamate the text from *Vayikra* with that of the story of the murder of Hevel in *Bereishit*.

<i>Bereishit</i>		<i>Vayikra</i>
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-קַיִן אֵי הֵבֶל אָחִיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי:	Attempt at Resolution 1	וְלֹא-תִטֵּר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמְךָ
וַיֹּאמֶר מָה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן-הָאֲדָמָה:	Attempt at Resolution 2	וְאֶהְבֵּתָ לְרַעְךָ כְּמוֹךָ – אָנִי ה'

G-d begins by querying Kayin on the whereabouts of his brother (אֵי הֵבֶל אָחִיךָ). Even after all this, G-d is asking: will you step up and take responsibility, Kayin? Or do you still bear him a grudge in that you will not acknowledge what you have done (וְלֹא-תִטֵּר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמְךָ)? Are you still “guarding” hatred of him in your heart? As previously noted, G-d is opening a door through a leading question in order to allow Kayin to acknowledge his sin and to repent, which would thus potentially lead to a (somewhat) positive outcome.

Kayin impudently responds that he is unaware of his brother’s location (לֹא יָדַעְתִּי) and further adds the seemingly flippant retort of, “Am I my brother’s keeper” (הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי)? Opposite these verses, in *Vayikra*, we note the injunction against carrying a grudge. Recall that in that instance it is the stinging words that constitute the sin. (I am not like you; I will lend my tool.) Here too, Kayin’s words are harsh and caustic. Accordingly, Kayin is not taking responsibility and indeed does still harbour the grudge he had been nursing against his brother—even after he had done away with him. In common parlance, “He just could not let it go.”

We can note how the two texts richly intertwine in terms of contextual content. But there is yet another resonance here within the words themselves. In Hebrew, the word for bearing a grudge (נִטַּר), has as a synonym, the word for guarding (שָׁמַר).<sup>32</sup> Hence forming yet another connection between the two sets of texts: whereas Kayin should have been “guarding” his brother, instead he was “guarding” a grudge.

30 *Bereishit* 4:9–10.  
31 For an alternate understanding of Kayin’s response, please see my article in the third volume of the *Hakhmei Lev* journal, entitled: *An Exemplary Murder*.  
32 Bechor Shor on *Vayikra* 19:18 (See also *Shir HaShirim* 1:6, 8:11–12) <https://translate.google.ca/?sl=iw&tl=en&text=%D7%A0%D7%98%D7%A8&op=translate>.



With our final pairing, the conversation continues. G-d's attempt to guide Kayin into the best possible outcome at this juncture—repentance—has failed. Therefore, G-d castigates Kayin for his actions: What have you done (מָה עָשִׂיתָ)?! No longer a query meant to elicit a response, instead, within this exclamation we hear G-d's supreme shock and disappointment. Do you not comprehend the gravity of your sin, Kayin?! The voice of your brother's blood is screaming to me from the ground (קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי) (מִן־הָאֲדָמָה). The text could have more succinctly stated that Hevel's blood is crying out from the ground; it did not have to mention "your brother's blood." We are reminded yet again that Hevel was Kayin's brother. In fact, the terminology of "brother" is repeated seven times within this narrative, thus having the status of a *leitwort*—a term of great significance.<sup>33</sup> Through its emphasis, the reader is drawn to take note of it and contemplate its profound meaning and ramifications. Moreover, compounding its prominence, the proper name of "Hevel" is dropped in the final chastisement of Kayin in verses 10 and 11, and G-d only refers to him as "your brother." In doing so, He thereby highlights the sin of killing not only another person, but a brother.

Considering another element of this verse we note that G-d laments that Hevel's blood is crying out "to me" (אֵלַי). We see the pathos in this small word, in that Hevel's blood was crying out to his Father in heaven. The same Father of his brother who slew him. The complementary *Vayikra* text is: "I am Hashem—'אֲנִי ה'." Most simply put, Ibn Ezra explains, "I the L-rd alone created all of you."<sup>34</sup> In other words, as your creator, Kayin, I created both you and your brother as equals. You had no right to do what you did. In sinning against your brother, you are also sinning against Me.

Expanding on this idea, Rav S.R. Hirsch couples the final two ideas of our passage and asserts that loving your fellow as yourself (וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ) has, as its sole basis, the idea that Hashem is above us and desires us to do so (אֲנִי ה'). G-d's creation of humankind in His image compels us to love our fellow. Moreover, in this understanding, the tension within the terminology of loving your fellow "as yourself" (כָּמוֹךָ) is ameliorated. There is no longer the question of how one can realistically love another as oneself, as that is a psychological impossibility. Rather, in this context one is to understand that the wording of "as yourself" is a referent to how you were created: רֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ. Your fellow is, like you, a creation of G-d. Therefore, in loving one's fellow, one is expressing a love for his Creator.<sup>35</sup> This should have been Kayin's mindset from the outset. Yet, instead, we see a devolution in his character and consequent actions which follow the trajectory of the verses in *Vayikra*, culminating in the killing of a brother.

33 Martin Buber, in his seminal work, *Darkho Shel Mikra*, (Jerusalem 5724), p. 284, describes a *leitwort* as: A word or linguistic root, which recurs within a text, a series of texts or a set of texts in an extremely meaningful manner, so that when one investigates these repetitions, the meaning of the texts is explained or becomes clear to the reader, or at least it is revealed to a much higher degree. For a full explanation of the convention, see an essay by Rav Dr. Yonatan Grossman: [https://torah.etzion.org.il/en/leitwort-part-i#\\_ftnrefl](https://torah.etzion.org.il/en/leitwort-part-i#_ftnrefl).

34 Ibn Ezra on *Vayikra* 19:18.

35 Rav S.R. Hirsch on *Vayikra* 19:18. (See also: Bechor Shor, Rabbi I. S. Reggio.)



## The Problem of Terminologies

We have noted that within the Kayin text in *Bereishit*, there is a constant reference to Hevel as Kayin's "brother." And, as suggested previously, the consistency creates a *leitwort*, emphasizing the grievous sin of fratricide. Surely, then, as we are attempting to create a confluence between the text in *Bereishit* and the text in *Vayikra*, it would have been more compelling had the latter also adopted the word "brother" for each of its injunctions. We must then return and consider why it chose instead to utilize a variety of terminologies.

Recounting the deterioration in Kayin's behaviour—from thought to speech, and ultimately to lethal action—it could be asserted that this downward spiral is mirrored in the terminologies used within the *Vayikra* text to relate to a "brother." Returning to the first chart of this treatise, we find that it begins with an admonition not to hate your "brother" in your heart.<sup>36</sup> It then proceeds to note that you should chastise the "people" (members of the nation).<sup>37</sup> Following this, we find that a person should not take revenge or bear a grudge against the "sons of your people."<sup>38</sup> Finally, this passage concludes with an exhortation to love your "fellow" as yourself.<sup>39</sup> As we might consider the *Vayikra* segment to be a "cautionary text" playing off the actual narrative of the Kayin story, we could postulate that the changing terminology in the first three instances in *Vayikra* reflects a deteriorating quality of relationship. We begin with a brother; there is, in theory, no closer relationship. But soon, if appropriate steps are not taken to maintain a proper relationship, you will come to view him as only a member of your nation—an important relationship, to be sure—but not as close as a brother. Furthermore, if effort is not expended in maintaining even this level of relationship, then, at the next stage, you will perceive that person as even more distant, no longer simply "your people" but a "son of your people"—yet another step removed.<sup>40</sup> It follows, then, that you would feel less and less responsible for the welfare of "the other" in succeeding more distant relationships, and hence, would be more willing to cause harm to that person. Relating these observations to the Kayin story, we might postulate that Kayin was feeling more and more remote from his "brother" as the situation unfolded, such that he was eventually able to disassociate himself almost entirely and commit the ultimate crime.

In the final analysis, the text concludes with a rectification towards the ideal (וְאָהַבְתָּ וְאָהַבְתָּ). At this point, G-d intervenes to notify us that He is the ultimate arbiter of relationships (אֱלֹהִים) and we are all fellows (רֵעִים)—equal in stature before Him, due to the circumstance of our creation by Him. Our relationships are actually not relative and fluid, but are steadfast and absolute from the perspective of our Creator. Hence the pairing of the terminologies of "Love your fellow" and, "I am Hashem."

36 *Vayikra* 19:17.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Vayikra* 19:18.

39 *Ibid.*

40 Note that this is clearer within the Hebrew nomenclature, as, for example, one's uncle is called a "dod" (דוד), whereas one's cousin—one step further removed with respect to familial closeness—is called a "ben dod" (בן דוד).

Lamentably, however, Kayin was not able to extricate himself from the downward spiral. Entangled in his ever-deteriorating relationship with his brother, and viewing it only from his own perspective, he committed the ultimate sin. Yet, had he been able to rise above and comprehend the true nature of his status as a “fellow” who is equal to his brother in the eyes of G-d, then a different outcome might have ensued; he might have been able to embody the ideal of “love your fellow as yourself.”

Epilogue

In examining these two texts, we overlaid, in a nearly parallel one-to-one manner, the story of Kayin’s killing of his brother in *Bereishit*, with a series of injunctions from the *parshah* of *Kedoshim* in the book of *Vayikra*. In our exploration of the themes of this essay, we noted that the passage in question in *Vayikra* was bookended rather neatly by the countervailing concepts of hate and love. But what if the first verse of, “Don’t hate your brother in your heart” was not truly the inaugural verse in this series? For, if we re-examine the text, we find that the injunction directly prior to it astonishingly states, “You shall not stand by the blood of your fellow—I am Hashem.”<sup>41</sup> Aligning these “new” bookends, we now find:

לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל־דַּם רֵעֶךָ – אֲנִי ה'
וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹד – אֲנִי ה'

Although the original “hate” and “love” pairing were thematic opposites, this new doublet, in addition to the thematic resonance, has the added lexical weight of having identical word correlations. Both verses contain the terminology of “your fellow” (רֵעֶךָ) and “I am Hashem” (אֲנִי ה'). Moreover, in my estimation, there could not be a more suitable nor more poignant heading to this affair of fratricide than “you shall not stand by the blood of your fellow.” Thus, if the prior confluences within the two texts were not enough to convince you of the intended relationship between these texts, I submit that this final revelation might secure that impression.

41 *Vayikra* 19:16.

Appendix 1

<i>Bereishit 4:6–10</i>		<i>Vayikra 19:17–18</i>
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־קַיִן לָמָּה חָרָה לְךָ וְלָמָּה נִפְּלוּ פָנֶיךָ:	Identify	לֹא־תִשָּׂא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בִּלְבָבְךָ
הֲלוֹא אִם־תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת	Advice 1: Positive	הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ
וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב לִפְתּוֹחַ חֹטְאֵת רֵבֶץ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל־בּוֹ	Advice 2: Negative	וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חָטָא:
וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו	Action 1: Positive	
וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בִּשְׂדֵה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:	Action 2: Negative	לֹא־תִקָּם
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־קַיִן אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי:	Attempt at Resolution 1	וְלֹא־תִטֵּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ
וַיֹּאמֶר מָה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן־הָאֲדָמָה:	Attempt at Resolution 2	וְאַהֲבַתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ – אָנִי ה'



# Torah Lishmah



# Imitation: The Sincerest Form of Flattery that is also a Mitzvah

Danny Berger

IN PARSHAS KI SAVO, Moshe Rabeinu presents various blessings that Hashem will bestow on *Am Yisrael* if they adhere to keeping the Torah and its mitzvos. In the middle of this passage of 14 verses, we are told:

יקימך ה' לו לעם קדוש כאשר נשבע-לך כי תשמר את-מצות ה' אלקיך והלכת בדרכיו:

Hashem will confirm you for Himself as a holy people, as He swore to you—if you observe the mitzvos of Hashem, your G-d, and you walk in His ways.<sup>1</sup>

Although this sounds like a simple statement, by referencing the words “and walk in His ways,” this *pasuk* represents the source for one of Torah’s 613 mitzvos as enumerated by the Rambam.<sup>2</sup> The *Sefer Hachinuch* lists it as number 611, describing it as “The obligation to emulate the good and just ways of Hashem.”<sup>3</sup> While it sounds like this mitzvah is a general adherence to everything contained in the Torah, clarification is required as to what specifically is entailed in order to fulfil its biblical obligation.

The Rambam highlights two other scriptural sources alluding to this notion of emulating G-d.<sup>4</sup> In Parshas Eikev we are told “ללכת בכל-דרכיו”—“to go in all His ways,” and in

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1 *Devarim* 28:9.

2 Rambam *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Positive Commandment 8.

3 *Sefer Hachinuch* (author is anonymous but his work was written some time after the Ramban). See mitzvah no. 611.

4 *Devarim* 11:22 and *Devarim* 13:5.

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Parshas Re'eh we are instructed “אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו”—“Hashem, your G-d, you shall follow.” On the former verse, Rashi teaches one should interact mercifully and kindly with others just like G-d does with mankind. On the latter verse, Rashi quotes the Talmud saying that we should perform acts of kindness such as burying the dead and visiting the sick, just as Hashem does.<sup>5</sup> However, Rashi only quotes two of the four acts of kindness listed in the Talmud, neglecting to mention providing clothing to those in need and to comfort mourners.

So, while the theme of this mitzvah number 611 is to emulate G-d in our own interpersonal relationships, it seems there is no precise method for fulfillment, as it remains somewhat vague and more general in nature. Furthermore, this is inferred directly when the *Sefer Hachinuch* explicitly states “וְיֵשׁ לָנוּ לְלִמּוּד וְלַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל דַּרְכֵינוּ בְּדַמְיוֹנוֹ”—“and that we should study and follow *all* His ways, in imitating Him.”

However, while perfecting one's character is a noble and worthwhile endeavour, the *Chinuch* appears to be somewhat dissatisfied with this approach since describing G-d's characteristics in human terms is too simplistic. This is evident by the following curious statement:

“וְקַבֵּל זֶה בְּנִי מִמֶּנִּי עַד שְׁמַעַךְ טוֹב מִמֶּנִּי”—“Accept this explanation from me, my son, until you hear a better one!” What emerges is that the precise definition of this mitzvah could possibly be open to something more general as long as it is within the framework of imitating G-d. Presumably, emulating Hashem in any one of His many “characteristics” is sufficient to fulfill this mitzvah.

Taking this cue, I would suggest an additional and perhaps more fundamental way to fulfill this mitzvah obligation. Let us consider the first “characteristic” we know of G-d, namely the act of creating the universe. So perhaps one can fulfill this mitzvah to emulate G-d through undertaking creative acts in all of life's endeavours. Support for this idea comes from Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who taught that G-d created man himself for this very purpose. In describing Adam 1 in his famous work, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, he states the following:

There is no doubt that the term image of G-d in the first account refers to a man's inner charismatic endowment as a creative being. Man's likeness to G-d expresses itself in man's striving and ability to become a creator. Adam, the first who was fashioned in the image of G-d, was blessed with great drive for creative activity and immeasurable resources for the realization of this goal...<sup>6</sup>

The simplest definition of “create” is “to make or bring into existence something new.”<sup>7</sup> It is an act whereby one brings something new into existence or causes something to happen as a result of one's actions.

5 Sorah 14a.

6 R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York, NY:Doubleday, 1992), 12.

7 [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/create](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/create).



There are many historical examples of how creativity has enhanced the world. Let us consider specifically how Jewish life, as we know it, was affected through unconventional thinking and creative initiatives by many great individuals in history. Additionally, while many highly creative acts are transformative, they are often met with major resistance at their origin which needs to be overcome. While all of the creative acts highlighted below changed Jewish life forever, they were faced with significant criticism from society and counterparts in each of their respective eras. Please consider the following examples of highly creative acts that transformed Jewish culture and our way of life in significant ways—and all of which required radically new and original thinking.

Consider the first century sage, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai, and his decision to negotiate with the Roman military commander Vespasian. This took place at the end of the second Bais Hamikdash while the nation was fighting for their lives against the Romans. He had the creative foresight to engage in dialogue and minimize the damage to our people in what he felt was an inevitable military defeat. His colleagues were opposed to him and thought his efforts were misguided and should have been better directed towards defeating the enemy. He was ultimately granted permission to relocate his school in Yavneh and to re-establish the Sanhedrin. In turn he introduced *takanos* to preserve the memory of the Bais Hamikdash and to deal with the numerous changes and halakhic questions at that extremely turbulent time in Jewish history.<sup>8</sup> While it was highly controversial to surrender to the enemy, R. Yochanan Ben Zakai may have single-handedly saved our nation from losing our connection to the Torah as we know it and possibly saving us from extinction.

Consider Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi who lived a century later and was faced with breaking a *masorah* going back to Har Sinai to benefit the nation. With the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and the beginning of the dispersion of Jews to exile, he creatively decided to commit the Oral Torah to a written text, thus preparing the Jewish nation for its future exile from the Land of Israel. The Torah was given to Moshe Rabeinu in two parts, both a written text and the accompanying oral explanations. While it was forbidden for the Oral Torah to be written for public use,<sup>9</sup> a paradigm shift was now required to address the new circumstances of the Jewish nation's dispersal and the ensuing decentralized leadership. R. Yehuda HaNasi was the chief redactor and editor of the Mishnah and his creative act was required to preserve our Oral Torah. Although highly controversial at the time, today one cannot visualize Judaism without our holy written texts of Mishnah and Talmud and the proliferation of written texts that ensued to become the defining aspect of our culture.

In relatively contemporary times, consider Sarah Schenirer's creativity in 1917 Poland and her vision to give young Jewish women access to formal Jewish education. This was unprecedented. Jewish women were deprived of formal Jewish study and expected to gain the necessary knowledge from within the home. This initiative was highly controversial in that it broke with tradition and she faced much "communal opposition and apathy."<sup>10</sup>

8 See Gittin 56a-b and *Introduction to the Talmud* (Rahway, NJ: ArtScroll Mesorah Publications, 2020), 333–338.

9 Gittin 60b: "דברים שבכתב אי אתה רשאי לאומרן על פה, דברים שבעל פה אי אתה רשאי לאומרן בכתב."

10 See two articles by Leslie Ginsparg Klein, "Sarah Schenirer and Innovative Change: The Myths and Facts" in *The*

Her creative act led to the Bais Yaakov movement and over 100 years later, it is difficult to consider Jewish education for women to be any other way.

Consider Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the Lubliner Rav in the year 1923, and his creative vision to start a daily learning program whereby a regular working-class Jew could complete the entire Talmud in under eight years. His proposal was met with great opposition from the yeshivas of Lithuania who felt “the study of one page per day would become perfunctory and not convey the depth of Talmudic knowledge.”<sup>11</sup> In hindsight, the proliferation and success of the Daf Yomi program has contributed to Jewish continuity and Torah study after the Holocaust while serving to unify Jews of many diverse backgrounds.

Consider the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, and his creative vision to have emissaries positioned around the world advocating and enhancing life for Jews regardless of their observance level or geographic location. These emissaries are often located in places with very little *Yiddishkeit* and without infrastructure for their own families requiring tremendous personal sacrifice. Many branches of orthodox Jewry do not see the value of Chabad’s initiatives and think it is incorrect to put emissaries in those positions. The Rebbe described this initiative as follows: “The soul of the mitzvah campaign is *Ahavat Yisrael*—love of the Jewish people. And the meaning of that love is that we are all one.”<sup>12</sup> Anyone who finds oneself in a faraway place often appreciates the sense of security knowing a Chabad House and Rabbi are around the corner.

There are so many additional examples to consider: Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook and his creative ability to synthesize prevalent orthodox thinking with the secular Zionist movement related to the advent of Medinat Yisrael. Rabbi Yoseph Ber Soloveitchik whose creative shift from both his family and many Lithuanian-born contemporaries led to combining Torah with secular wisdom and gave rise to the *Torah Umadda* philosophy. Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz and his creation of the ArtScroll Schottenstein Talmud which gave tens of thousands access to very difficult texts.

These were all acts of creativity, which is the first characteristic we know of G-d. All were instances of emulating G-d, which I suggest was an extraordinary fulfillment of mitzvah number 611 in our holy Torah. All of the above innovations were somewhat controversial and met with resistance but all prevailed to change and enhance the practice of Judaism.

Incidentally, when G-d set out to create man, He Himself experienced resistance. The Talmud relates how G-d consulted ministering angels prior to creating man. After being told by two separate groups of angels not to proceed, the third group responded that since He did not listen to the first two groups there was no point in opposing G-d, and they concluded, “the universe is Yours so do with it as You wish.”<sup>13</sup> Ironically, what emerged

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Lehrhaus 2017; <https://thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/sarah-schenirer-and-innovative-change-the-myths-and-facts> and “A Traditional Revolutionary: Sarah Schenirer’s Legacy Revisited” in Jewish Action Magazine 2016; <https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/people/traditional-revolutionary-sarah-schenirers-legacy-revisited>.

11 [www.jewishhistory.org/daf-yomi](http://www.jewishhistory.org/daf-yomi).

12 Article by Tzvi Freeman, “The Myth of Chabad Outreach” Chabad.org; [www.chabad.org/therebbe/article\\_cdo/aid/260455/jewish/The-Myth-of-Chabad-Outreach.htm](http://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/260455/jewish/The-Myth-of-Chabad-Outreach.htm).

13 Sanhedrin 38b.

is when humans are imitating G-d by being creative, they often meet resistance in the exact same way that G-d Himself did when creating man. Thus, the endeavour itself of being creative is an act of imitation on its own.

As illustrated in the numerous examples above, man's creativity has impacted Jewish cultural and communal life in a major way. However, being creative can be relevant to everyone in their personal day-to-day life as well. Imitating G-d ranges from something as simple as coming up with new methods to engage the family in parshah discussions around the Shabbos table, to starting a new shiur or pioneering a local chesed project. Perhaps any creative act or initiative with the proper intention to better one's life and greater society, would be a fulfillment of mitzvah number 611 in emulating the ways of Hashem.

May G-d grant us the ability to tap into our creative abilities to not only fulfill the mitzvah, but to benefit our individual families, our local communities and *Am Yisrael* at large in the way that so many of our greats have accomplished in the past.

# | Sodom and Givah

Asher Breatross

AT THE END of *Sefer Shoftim* we are told about two tragic incidents that occurred because the Jewish people did not have a king to rule over them. These incidents occurred sometime after the death of Yehoshua, at the beginning of the era of the Judges. The Jewish people had not totally eliminated the *Canaanim* from their midst, and there were sizeable pockets of *Canaanim* who continued with their idolatrous practices and who served as an evil influence on the Jewish people. This was unfortunate, for the Jewish people had the strength at that time to totally eliminate the *Canaanim*; because they did not do so it caused them to go downhill in their religious observance. As will be seen shortly, the Jewish people's association with the *Canaanim* resulted in one of the tragic events mentioned in this part of *Sefer Shoftim*.

The first incident, which can be found in chapters 17 and 18, involved the idol of Micha. Micha was an individual whose mother had 1,100 pieces of silver stolen from her. Micha confessed to having taken the money, and when his mother articulated a curse in regard to the theft, Micha promptly returned the money to her. His mother then blessed her son to Hashem and informed him that she was consecrating 200 of the silver pieces to Hashem, making a carved image and a molten image. Micha built a house of idolatry where the images were kept. He then found a Levi and appointed him to be his *Kohen*.

A group of five men from the tribe of Dan stopped off at Micha's temple and stayed overnight. (The temple also served as a hotel.) They were on their way to look for additional land for their tribe, and they knew the Levi that was in charge of the temple. They asked the Levi to inquire of Hashem as to whether their mission would be successful. The

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Levi told them that they would be successful, and indeed they found suitable land. As well, the people who lived on the land were not warlike and were isolated and seemingly easy to conquer. The spies returned to the rest of their tribe and reported back to them. An army of 600 men was organized to march north, along with the five spies, to conquer the land. On the way, the soldiers and the spies stopped at Micha's temple, where they appropriated for themselves the contents of the temple and the Levi. Micha and his neighbours followed and caught up with the Dan army; they were told not to make an issue of the theft or there would be serious consequences.

From this story alone we can see, apart from the blatant robbery by the people from Dan, that their *hashkafot* were corrupted since they thought that they were properly serving Hashem through the vehicle of *avodah zarah* (idol worship).<sup>1</sup>

A further illustration of the corruption that existed at that time is learned from the identity of the Levi. His name was Jonathan, son of Gershom, son of Menashe. He was none other than Moshe Rabbeinu's grandson. His identity was hidden and the name Menashe was used because he adopted the conduct of a future king of Yehudah named Menashe who was a notorious idolator.<sup>2</sup>

Rav Yitzchak Levi<sup>3</sup> quotes the Talmud Bavli in *Bava Batra* (110a) that the men from Dan asked the Levi, "Are you not descended from Moshe? What are you doing serving as a priest for *avodah zarah*?" The Levi answered that he received this teaching, by tradition, from the house of his grandfather, that a man should hire himself out to perform service for idols rather than subsist on the charitable donations of other men. The Levi interpreted this to mean that as long as one did not believe that the idol was actually G-d, one was permitted to earn a living by acting as its priest. The Levi would caution supplicants, telling them that the idol was powerless to help them. He would then accept goods from the people for his own consumption and promise them that he would petition G-d on their behalf.

The Levi interpreted the teaching literally; he understood it as justifying involvement in the actual service of idols. But this was not what Moshe meant when he taught this principle. Rather, when Moshe advocated working for *avodah zarah* he did not mean idol

1 According to the Rambam, this is how *avodah zarah* started. The Rambam explains in Chapter One, *Halakhab Alef* of the *Laus of Avodat Kokhavim* that in the days of Enosh, the grandson of Adam HaRishon, mankind made a gross error in judgment. They reasoned that since Hashem created the stars to lead the world and since He put them in the heavens and honoured them, it was appropriate to praise them, exalt them and show them honour. They also concluded that they were obligated to show honour and respect to those whom Hashem showed honour and respect to, just as a king desires that respect should be shown to the officers who stand before him. Thus, honour is shown to the king. When this idea arose in the minds of the people, they began to erect temples to the stars, offered up sacrifices to them, praised and glorified them in speech and prostrated themselves before them—their purpose according to their perverse actions being to obtain the Creator's favour. In *Halakhab Bait*, the Rambam explains that in the course of time, there arose among them false prophets who told them to worship all kinds of objects. As time passed, Hashem was generally forgotten by mankind and people only worshipped the objects.

2 See HaRav Avrohom Shoshana in his commentary on *Sefer Shoftim*, entitled *Derekh Bina*, Makhon Ofek, Cleveland-Yerushalayim, 1988, page 264.

3 See his *Parshiyot* on the *Books of the Neviim*—*Sefer Shoftim*, Feldheim, Yerushalayim, 1991, page 297.

worship; he meant work that was unfamiliar (“*zarah*”) to the person, namely menial or undignified labour.

The second incident and its consequences, which is covered in chapters 19, 20 and 21, is the story of the *Pilegesh B’Givah* (the concubine in Givah). This story, a sad and tragic episode in the history of the Jewish people, can be summarized as follows. A Levi lived with his concubine in the foothills of Har Ephraim. The concubine ran away from the Levi (ostensibly after being mistreated by him), back to her father’s house in Beit Lekhem in Yehudah. After four months of separation, the Levi went to the concubine’s father’s home in Yehudah to reconcile with her and to bring her back home. On their way back home, they had to spend the night in Givah, which was a city in the tribe of Binyamin. (One ironic point is that they could have stayed in the city of Yebus, which was Yerushalayim, but the Levi preferred to stay in Givah, which was inhabited by Jews, because he felt safer there among his own kind. Apparently, though, the evil traits of the *Canaanim* of Yebus rubbed off on the neighbouring Jewish city of Givah.) An elderly man offered the travelers a place to stay. A gang of ruffians however came to the house and demanded that the Levi be surrendered to them for the same reason that the Sodomites wanted Lot’s guests. Just as Lot offered the mob his two daughters in place of the guests, the old man offered his own daughter and the concubine in place of his guest. The mob did not accept the offer, but the Levi in any case pushed his concubine out to them. As an aside, the Levi’s conduct gives us an insight into why this woman ran away in the first place. The Levi was an inflexible individual who ruled his household with an iron hand, which, as we have already suggested, is what caused her to run away in the first place.<sup>4</sup> In fact, because of his poor behaviour toward his concubine, he is blamed for the unfortunate events that transpired, for if he had not been so mean she would not have run away from him and set in motion this tragic episode.

During the entire course of the night, the concubine was abused by the men of Givah. In the morning, she was released and returned to the old man’s house where she died at the door. (The Levi displayed a very callous attitude when he discovered his dead concubine at the door.)

The Levi publicized what happened (leaving out his full role in the incident) and the other tribes converged together and demanded that Binyamin surrender the perpetrators. When they refused, the rest of the tribes mustered an army and attacked Binyamin. In the end, almost the entire tribe of Binyamin was wiped out (only 600 men remained alive).

The Ramban<sup>5</sup> asks the question: why was Sodom totally destroyed by Hashem while Givah was spared that fate, despite the similarities between the two incidents? (I should add that Givah did not get off scot free for they were wiped out also during the civil war

4 HaRav Avrohom Shoshana, in his commentary on *Sefer Shoftim*, entitled *Derekh Bina*, Makhon Ofek, Cleveland-Yerushalayim, 1988, says, on page 271, that they had gotten into an argument and he had struck her. Consequently, she left him because she felt demeaned by him. *Derekh Bina* also quotes the Talmud Bavli in Gittin that one should not impose extra fear in one’s household; the husband of the concubine was guilty of this, and it resulted in the deaths of many Jews. See also Levi, *Parshiyot in the Books of the Neviim—Sefer Shoftim*, pages 311–312.

5 *Perek 19, Pasuk 8 in Parshat Vayeira.*

that occurred between Binyamin and the rest of the Jewish people. However, the Ramban wants to understand why Givah was not destroyed in the same manner as Sodom.)

The opinion of the Ramban is that even though the events in Givah resembled the ones in Sodom, they were not as bad. It was not the intention of the wicked people of Givah to eradicate the passage of wayfarers or poor people from their place, as it was in Sodom. Rather, they were steeped in promiscuity and immorality to the extent that they wanted to have relations with the Levi. When the concubine was offered to them, they were appeased. The rationale for giving them the concubine, they believed, was that she was not a married woman and that she had been unfaithful to the Levi. The unfortunate violation of the concubine was a most deplorable sin but it was not, apparently, as bad as the homosexual violation of the Levi would have been. The Ramban's point is that if the concubine had been a legally married woman, the incident of Givah would have been considered adultery, a capital sin, and it would have thus been much worse than what Lot tried to do by giving over his unmarried daughters to the mob. Since the concubine was not technically married, their sin was limited to cruelty and perversion.

Also, unlike the events in Sodom, where the entire populace was involved, in Givah only a small group were involved. The rest of the inhabitants of the city were actually afraid of them. The other tribes reacted as they did because they did not want this conduct to spread throughout the entire nation.

The other tribes wanted to execute the perpetrators. They demanded that the perpetrators be delivered to them to be dealt with accordingly. The perpetrators were not liable for the death penalty, for they did not intend to cause the concubine's death. Indeed, the concubine did not die directly at their hands. Rather she returned to the home where she was staying, and died there, presumably weakened from all the abuse she had been subjected to and overcome by the cold as she waited at the door of the house for someone to let her in. However, because the people from Givah acted on a scale similar to the people of Sodom, the other tribes saw fit to make a fence for the Torah in order to eliminate this kind of conduct.

The tribe of Binyamin refused to hand over the perpetrators because they were not liable for the death penalty. They were also upset because the other tribes did not consult with them first to resolve this matter but instead agreed to attack Binyamin if they did not comply.

The tribes were punished by sustaining losses in the war because it was not undertaken in a legal manner. As for making a fence to reinforce morality it was the responsibility of Binyamin to do so; the *teshuvah* should have originated with them.

Part of the reason for the massive losses that the tribes sustained in this war, and the reason I initially mentioned the story with Micha, was that Hashem was upset that for His honour the Jewish people did nothing but for the honour of a human being they acted. In other words, they tolerated Micha's statue which was *avodah zarah* and which was an offence to Hashem's honour deserving of the death penalty. Yet, in the case of Givah, they acted, and they were even ready to go beyond the letter of the law.



The Abarbanel<sup>6</sup> says that the people of Givah deserved to be killed for a variety of reasons. They wanted to have homosexual relations with the Levi. They sexually abused the concubine and even though she may have been technically unmarried, their conduct was inexcusable. The people from Givah wanted to act like the Sodomites and for that reason alone they deserved to be executed so that their behaviour would not inspire others. Seemingly, though, what transpired with the concubine was an isolated incident. The reason Givah did not suffer the same fate as Sodom was because the people in Sodom had been carrying on their inhospitable conduct for years and had by then accumulated serious sins. However, in Givah, this was the first time that this type of incident happened.

The Abarbanel is very critical of the Ramban's analysis.<sup>7</sup> He feels that the Ramban, in dealing with Sodom and Givah, overemphasizes the sins of Sodom and downplays the sins of Givah in order to explain why Givah did not suffer the same fate as Sodom. This was not the case. The people of Givah were just as bad as the people of Sodom. Their city was not destroyed in the same manner because this kind of conduct had not occurred before; it was, as we have already mentioned, an isolated incident.

HaRav Yitzchak Arama, a Spanish Rabbi who lived from 1420 to 1494, in his commentary *Akeidat Yitzchak*<sup>8</sup> says that the difference between Sodom and Givah was that it was the law in Sodom that outsiders were to be abused. In Givah the perpetrators did not act pursuant to the law. Their acts were decidedly immoral, but technically not illegal.

In summary, the Ramban feels that the people of Sodom were worse than the people of Givah. The Abarbanel and HaRav Arama are of the opinion that the two were equally bad. Like the Sodomites, the people of Givah discouraged visitors from coming to their town, and they abused those who did come so that no one would dare to be hosted by them. Thus, for example, when the Levi and his concubine arrived in Givah, no one offered them shelter. The Abarbanel feels that the other tribes acted appropriately<sup>9</sup> because the conduct of the people from Givah was a national concern and not merely a tribal matter. It was important for the entire nation to have enforceable moral standards as put forth by the Torah.

All agree that the events of Micha and the concubine were national tragedies and disasters that will hopefully never re-occur.

*This Dvar Torah is in memory of my Bobie Leah Bas R' Meir Dov HaKobein,  
whose Yartzheit falls on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of Kislev.*

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<sup>6</sup> Abarbanel on *Shoftim*, 20:7.

<sup>7</sup> The Abarbanel on *Perek 20* mentions five distinctions ("*Behinot*") as to why the people of Givah deserved to receive capital punishment. In the fifth distinction he expresses his criticism of the Ramban.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Rabbi Yehuda Nachshoni, *Hagut in Parshiyot of the Torah*, Sifriati, Bnei Brak, 1989, page 62.

<sup>9</sup> See the fifth *Behinah* of the Abarbanel in footnote 7.



# | Vezot HaBrakha: Moshe's Tears

Rabbi Avraham Aryaih and Laya Witty

## The Last Chapter

THE FINAL PARASHA of the Torah tells us of the death of Moshe. In 34:2 of *Devarim*, we are told that Moshe ascended Mount Nevo, and G-d showed him all of Israel, from north to the south. According to the Midrash, he was shown all of Jewish history, all of its highs and lows, until the end of time.<sup>1</sup> In 34:5 it says, “And there Moshe, servant of G-d, died, in the land of Moav, according to the word of G-d.” However, the Torah continues with seven more verses, which describe the mourning for Moshe and the transition to the leadership of Yehoshua. Until this point, the Torah has been written down by Moshe, as we will see described below. Our question is therefore: Who wrote this section, which describes events *after* Moshe’s death?

This last perek and especially the last 8 verses are a source of some controversy in the Talmud. These discussions are found in *Bava Batra* (15a) and *Menahot* (30b), as we will see below. In *Perek* 31, we are told of Moshe completing the writing of the Sefer Torah and giving it to the *Kohanim* and the *Levi'im* and commanding that it be put in the Ark of the Covenant (*Devarim* 31:24 to 26).

*Pasuk* 24, And it came to pass, when Moses had made an *end of writing the words of this law* in a book, until they were finished; *Pasuk* 25, that Moses commanded the Levites, that bore the ark of the covenant of the L-rd, saying: *Pasuk* 26, ‘Take this book of the

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1 See Rashi *Devarim* 34:2.

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law, and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the L-rd your G-d, that it may be there for a witness against thee.<sup>2</sup>

Did the Torah scroll that Moshe gave to the *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* at that point include these verses describing the death of Moshe? How could it address Moshe's death in the past tense before it had occurred? If these verses are not yet included, then we have a "complete" Torah scroll which is *missing* text. How could Moshe's Torah scroll have been missing even a single letter?

## Bava Batra 15a

This controversy is discussed in the *Gemara* in two places, in *Menabot* (30b) and in *Bava Batra* (15a). The passage in *Bava Batra* is as follows:

The *Gemara* previously told us in the *baraita*: Mar said: Joshua wrote his own book and the last eight verses of the Torah. The *Gemara* comments: This *baraita* is taught in accordance with the one who says that it was Joshua who wrote the last eight verses in the Torah. This point is subject to a tannaitic dispute, as it is taught in another *baraita*: "And Moses the servant of the L-rd died there" (Deuteronomy 34:5); is it possible that after Moses died, he himself wrote "And Moses died there"? Rather, Moses wrote the entire Torah until this point, and Joshua wrote from this point forward; this is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda.

The *Gemara* then presents the opposing opinion:

Rabbi Shimon said to him: Is it possible that the Torah scroll was missing a single letter? But it is written: "Take this Torah scroll" (Deuteronomy 31:26), indicating that the Torah *was* complete as is and that nothing further would be added to it. Rather, until this point the Holy One, Blessed be He, dictated and Moses repeated after Him and wrote the text. From this point forward, with respect to Moses' death, the Holy One, Blessed be He, dictated and Moses wrote with tears. The fact that the Torah was written by way of dictation can be seen later, as it is stated concerning the writing of the Prophets: "And Baruch said to them: He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink in the scroll" (Jeremiah 36:18).

The *Gemara* asks: In accordance with whose opinion is that which Rabbi Yehoshua bar Abba says that Rav Giddel says that Rav says: When the Torah is read publicly in the synagogue, one person reads the last eight verses in the Torah, and that section may not be divided between two readers? Shall we say that this is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, and not in

accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Shimon, as according to Rabbi Shimon these verses are an integral part of the Torah, written by Moses just like the rest?

The Gemara answers: Even if you say that this was said in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Shimon, since they differ from the rest of the Torah in one way, as Moses wrote them with tears, they differ from the rest of the Torah in this way as well, i.e., they may not be divided between two readers.<sup>3</sup>

## Written in Tears?

With regard to the idea that Moshe wrote the last eight *pesukim* in tears, Rashi comments in *Menahot* (30a), that G-d dictated these verses, and Moshe wrote them, but that he did not repeat them because of his great sorrow. Rashi therefore supports the opinion that the Torah as given to the *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* was complete, just that there was something distinguishable about these last eight verses. Specifically, due to Moshe's great sorrow, he did not repeat the words as usual and that he was crying as he wrote them.

The Maharsha<sup>4</sup> comments that these verses were written by Moshe using his tears as a writing medium rather than using ink. The idea that a Sefer Torah could be written but not be completely true is anathema. This interpretation has Moshe writing these verses in a non-permanent writing medium, thus not truly “writing” the verses that have yet to become completely true.

The Vilna Gaon offers an explanation that includes the opinions of Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yehuda.<sup>5</sup> He says that the entire Torah was written before the world was created. Therefore, all of the narrative parts of the Torah had not yet occurred. However, the Torah in its primordial state was made up entirely of G-d's names, and was therefore at that time indecipherable to human beings. Only as the Torah was revealed to humanity, was it rendered into the words, phrases and verses as we know them. Therefore, these eight verses were given by G-d to Moshe, and were written down, but in their primordial form. They only became comprehensible to human beings in the hands of Yehoshua after the passing of Moshe. Yehoshua, as it were, decodes them for us.

## Why was Moshe Crying?

Rav Soloveitchik, zt”l in *Nefesh Harav*<sup>6</sup> gives a further explanation to Rashi's teaching, above. He says that Moshe was indeed crying with overwhelming sadness in writing these *pesukim* down as G-d dictated them to him. However, it was not with the sadness of contemplating his own mortality. It was the knowledge that he would not be given the opportunity to bring these verses to their full *kedushah* as he was able to do with the

3 Translation based on ArtScroll.

4 Bava Batra 15a.

5 Quoted in the *Kol Eliyahu*, a compilation of the Vilna Gaon's work produced by his students as quoted by Rabbi Shalom Rosner. See [www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/728460/rabbi-shalom-rosner/last-8-pesukim-of-torah](http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/728460/rabbi-shalom-rosner/last-8-pesukim-of-torah).

6 Rabbi Hershel Schachter, *Nefesh Harav*, page 321–322, at very end of the book in the section on *Parshat V'Zot HaBrakha*.

rest of the Torah. He would not be transmitting this part of the Torah, as it would only be read after his death.

Rav Rosner<sup>7</sup> mentions another explanation also attributed to Rav Soloveitchik, zt”l. He explains that Moshe was aware that he would not ever teach these verses, as they would not be comprehensible to the Jewish people until after he had left them permanently. Moshe, as the great *teacher* of Torah, as Moshe Rabbeinu learns that there is a portion of the Torah which he will never teach. It was the sadness of knowing that there was Torah which he would not be privileged to teach that had him writing in tears.

## An Individual Reads Them

This brings us back to the *baraita* in *Bava Batra* that we discussed above, as it distinguishes these *pesukim* from all of the other verses in the Torah. The *baraita* states that “An individual reads them.” There are several ways of understanding this statement. According to Rashi (as above), this means that the honour of reading these eight verses should be given to one person, and they should be read as one Aliyah, with no interruptions.

According to Tosafot (Ibid.), these should be read by the *oleh*, there should not be a *baal koreh* for this *aliya*. The Rashash (*Megilla* 21b) commenting on Tosafot in *Bava Batra*, refers to the Simhat Torah custom of reading and re-reading the first *perek* of *V’zot Habrakha* until every eligible person has had an *aliyah*. He says that this Aliyah should be read only once. The Mordekhai (commenting on the Rambam below) says that the meaning of “An individual reads them” is that this *aliya* should be given to an important individual, such as the Rav of the congregation. This may be the origin of the custom of Hatan Torah. The Hakham Tzvi notes that we give this Aliyah to a person of importance in order to emphasize that this section is of equal stature to the rest of the Torah, regardless of the discussion about its authorship.

The Rambam<sup>8</sup> takes this statement in a very different direction. He maintains that an individual is permitted to read them, meaning the presence of a minyan is not required. The reason we require a minyan for public reading of the Torah is that every public reading of the Torah is an echo of a reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. Every time Moshe taught the Jewish people a new mitzvah, or any new aspect of the Torah, it was a continuation of the revelation at Har Sinai. Since the eight *pesukim* under discussion did not attain their full meaning and significance until after the death of Moshe, they do not have the same requirement of returning to the “moment of Har Sinai.”

The Kli Hemda offers another perspective, in that these last eight verses are transmitted to us directly from G-d, without Moshe teaching them, therefore they have an enhanced level of holiness. This exceptionally elevated status means that they do not require a minyan in order to be read aloud.

7 In the *shiur* cited above.

8 *Hilkhbot Tefillah* 13:6.

## This is the End?

Moshe dies. Moshe does not ascend to G-d, as did Hanokh (*Beresbit* 5:24) and Eliyahu (*Melakhim Bet* 2:11). He does not die a “heroic death,” in a blaze of glory, as did Shimshon (*Shoftim* 16:30). His death is an intimate moment with G-d, unwitnessed by any other human being. Moshe’s leadership was never about himself, it was always about caring for, educating, admonishing and advocating for the people. When G-d decides that the time has come for Moshe to die, G-d fills Yehoshua with the “spirit of wisdom.” Moshe dies as he has lived, by the word of G-d. His burial is a Divine act of lovingkindness, “just as the Torah opens with *hesed*, it closes with *hesed*” (*Sotah* 14a). The Jewish people mourn Moshe for thirty days, and then move forward under the leadership of Yehoshua. Perhaps the reason why this Aliyah is read by a Rav, or by the leader of the community, is because it shows the unbroken chain of transmission of the Torah from Moshe to today.

In the course of these final eight *pesukim*, we learn the essence of leadership of the Jewish Nation. Moshe’s role is that of the leader and teacher who transmits the Torah to the Jewish people. As the mantle of leadership passes to Yehoshua, the nation obeys Yehoshua according to G-d’s command. Perhaps a reason that we do not allow any interruptions in this passage is to show the seamless transfer of the responsibility for teaching Torah to the Jewish nation. This aspect of leadership of the Jewish nation passes from Moshe to Yehoshua. Yes, Moshe dies, but the Torah of Moshe lives on forever.



**Contemporary**





# A Definition of “Modern Orthodox”

Cemach Green

SINCE THE 1950s, if not earlier, the term “Modern Orthodox” has been bandied about the Orthodox community. The term “Modern Orthodox” has meant different things to different people. Although some have argued against using labels to describe a specific stream of Orthodoxy, nevertheless there remains a significant group within Orthodoxy who identify as Modern Orthodox, and as such, a discussion as to the meaning of Modern Orthodox may prove worthwhile. The goal of this article is not to advocate one particular stream of Orthodoxy over another, but is rather an attempt to offer a possible definition of Modern Orthodoxy.

I came across one definition of Modern Orthodox buried in a footnote in Dr. David Berger’s book, *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*, where Berger lists a set of six elements that in his view, define Modern Orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> Some may argue there are more than six, and some may argue that six are too many, but for the purposes of this article we will adhere to the six elements raised by Berger. Below is the footnote in full:

Discourse about Orthodoxy is bedeviled by a difficult problem of terminology. There is clearly a rough division between ‘Modern Orthodoxy’ and the streams to its religious right centering to a greater or lesser degree on *the intrinsic value of higher secular education, the religious status of the State of Israel, the role of women, attitudes towards non-Jews and non-Orthodox Jews, the absolute authority of leading rabbis in matters of public policy,*<sup>2</sup> and involvement in the

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1 Berger was Dean at the Bernard Revel Graduate School for Jewish Studies of Yeshiva University from 1986–2020.

2 Otherwise known as “*Daas Torah*.”

*surrounding culture* (emphasis added).<sup>3</sup> Efforts to capture the Orthodoxy or orthodoxies of the right in a single term—ultra-Orthodox, rigorously Orthodox, fervently Orthodox—invariably offend one group or another. My solution is ‘Traditionalist Orthodox’ which bears no invidious implications but reflects a degree of resistance to change that is a key, though by no means infallible, marker of these differences.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, I will cite passages expressing the view of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (hereinafter referred to as “The Rav”<sup>5</sup>) relating to each of these six topics. The Rav, who has been characterized as the “*posek par excellence*”<sup>6</sup> of Modern Orthodoxy,<sup>7</sup> is generally accepted as the “authority figure”<sup>8</sup> of Modern Orthodoxy. The examples provided below will be both direct quotes from the Rav, and quotes from his *talmidim* (students)<sup>8</sup> as to what they felt was the Rav’s view in each of the six categories. I have annotated the quotes in the footnotes.

3 Essentially Berger is solely focusing on defining the “Modern” in “Modern Orthodox,” as the “Orthodox” part would presumably be shared by all streams of Orthodox Judaism; including but not limited to, a strict adherence to the *Shulban Arukh* and an unwavering belief in the divine origin of the Torah.

4 See Berger, David. *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference: With a New Introduction*. (Liverpool University Press, 2008), 7.

5 See Wurzbarger, Rabbi Walter S. “Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik as Posek of Post-Modern Orthodoxy.” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 29, no. 1 (1994): 5. “In the circles of what is labelled “Modern Orthodoxy” or “Centrist Orthodoxy,” Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik z.t.l is referred to as “the Rav.” This appellation is not merely a sign of respect and reverence accorded a charismatic luminary, the mentor of generations of academics and communal leaders, but it also attests to his role as the authority figure of those segments of the Orthodox community which see no conflict between commitment to Torah and full participation in scientific and cultural activities of modern society. To the popular mind, unfortunately “Modern Orthodoxy” represents a movement which is characterized by a willingness to make all sorts of concessions to modernity at the expense of genuine religious commitment. It is perceived as a “moderate” brand of halakhic Judaism which lacks the fervor and passion associated with the Haredi community. Its opponents ridicule it as a compromise designed to facilitate entry into a modern lifestyle by offering less stringent interpretations of halakha and even condoning laxity in religious observance.”

See also Liebman, Charles S., “Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life,” *The American Jewish Year Book* (1965): 53. “One can almost distinguish a Jew’s religious position by the manner in which he refers to Soloveitchik. The non-Orthodox are likely to call him Rabbi Soloveitchik; the RCA modern Orthodox call him the Rav; his own students, Rebbe; and the right wing, J.B., for the first two initials of his name.” See also Sokel, ‘Exploring the Thought of Soloveitchik’, 139. “And to top it all off, who could simultaneously serve as a world class *rosh yeshiva* and *posek* on the one hand, and a legitimizier of such desirable values as Zionism and secular studies on the other. In a very special sense R. Soloveitchik was the perfect authority figure and role model for the Modern Orthodox of his generation. (emphasis added).”

6 R. Wurzbarger, “Soloveitchik,” 7.

7 Ibid.

8 See Bierman, Michael, *Memories of a Giant* (Urim Publications, 2005), 40, where he writes regarding eulogies for the Rav by his *talmidim*: “I would prefer to see it as individuals confronted by his multi-faceted strengths, coming away with different perceptions of the very complex personality that constituted the Rav.” The point being, that recollections, perceptions, and descriptions of the Rav’s philosophy may differ amongst his *talmidim*. See also Blau, Rabbi Yosef. “The Rav, Feminism and Public Policy,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 33, no. 2 (1999): 90–92. where he takes issue with Rabbi Moshe Meiselman’s perspective on the Rav’s approach to the State of Israel and feminism. Although both R. Blau and R. Meiselman are *talmidim* of the Rav, they have significantly different perspectives how the Rav viewed these two issues.

## The Intrinsic Value of Higher Secular Education

Our goal<sup>9</sup> [at Yeshiva University] is to educate a generation of Torah scholars with secular knowledge.<sup>10</sup> (The Rav)

The greatness of the Yeshiva is that it is a real Yeshiva and on the second level is a proper academic institution. Both divisions function without synthesis<sup>11</sup> and compromise. In my class they study Talmudic topics, then they go upstairs to their college classes, where they study theories in mathematics and physics. I am proud when my student is both a Torah scholar and a good college student. If there were a synthesis, both achievements would be weakened. (The Rav)

My training was basically not in the philosophy of religion but in the philosophy of science,<sup>12</sup> Kantian, and neo-Kantian philosophy. So, perhaps, I have a strange approach to the philosophy of religion .... However, since I've been, so to say, cast in, or thrust in to a certain environment where the philosophy of religion was considered important, I try to interpret ... Jewish religious concepts in philosophical terms. All I'll say to you is just my own subjective thoughts and feelings about Judaism. I have tried to interpret Judaism in modern terms. (The Rav)

Incorporating secular studies into a yeshiva curriculum has been a source of contention for centuries. In many circles, the study of sciences and philosophy are frowned upon. They may adversely affect the student's *emunah* and/or may distract the student from his Torah studies. They are a *bittul zman*, possessing no intrinsic value. The rationale for permitting a limited number of secular subjects is that they are either required by government regulations or for

9 The Rav's characterization of acquiring secular knowledge being part of a "goal," is clearly a departure from the notion of "secular studies being condoned only to the extent necessary to make a living," as pointed out by R. Würzberger, and seems in accordance with the view of R. Lamm, cited below, that acquiring secular knowledge is a first choice, not just as a last resort. Certainly it is a departure from those who view secular studies as a distraction or even a threat to the religious personality.

10 Rakeffet-Rothkoff, Rabbi Aaron, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, Vol. 2. (KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1999), 227.

11 The Rav's view that "both divisions function without *synthesis*" seems to differ from those who define *Torah uMadda* as a "*synthesis*" of Torah learning and secular knowledge.

12 Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, who is both the son-in-law of the Rav, and one of his foremost *talmidim*, writes the following moving description on the impact higher secular education had on his life: "Speaking for myself, however, I can emphatically state that my general education has contributed much to my personal development. I know that my understanding of Tanakh would be far shallower in every respect without it. I know that it has greatly enhanced my perception of life in Eretz Yisroel. I know that it has enriched my religious experience. I know that when my father was stricken blind, Milton's profoundly religious sonnet "On his blindness," and its magnificent conclusion, "They also serve who only stand and wait," stood me in excellent stead. I also know—and this has at times been a most painful discovery—that many of these elements are sadly lacking among the contempters of culture on the Right ... when one's psychological sensitivity is lacking, the result is that much of Torah—whole parashiyot and personalities in Chumash—are simply misread" (*Centrist Orthodoxy: A Spiritual Accounting*, 4). The fact that John Milton has been described as a "passionately individual Christian Humanist poet," and nevertheless R. Lichtenstein cites Milton's sonnet as keeping him in excellent stead in dealing with his father's blindness, is something that would be unheard of in the Traditionalist Yeshiva world.

economic reasons, that is, for the sake of *parnasah*, to earn a living. The Rav, on the other hand, maintained that secular subjects, whether they be the pure sciences or the humanities, should be incorporated into the yeshiva curriculum. The Rav himself boldly and resolutely entered the arena of general culture and, with firm conviction, led the way to the integration into the modern world. Some of his writings like *Halakbic Man* and *The Halakbic Mind* demonstrate the breadth of his secular knowledge and his admiration for its wisdom. In his innumerable talks on biblical themes or philosophic topics, he drew upon the literature of philosophy and general culture for illustration or for analysis. Recently, I heard a tape recording of a talk he delivered during the fifties, wherein he espoused his philosophy of education. For him, secular studies possess a positive intrinsic value that enhance the understanding of *yahadus*, thus enriching our *hashkafa*. He valued Yeshiva University for providing its students with the opportunity to study secular subjects under the same roof with Torah studies. His works reflect an extraordinary knowledge of secular subjects. His classic essay, “The Lonely Man of Faith,” and his essay “Confrontation,” could not have been written were he not conversant with a wide range of philosophical, religious, and psychological literature. Furthermore, his cultural breadth included music, art and general literature. For him it was not “*Eit la’asot la’Hashem, hefaru toratekha*,” a concession to the times. The truths and wisdom of the secular world were not to be dismissed.<sup>13</sup> (R. Gorelik)

Rav Soloveitchik was probably most unique among his contemporary rabbinic peers in his attitude toward secular knowledge.<sup>14</sup> He embraced it without fear or apology. The supremacy of Torah was such that under its sacred umbrella, the sciences and humanities could find a proper dwelling. As “handmaidens” to Torah scholarship, these studies not only provided important insights and information, but broadened the perspective of the Torah scholar in his attempt to understand and grapple with the vexing issues of his generation. Rav Soloveitchik’s erudition in this arena was simply unmatched; no body of secular knowledge was foreign to him. He moved easily between these two worlds, because, for him, Torah had the capacity to critically assess all of secular wisdom and assimilate that which it judged to be true and enduring.<sup>15</sup> (R. Beinenfeld)

Perhaps the most significant area where he diverged from other *Gedolim* and followed an independent way was with regard to secular studies, to *Torah*

13 R. Gorelik, *Memories of a Giant*, 180.

14 See R. Lichtenstein, *Centrist Orthodoxy*, 2: “If pressed to define the primary area of difference between the various Torah communities, I presume we would get different replies depending upon whether the question were posed in the Diaspora or in Eretz Yisroel. In *Galut*, the litmus test probably still is the attitude to secular culture; in Eretz Yisroel, the attitude towards the state.”

15 R. Beinenfeld, *Memories of a Giant*, 116.

*Umadda*. The Rav was an intellectual Colossus astride the various continents of human intellectual achievement and all forms of Jewish thought. Culturally and psychologically as well as intellectually, this made him a loner amongst the *halakhic* authorities of this century. How many preeminent Halakhists in the world, after all, have read Greek philosophy in Greek, and German philosophy in German, and the Vatican's document on the Jews in Latin? A Ph.D. from the University of Berlin in Mathematics and especially Philosophy, he took these disciplines seriously, not as an inconsequential academic flirtation or a superficial cultural ornamentation, or a way of impressing benighted and naive American Jewish students who did not know better. There is no doubt where his priorities lay—obviously, in Torah—but he did not regard *madda* as a *de facto* compromise. The Rav believed that the great thinkers of mankind had truths to teach all of us, truths which were not necessarily invalid or unimportant because they derived from non-sacred sources. Moreover, the language of philosophy was for him the way that the ideas and ideals of Torah can be best communicated to cultured people, it is Torah expressed universally; and he held as well that the philosophic studies helped him enormously in the formulation of *halakhic* ideas.<sup>16</sup> (R. Lamm)

Whereas in the Yeshiva world, secular studies are condoned only to the extent necessary to make a living, the Rav endowed them with intrinsic value. This explains why he encouraged many of his disciples to pursue graduate studies in secular fields.<sup>17</sup> (R. Wurzbarger)

Let it be stated clearly and unequivocally; his attitude to the “wisdom of the nations,” to *Torah Umadda*, to the broader Jewish community, was not cavalier; it was *le'khat'chilah* (first choice), not *bidiavad* (as a last resort). Any contrary assertion diminishes the *Gestalt* of this unconventional Rosh Yeshiva and *gaon she'bigeonim*.<sup>18</sup> (R. Lamm)

To grasp the scope of this phenomenon within the Rav's writings and to appreciate its breadth and depth, one has to go no further than the footnotes which accompany *Halakhic Man*. There, summoned by the author, one can meet, side by side, famous *Rabbanim* and German professors, Rambam and William James, *Minhat Hinukh* and I. L. Peretz, along with many other such figures. In the Rav's world it is possible to use such diverse sources and create a single, coherent, Torah-true whole from them. Lest anyone mislead himself and think this was an intellectual posture detached from the fiber of his soul, I must emphatically state that this was not so. Many a time did he preach to my brothers and myself, from the depths of my grandfather's loving concern,

16 R. Lamm, *Memories of a Giant*, 221–222.

17 R. Wurzbarger, “Soloveitchik,” 10.

18 R. Lamm, “Caves and Enclaves” in *Seventy Faces*, Volume 2 (Ktav, 2002).

the importance of acquiring general and scientific knowledge.<sup>19</sup> (R. Mosheh Lichtenstein)

## The Religious Status of the State of Israel

The founding of the State of Israel was a Divine miracle.<sup>20</sup> (The Rav)

G-d created the State of Israel, can “flesh and blood” be so brazen to oppose it?<sup>21</sup> (The Rav)

The founding of the State of Israel is an *atbalta di-geulah*<sup>22</sup> (the beginning of our redemption).<sup>23</sup> (The Rav)

The Divine Providence employed secular Jews as instruments to bring to fruition his great plans regarding the Land of Israel.<sup>24</sup> (The Rav)

The establishment of the State has halakhic significance, not only by building up the country economically, but also by our sovereignty there.<sup>25</sup> (The Rav)

We admire the State with all our heart, we pray for her welfare, we send her our sons and stand united to defend her.<sup>26</sup> (The Rav)

The State of Israel will help us, the Jews of the Diaspora, to preserve our identity and self-pride.<sup>27</sup> (The Rav)

The very existence of the State is a denial of basic Christian doctrine, according to which Jews lost the right to *Eretz Yisroel* and their role as the Chosen people.<sup>28</sup> (The Rav)

19 Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein, *Memories of a Giant*, 86. Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein, the Rav's grandson, is currently the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion. This quote is especially relevant, as it shows the Rav did not maintain a different standard for his “Modern Orthodox community” than from that of his own family.

20 Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B., *Five Addresses*, (Jerusalem, 1982), 32.

21 Ibid., 116.

22 The fact that the Rav referred to the founding of the State of Israel as an “*atbalta di-geulah*” (the beginning of our redemption), would seem to contradict Blidstein's assertion that “the Rav did not assign messianic significance to the establishment of the state.” (Blidstein, Gerald J., *Society and Self: On the writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (OU Press, 2012), 26.) Perhaps Blidstein was unaware of the Rav's “Jewish Sovereignty and the Redemption of the Shekinah” address in 1948, as the address has just been recently published in 2021.

23 Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B., *Jewish Sovereignty and the Redemption of the Shekinah*, (June 1948), 12. This was originally delivered by the Rav in 1948 as the keynote address at the annual Mizrahi convention in Yiddish, the Rav's mother tongue. It was published in Yiddish in 2012 by OU Press. I looked up the Yiddish publication, and on page 194, the Rav did indeed use the words “*atchalta di-geulah*” in his Yiddish address.

24 R. Soloveitchik, *Five Addresses*, 36.

25 Ibid., 137.

26 Ibid., 117.

27 Ibid., 170.

28 Ibid., 122.

The Israeli flag<sup>29</sup> has a spark of sanctity that flows from devotion and self-sacrifice. We are all enjoined to honor the flag and treat it with respect.<sup>30</sup> (The Rav)

Let me clarify why I feel so connected to Mizrachi. First, *rabbotai*, simply as an expression of gratitude, of historical appreciation. The Mizrachi built the Land of Israel at a time when other religious groups still kept building at arm's length... Providence selected them as partners in the great miracle of the redemption of the land, which is being realized now before our eyes. I say this not so much with joy as with pain, because I would have preferred that all religious groups would have contributed to the work which the G-d of Israel is interested—and seemingly, highly interested. For how else can we explain the great miracle that is the State of Israel? I wish that all Orthodox, from *Neturei Karta* to the Rabbinical Council of America, would grasp that the State of Israel, with all its deficiencies, has accomplished something that no human fantasy could imagine: in a historic way, it has sanctified G-d's name in the face of the Christian world.<sup>31</sup> (The Rav)

The State is the instrument by means of which You have found us worthy to continue building the world, which itself is an edifice of lovingkindness. The State must develop the most modern technology, the very best educational institutions; it must be scientifically progressive, with a high standard of living and a flourishing economy. All of these things are part of “the world is built of lovingkindness.”<sup>32</sup> (The Rav)

If I now identify with Mizrachi, against my family tradition, it is only because, as previously clarified, I feel that divine Providence ruled like “Joseph” against his brothers. The years of the Hitlerian Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the accomplishments of the Mizrachi in the land of Israel, convinced me of the correctness of our movement's path.<sup>33</sup> (The Rav)

The Rav's endorsement of Religious Zionism is also closely related to his belief that taking the initiative in ameliorating natural, economic, social, or political conditions, far from being a usurpation of divine prerogatives, represents a religiously mandated activity of becoming partners with G-d in the process of creation. This position is radically different from that prevailing in the Haredi community. Although they may not be quite extreme as the *Neturei Karta*, who refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the State of Israel, the rest of the Haredi community, nevertheless, is not prepared to ascribe any religious value

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29 The presence of the Israeli Flag in many Modern Orthodox synagogues while absent in most Traditionalist synagogues is another key feature differentiating between the two streams of Orthodoxy.

30 Ibid., 139.

31 Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B., *Zionism and the Mizrachi from the Perspective of a Raven Head and a Dove Head*, April, 1954, audio.

32 R. Soloveitchik, *Five Addresses*, 124.

33 Ibid. 36.



to the existence of a sovereign Jewish State in the pre-Messianic era. While reconciling themselves to the recognition of Israel as a *de facto* reality, they cannot view as a religious desideratum a Jewish State that came into being as a result of political activity and not through supernatural intervention. In their opinion, reliance on human initiatives to establish a “secular” Jewish state cannot be reconciled with belief in G-d the Redeemer, who would restore the Jewish people to its national homeland when the process of catharsis was completed and Israel would become worthy of the Redemption.<sup>34</sup> (R. Wurzburger)

Almost alone amongst contemporary *Gedolei Torah* (Talmudic authorities), he viewed the emergence of the State of Israel as evidence of divine grace; he saw its appearance as opening a new chapter in Jewish history, one in which we enter the world stage once again. He was not afraid—despite the opinions of the majority of *Roshei Yeshiva* and his own distinguished family members—to identify with the goals and aspirations of Religious Zionism.<sup>35</sup> (R. Lamm)

The establishment of the State of Israel, according to the Rav, not only restored Jewish dignity and national self-esteem,<sup>36</sup> but it has also emphatically refuted the dogma of the Church about the “punishment of the wandering Jew for the crime of deicide—the irreversible expulsion from his homeland.” The emergence of the State of Israel is a total rejection of this cynical assertion, according to the Rav, which in no small measure was responsible for the suffering, and humiliation of our people throughout the ages<sup>37</sup> (R. Poupko).

For the Rav, the State of Israel represents a turning point in G-d’s relationship with its people, transforming their covenant to one of destiny, and elevating their status to active partners<sup>38</sup> in shaping that destiny.<sup>39</sup> (R. Genack)

Without a doubt the Rav publicly identified with Religious-Zionism and contributed to it his prestige, authority, and standing. For years he served as “honorary President” of the Mizrachi movement in the United States, spoke at its annual conventions, and was even involved in its activities.<sup>40</sup> (Prof. Blidstein)

34 R. Wurzburger, “Soloveitchik,” 10.

35 R. Lamm, *Memories of a Giant*, 221.

36 The concept of the State restoring “Jewish dignity and national self-esteem” is arguably unique to Modern Orthodoxy, when compared to streams of Orthodoxy to the right.

37 Rabbi Poupko, *Memories of a Giant*, 259.

38 The concept of being “active partners” in our destiny, dovetails with *atbalta digeulah*; the concept of an active partnership with G-d contrasts with the view in some Orthodox circles of being passive and waiting for G-d to bring the *geulah* when the *Mashiach* arrives.

39 Genack, Rabbi Menachem, *Rav Soloveitchik and Religious Zionism* (Mizrachi, 2023), <https://mizrachi.org/hamizrachi/rav-soloveitchik-and-religious-zionism>.

40 Blidstein, *Society*, 19.



The *minyán* at Maimonides, which follows the halakhic rulings of the Rav, said *Hallel*<sup>41</sup> on *Yom HaAtsma'ut* when I started teaching there in 1965 and continues to do so today. At Yeshiva University, based on what the Rav told them, his pupils introduced saying *Hallel* at the end of prayers with full *kaddish*.<sup>42</sup> (R. Blau)

## Attitudes Towards Non-Jews

When we move from the private world of faith to the public world of humanitarian and cultural endeavors, communication among the various faith communities is desirable and even essential. We are ready to enter into dialogue on such topics as War and Peace, Poverty, Freedom, Man's Moral Values, the Threat of Secularism, Technology and Human Values, Civil Rights, etc., which revolve about religious spiritual aspects of our civilization.<sup>43</sup> (The Rav)

We are opposed<sup>44</sup> to any public debate, dialogue or symposium concerning the doctrinal, dogmatic or ritual aspects of our faith vis-à-vis "similar" aspects of another faith community.<sup>45</sup> (The Rav)

There is no contradiction between coordinating our cultural activities with all men and at the same time confronting them as members of another faith community. As a matter of fact even within the non-Jewish society, each individual sees himself under a double aspect; first, as a member of a cultural-creative community in which all are committed to a common goal and, at the same time, as an individual living in seclusion and loneliness.<sup>46</sup> (The Rav)

We, created in the image of G-d, are charged with responsibility for the great confrontation of man and the cosmos. We stand with civilized society shoulder to shoulder over against an order which defies us all. As a charismatic faith community, we have to meet the challenge of confronting the general non-Jewish faith community. We are called upon to tell this community not only the story it already knows—that we are human beings, committed to the general welfare and progress of mankind, that we are interested in combatting disease, in alleviating human suffering, in protecting man's rights, in helping

41 For purposes of this article, it is not significant whether *Hallel* was said with or without a *berakhab*; the key distinguishing point is that in many Traditionalist Orthodox synagogues, *Hallel* is not said at all on *Yom HaAtsma'ut*.

42 R. Blau, "Feminism," 91.

43 Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B., *Community, Covenant, and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, Vol. 4, (Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 2005), 260–1.

44 See Blidstein who writes: "The Rav's reservations about interreligious dialogue were grounded in two different arguments. First, he was concerned about the missionary impulse that, he believed, still remained in the Church .... Second, a philosophical foundation—there can be no shared spiritual discourse, because when it comes to faith and religion, there is no common language .... Each faith community has its own legitimacy, autonomy, and intimacy" (*Society*, 48).

45 R. Soloveitchik, *Community*, 260.

46 Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B., "Confrontation," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 6, no. 2 (1964):19.

the needy, *et cetera*—but also what is still unknown to it, namely our otherness as a metaphysical covenantal community.<sup>47</sup> (The Rav)

In the areas of universal concern, we welcome an exchange (with other faiths) of ideas and impressions. Communication among the various communities will greatly contribute towards mutual understanding and will enhance and deepen our knowledge of those universal aspects of man which are relevant to all of us.<sup>48</sup> (The Rav)

Any dialogue, debate or symposium on dogmatic and theological subjects (with other faiths) is not only futile, but damaging as well to the best interests of the religious communities involved in such a debate. We reassert that, as loyal citizens of our great country, we are all, Jew and non-Jew alike, interested in the welfare of our people and in their material as well as their spiritual and moral advancement. Therefore it is desirable that full cooperation and coordination of efforts in the fields of social legislation and ideology be furthered and promoted.<sup>49</sup> (The Rav)

The Rav famously continues by stating that when it comes to the strictly theological issues that define us as a faith, as a covenantal community, no public, communal dialogue should take place between Orthodox and Christianity. When, however, the issues to be discussed are those that relate to both Jews and Christians as human beings, seeking to enhance the welfare of humanity, *dialogue is not only permitted but encouraged*.<sup>50</sup> (R. Meir Soloveitchik)

The Rav provided direction for the Torah community on how to address non-Jewish religious manifestations. The RCA remained loyal to the guidelines which the Rav had set down, and distinguished between theological discussions and ethical-secular concerns, which have universal validity. Every program involving either Catholic or Protestant churches in which we participated was carefully scrutinized and analyzed. Every topic which had possible theological nuances or implications was vetoed, and only when the Rav pronounced it to be satisfactory did we proceed to the dialogue.<sup>51</sup> (R. Rosensweig)

47 Ibid., 20–21.

48 R. Soloveitchik, *Community*, 259.

49 Ibid., 267.

50 Soloveitchik, Rabbi Meir, “A Nation Under G-d: Jews, Christians, and the American Public Square,” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* (2006–07): 64. See Blidstein who writes: “R. Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe*, *Yoreh De'ah* 3:43) in fact asked the Rav to withdraw his “permissive ruling” allowing Jewish-Christian discussion on societal matters, a form of cooperation that R. Feinstein considered threatening, not only because of its religious content but also because of the social environment it fostered.” (*Society*, 51).

51 R. Rosensweig, *Memories of a Giant*, 274–275.

## Attitudes Towards Non-Orthodox

When we are faced with a problem for Jews and Jewish interests towards the world without, regarding the defense of Jewish rights in the non-Jewish world, then all groups and movements must be united. In this area, there may not be any division, because any friction in the Jewish camp may be disastrous for the entire people. In this realm we must consider the ideal of unity, as a political-historical nation, which includes everyone from Mendes-France<sup>52</sup> to the “old-fashioned” Jew of *Me’ah She’arim*—without exception. In the crematoria, the ashes of the hasidim and pious Jews were put together with the ashes of the radicals and the atheists. And we all must fight the enemy, who does not differentiate between those who believe in G-d and those who reject him.<sup>53</sup> (The Rav)

The Rav provided Orthodoxy with respect, dignity and stature by articulating its basic philosophical premises. It was within the framework of the Rav’s thinking and approach that the RCA involved itself in an internal struggle over relationships with non-Orthodox rabbinic bodies and non-Jewish religious groups. The Rav’s role in determining these directions was crucial and definitive. The RCA, as a rabbinic body, had maintained ongoing relationships with the Conservative and the Reform movements—and we did so on the basis of ground rules which our halakhic authority had set down for us. For many years, the RCA and the UOJCA were members of the Synagogue council of America,<sup>54</sup> which housed representatives of the Conservative and Reform movements as well as our own. In 1956, our relationship to non-Orthodox bodies was challenged when eleven *roshei yeshiva* signed an *issur* prohibiting Orthodox rabbis from belonging to the Synagogue Council of America... The Rav felt that the atmosphere was too highly charged emotionally for a public response. The Rav set down for us his famous guidelines of *kelapei chuts* and *kelapei penim*. In an interview with a Yiddish newspaper, he made this historic distinction, underlying his approach to the Jewish people. When the representation of Jews and Jewish interests vis-à-vis the non-Jewish world—*kelapei chuts*—are involved, all groups and movements must be united. There can be no divisiveness in this area, for any division in the Jewish camp can endanger its entirety.<sup>55</sup> (R. Rosensweig)

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52 Jewish French socialist leader; premier and foreign minister (1954–55).

53 R. Soloveitchik, *Community*, 145.

54 The Synagogue Council of America was an American Jewish organization of synagogue and rabbinical associations founded in 1926. The Council was the umbrella body bringing together the Orthodox (The Rabbinical Council of America, and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations), Conservative (the United Synagogue of America) and Reform (The Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations) movements.

55 R. Rosensweig, *Memories of a Giant*, 274–275.

The Rav attended a special session of the Joint Advisory Committee of the SCA and the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC) in February 1959. This committee represented almost the entire range of religious and secular organizations in the United States at the time. Throughout this entire period, the Rav worked hand in hand with non-Orthodox representatives of the larger Jewish community to ensure the protection of the *shevita* and the dignity of Halakhah and its practice.<sup>56</sup> (R. Helfgot)

In his insistence that failure to observe halakha does not affect one's status as a full-fledged member of the Jewish people, the Rav went so far as to urge *kohanim* who were not Sabbath observers to participate in *Birkat Kohanim*. According to his ruling, only transgressions of prohibitions specifically governing *kohanim*, but not violations of other halakhic norms (with the exception of homicide), disqualify a *Kohen* from *dukhening*.<sup>57</sup> (R. Wurzbarger)

It was because of his solicitude for the material and spiritual well-being of every Jew that despite his insistence that a *mehitza* was an absolute halakhic requirement, the Rav occasionally permitted Rabbis to accept pulpits in synagogues which flouted this norm. His leniency was due to his belief that the presence of a dedicated Rabbi was likely to result in the raising of religious standards (e.g., establishment of day schools, *kashrut*, *taharat ha-Mishpaha*, etc.) The Rav cited this as an illustration of the differences inherent in the *Derekh ha-Benoni*, a philosophy of moderation, which, unlike extremist positions, must mediate between a plurality of conflicting values and obligations.<sup>58</sup> (R. Wurzbarger)

## The Absolute Authority of Leading Rabbis in Matters of Public Policy (Da'as Torah)<sup>59</sup>

Apparently, there is a subjective element in making moral decisions. If one is confused, he can ask for guidance and counsel. Many times, I have been

56 Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot, *Community*, xviii.

57 R. Wurzbarger "Soloveitchik," 12.

58 Ibid.

59 See Cohen, Rabbi Alfred, "Daat Torah," *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* (Spring 2003): 1, who writes: "Daat Torah refers to an ideology which teaches that the advice given by great Torah scholars must be followed by Jews committed to Torah observance, inasmuch as these opinions are imbued with Torah insights." See also Blau, Rabbi Yitzchak, "Daas Torah Revisited: Contemporary Discourse about the Rabbinate," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* (Fall, 2015): 1. "Attitude towards the doctrine of *Daas Torah* is often a significant dividing line in the contemporary Orthodox world. Ample sources support the idea that great rabbis do not speak with special authority about issues of science, medicine, business, and so forth. Many issues in life including choice of spouse, profession, focus of learning, and religious philosophy depend to a great degree upon the inclination of the individual. Such decisions cannot emerge from an external authority even when that authority actually knows a tremendous amount about that person in question. Again, it is not about the most informed decision but about the personal quality of choice." R. Blau further argues that Modern Orthodoxy has two objections to the doctrine of *Daas Torah*. The first objection is "the expertise argument:" "Asking rabbis for opinions on an entire host of extralegal topics often assumes that their expertise applies to society, politics, business, and science," in which, in many cases, their expertise is lacking.

presented with such moral questions. I never give a yes or no answer. The questions that may determine the future of a particular individual. I will explain the options but tell them that the final choice is his. These are occasionally the most important of problems. Many times when my own students ask me questions, I explain to them what is involved. They have to understand the alternatives. I resent very much when certain *roshei yeshiva* and certain teachers want to impose their will upon the boys. It is against the law. Both ways are correct, the options are correct, and it is up to the individual to decide. I do not like to impose my will upon somebody else. Only the Almighty can do that, but not a human being.<sup>60</sup> (The Rav)

The Rav's general approach to the nature of rabbinic authority, was in his view limited to the domain of *pesak halakha*. He respected the right of individuals to form their own opinions and attitudes with respect to matters which were not subject to halakhic legislation. Because of his respect for human autonomy and individuality, he never wanted to impose his particular attitudes upon others or even offer his personal opinions as *Da'at Torah*. On the contrary, when I turned to him for guidance on policy matters,<sup>61</sup> which at times also involved halakhic considerations, he frequently replied that I should rely upon my own judgement. Similarly, whenever the Rav expounded on his philosophy of *halakha*, he stressed that these were merely his personal opinions which he was prepared to share with others but which *did not possess any authoritative status*.<sup>62</sup> (R. Wurzbarger)

Rav Soloveitchik believed profoundly in the Oral Law as transmitted by our Sages (*emunat hakhamim*), and even interpreted the Yom Kippur *Avodah* and the Passover Seder Haggadah explication as reflecting our faith in the truth of this tradition. But Rav Soloveitchik did not believe in the infallibility of any particular sage, in the cult of the *rebbe* or *rosh yeshiva*. He imbued his students with the ability and the obligation to study the sources for themselves, to respect the views of those authorities who preceded us but to reserve the right to interpret in accordance with our own understandings and to strive to

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The second objection is that the Modern Orthodox world values the autonomy of personal choice. "We want people to feel drawn to a particular selection and that, by definition, cannot come from an external source, however wise it may be." See also R. Soloveitchik, 'Lonely Man of Faith,' 84 n.1: "In order to render precise Halakhic decisions in many fields of human endeavor, one must possess, besides excellent Halakhic training, a good working knowledge in those secular fields in which the problem occurs." See also Kaplan, Lawrence, "*Daas Torah: A Modern Conception of Rabbinic Authority*," in Sokol, Moshe (ed.), *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy* (1992), 1–60 who argues that *Daat Torah* was invented, or at least developed, in order to create a submissive society, and arose in response to the perceived negative influences of modernity.

60 R. Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, 237.

61 Contrast this view of the Rav advocating his followers to form their own opinions regarding matters not involving halakhic legislation, with some rabbinic voices in the Traditionalist Orthodox community, instructing their followers whom to marry, which profession to adopt, which business deal to invest in, and which political party to vote for.

62 R. Wurzbarger, "Soloveitchik," 18.

discover new insights and revelations. I remember coming to the Rav in the early 60s with a burning question of the day. Should we stage demonstrations on behalf of Soviet Jewry as urged by a number of then youthful activists (Yaakov Birnbaum, for example), or is it preferable to follow the policy of “quiet diplomacy” urged by establishment *Gedolei Torah*? “Why do you ask me?” queried the Rav sincerely. “This is a question for leading Sovietologists!” And when a Professor of Soviet History of Columbia University spoke out in favor of activism, Rav Soloveitchik supported our demonstrations.”<sup>63</sup> (R. Riskin)

I recall, at the time, telling the Rav that I thank G-d for being a *talmid* of the Rav and not a *chassid* of the Rav! In Chassidic circles, the Rebbe’s “advice” was a determining factor on personal decisions. The Rav never wanted to serve in that capacity. He believed that his students had the right to decide on personal matters even against his “advice.” As a matter of fact the Rav had an overall negative opinion of the doctrine of “Da’at Torah.”<sup>64</sup> (R. Adler)

## Involvement in the Surrounding Culture

In addition to combining the fear of G-d with worldly culture,<sup>65</sup> the Yeshiva wants above all to stress the importance of the study of Torah.<sup>66</sup> (The Rav)

Jews are vitally concerned with the problems affecting the common destiny of man. We consider ourselves members of the universal community charged

63 Rabbi Riskin, *Memories of a Giant*, 263.

64 Adler, Rabbi Aaron, *Seventy Conversations in Transit with HaGaon HaRav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l* (Urim Publications, 2021).

65 “Culture” is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language as “The totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population.” It is this “culture” arguably that the Rav is referring to; obviously culture is a much wider context than just the study of “higher secular education.” Moreover, it is this distinction that may have led Berger to separate into different categories “the value of higher secular education,” and “involvement in the surrounding culture.” Possible examples of “involvement in the surrounding culture” may include; art galleries, museums, symphonies, the opera, baseball games, poetry reading, candidate debates, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, Thanksgiving, and reading the New York Times book review. Although these do not fall into the category of “higher secular education,” they do nonetheless fall into the category of “being involved in the surrounding culture.” See also R. Lookstein, *Memories of a Giant*, 241: “The Rav was known to be an avid reader of the most worthwhile books on the New York Times’ bestseller list, perusing them while on the train to and from Boston on the years before the shuttle trips made the trip much shorter.” See also R. Lichtenstein, *Centrist Orthodoxy*, 3. “Nevertheless, I wish to reiterate emphatically that I continue to subscribe wholeheartedly to the central thesis of that early essay: the affirmation that, properly approached and balanced (and the caveats are there, there is need for much care and much caution), general culture can be a genuinely ennobling and enriching force... My personal experience over the last two decades has only reinforced an awareness of the spiritual significance of the best that has been thought and said in the world. For what is it that such culture offers us? In relation to art—profound expressions of the creative spirit, an awareness of structure and its interaction with substance and, consequently the ability to organize and present ideas; in relation to life—the ability to understand and appreciate and confront our personal, communal and cosmic context, sensitivity to the human condition and some assistance in coping with it; in relation to both—a literary consciousness which enables us to transcend our own milieu and place it in a broader perspective. Above all, culture instills in us a sense of the moral, psychological and metaphysical complexity of human life.”

66 R. Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, 227.

with the responsibility of promoting progress in all fields, economic, social, scientific and ethical. As such, we are opposed to a philosophy of isolationism or esotericism which would see the Jews living in a culturally closed society.<sup>67</sup> (The Rav)

One can be a Jew committed to the past, present, and future of Jewish history, and, at the same time, a member of modern society. A useful member, trained in all the skills, and able to live in the midst of modern society and not to retreat.<sup>68</sup> (The Rav)

As a source of inspiration and guidance for his contemporaries, the Rav's own person and way of life were no less important than his explicit teachings. A modern man he was, and it was in the modern world that he lived. The Rav led an active life of *Torah lishma* within the surrounding general world in which he lived, without ensconcing himself or attempting to escape from it into a sheltered environment. He was well acquainted with American society, thoroughly familiar with its language and culture.<sup>69</sup> (R. Mosheh Lichtenstein)

The Rav's endorsement of culture is founded on a principle rooted in *sefer Bereshis*, one we might describe as moral. Human beings fulfill their divine charge and actualize their divinely ordained nature only by aggressively striving to improve human existence in concrete, material ways. They must "harness the elemental forces of nature" to conquer disease and to subdue the threat that nature poses to human life and security. Only by doing so they imitate G-d's creativity, fulfill the responsibilities imposed by the mandate "milu et ha'aretz vekivshuhah," and attain dignity.<sup>70</sup> (Dr. David Shatz)

The Rav's sense of gratitude to America for according Jews full equality also comes to the fore in his positive attitude towards the observance of Thanksgiving<sup>71</sup> as a national holiday.<sup>72</sup>

## The Role of Women

Not only is the teaching of *Torah she-be-al peh* to girls permissible but it is nowadays an absolute imperative. This policy of discrimination between the sexes as to subject matter and method of instruction which is still advocated by certain groups within our Orthodox community has contributed greatly

67 R. Soloveitchik, *Community*, 259.

68 R. Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, 231.

69 R. Mosheh Lichtenstein, *Memories of a Giant*, 87.

70 Dr. Shatz, *Memories of a Giant*, 314.

71 The Rav's positive attitude towards the observance of Thanksgiving as a national holiday is perhaps another example of "involvement in the surrounding culture."

72 R. Wurzbarger "Soloveitchik," 16.



to the deterioration and downfall of traditional Judaism. Boys and girls alike should be introduced into the inner halls of *Torah-she-be-al peh*.<sup>73</sup> (The Rav)

When my wife became educational director at a Yeshiva high school for girls, she and I met with the Rav to discuss the education to be provided to the students. When she asked about teaching *Torah shebe'al peh* (Talmud) to women, the Rav replied that the reasoning used by the Chafetz Chaim sixty years earlier, to justify teaching *Torah shebichtav* (Bible) to women exposed to Polish primary schools, requires teaching Talmud to American women who receive a university education. To the Rav, there could be no high level study of Jewish texts that did not include Talmud. At the same meeting, they discussed the pursuit of higher education and preparing for a career in terms of its effect on traditional life. He felt that a woman's family role should be taught but that also she had the right for self-realization. The contradiction was to be resolved by the student herself.<sup>74</sup> (R. Blau)

If Jewish mothers were to provide proper guidance to their children in an era when relatively few Jews abided by Halakha, they had to possess a real understanding of the halakhic process, since without knowledge of halakha one could not possibly acquire a genuinely Jewish perspective. It was for this reason that The Rav insisted that girls receive through instruction in *Gemara* at his Maimonides Day school in Boston. Many years later, Stern College and some other institutions followed suit, and, despite the traditional aversion to instructing girls in *Gemara*,<sup>75</sup> initiated programs for intensive study not merely of the practical aspects needed for proper observance, but also of the theoretical underpinnings of halakha.<sup>76</sup> (R. Wurzbarger)

Ethical considerations also prompted the Rav's refusal to participate in granting a *heter me-a rabbanim* to husbands whose wives were unwilling to accept a *get*. The Rav explained that his policy was based upon the realization that, if the shoe were on the other foot, corresponding procedures would not be available to the wife.<sup>77</sup> (R. Wurzbarger)

The Rav interpreted the verse that Eve was to function as Adam's *eizer kenegdo* in the sense that Eve was not simply to function as Adam's helpmate, but that she was supposed to help him by being *kenegdo*, i.e., complementing Adam by offering opposing perspectives.<sup>78</sup> (R. Wurzbarger)

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73 R. Soloveitchik, *Community*, 83.

74 R. Yosef Blau, *Memories of a Giant*, 125.

75 To this day, Traditionalist Orthodox seminaries for women do not teach Gemara.

76 Wurzbarger, "Soloveitchik," 18.

77 Ibid., 17.

78 Ibid.



## Conclusion

Based on the above, a possible, more thorough definition of Modern Orthodoxy<sup>79</sup> would include the following:

- Maintains a strict adherence to the *Shulhan Arukh* and possesses an unwavering belief in the divine origin of the Torah.<sup>80</sup>
- Identifies publicly with Religious Zionism and is steadfast in its support of the State of Israel. Believes the founding of the State of Israel is an *athalta digeulah* (the beginning of our redemption), and maintains that the establishment of the State has halakhic significance, not only by building up the country economically, but also by our sovereignty there.<sup>81</sup>
- Values the pursuit of higher secular education as *lekhat'hilah* (first choice), and not *bediavad* (as a last resort).<sup>82</sup>
- Lives and participates in its surrounding<sup>83</sup> culture.<sup>84</sup>

79 This definition presupposes two elements; first, utilizing Berger's six categories of differentiation between Modern Orthodoxy and streams to its religious right (the intrinsic value of higher secular education, the religious status of the State of Israel, the role of women, attitudes towards non-Jews and non-Orthodox Jews, the absolute authority of leading rabbis in matters of public policy, and involvement in the surrounding culture), and, secondly, a close adherence to Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's teachings and hashkafa.

80 All streams of Orthodoxy have this in common.

81 Where Modern Orthodoxy differs from Traditionalist Orthodoxy when it comes to the State of Israel is complex. Certainly, for those Traditionalist Orthodox circles that believe the Jewish State should only exist once Moshiah comes, the distinction is clear. However, even for those Traditionalist Orthodox circles that support the State of Israel, and are involved in Israeli politics, nevertheless, there are significant differences, including but not limited to; the fact that an overwhelming majority of Traditionalist Orthodox Jews do not serve in the army, nor celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut or Yom Yerushalayim, nor say a prayer for the State of Israel or a prayer for the welfare of the Israeli defence forces every Shabbos morning, nor believe the establishment of the State has any halachic significance, nor publicly identify as "Religious Zionists" and certainly would never refer to the founding of the State as "atchalta di-geulah (the beginning of our redemption)."

82 For Modern Orthodoxy, this would include studying philosophy and English literature, as opposed to many in Traditionalist Orthodox circles who believe secular studies should be limited to a number to those subjects required by government regulations, or required to earn a living. Needless to say, it would be difficult to find any leading Rabbi in the Traditionalist Orthodox circles who would subscribe to the above value.

83 As opposed to many in Traditionalist Orthodox circles who believe exposure to secular culture should be avoided as much as possible in order not to lead to a loss of faith.

84 "Culture" is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language as "The totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population." It is this "culture" arguably that the Rav is referring to; obviously culture is a much wider context than just the study of "higher secular education." Moreover it is this distinction that may have led Berger to separate into different categories "the value of higher secular education" and "involvement in the surrounding culture." Possible examples of 'involvement in the surrounding culture' may include; art galleries, museums, symphonies, the opera, baseball games, poetry reading, a candidate debates, Mother's Day and Father's Day, Thanksgiving, and reading the New York Times book review. See also R. Lookstein, *Memories of a Giant*, 241: "The Rav was known to be an avid reader of the most worthwhile books on the New York Times' bestseller list, perusing them while on the train to and from Boston on the years before the shuttle trips made the trip much shorter." See also R. Lichtenstein *Centrist Orthodoxy*, "that properly approached and balanced (and the caveats are there, there is need for much care and much caution), general culture can be a genuinely ennobling and enriching force."

- Values the autonomy of personal choices in life decisions, and does not rely extensively on the authority of its leading rabbis in matters of public policy<sup>85</sup> (*Daas Torah*).<sup>86</sup>
- Believes that Jewish-Christian discussion on issues that relate to both Jews and Christians as human beings seeking to enhance the welfare of humanity, is not only permitted<sup>87</sup> but encouraged.<sup>88</sup>
- Believes that when the representation of Jews and Jewish interests vis-à-vis the non-Jewish world are involved, all groups and movements, including the Conservative and Reform movements<sup>89</sup> must be united.<sup>90</sup>
- Believes that not only is the teaching of Talmud to women permissible but it is nowadays an absolute imperative.<sup>91</sup> Is against any policy of discrimination between the sexes as to subject matter and method of instruction.<sup>92</sup>

85 The critical feature distinguishing the modernist (orthodox) from the traditionalist orthodox is the nature and scope of the authority to which each is committed. Traditionalists allow their leaders authority in political and personal matters, and the leadership attempts to exercise authority beyond the specifics of halakhah .... Modernists, in contrast, seek maximum scope of personal decision making and their leadership limits its authority only to halakhah. (Danzger, Herbert M., *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism*, (New Haven, 1989), 167.)

86 R. Blau, "*Daas Torah*."

87 See Blidstein who writes: "R. Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe*, *Yoreh De'ah* 3:43) in fact asked the Rav to withdraw his "permissive ruling" allowing Jewish-Christian discussion on societal matters, a form of cooperation that R. Feinstein considered threatening, not only because of its religious content but also because of the social environment it fostered" (*Society*, 51). This illustrates a distinction between the Modern Orthodox and Traditionalist Orthodox in their attitude towards Jewish-Christian discussion on societal matters.

88 R. Meir Soloveitchik, "Nation Under G-d," 64.

89 In 1956, eleven *roshei yeshiva* signed an *issur* prohibiting Orthodox rabbis from joining the Synagogue Council of America (SCA), whose membership included constituents from the Conservative and Reform movements, while the Rav felt otherwise and authorized the RCA (an Orthodox Rabbinical Council) to join the SCA; and the Rav worked hand in hand with non-Orthodox representatives of the larger Jewish community to ensure the protection of *shebitah* and the dignity of Halakhah and its practice. (R. Soloveitchik, *Community*, xviii.) This illustrates a distinction between the Modern Orthodox and Traditionalist Orthodox in their attitude towards the non-Orthodox.

90 R. Rosensweig, *Memories of a Giant*, 274–275.

91 To this day, Traditionalist Orthodox seminaries for women do not teach *Gemara*.

92 R. Soloveitchik, *Community*, 83.

# Jews, Jewish, and Poetry: An Idiosyncratic Tasting

Dr. Eliakim Katz

**THE PURPOSE OF** this essay is to introduce or reacquaint the reader with a small sample of poetry by Jewish poets.<sup>1</sup> The main, but not sole, focus is on Judaism and Jewishness from different perspectives, including the Orthodox, the secular, and the wavering. Obviously, the subject matter is vast, implying that my knowledge of it, and therefore the choice of poems presented here, is highly idiosyncratic.

Moreover, the beauty of poetry lies in its ambiguity and its many layers. Every poem speaks for itself, and what we each hear may be very different. I have therefore limited my own input to (relatively) few lines following each poem. In other words, the comments are brief, just hors d'oeuvres really, meant to stimulate the appetite rather than provide a full meal. All interpretations and misinterpretations are mine and should not be blamed on anybody else, and, in particular, not on the poets.

All poems that are presented solely in English were written by their authors in English. Poems that are presented in both Hebrew and English were originally written by their authors in Hebrew. I note that the translation of Hebrew poems is, for better or worse, mine. The translations are loose and, by definition, interpretational.

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1 I want to thank my wife, Stella Katz (née Ruch), without whom this essay, and much else, would not exist.

## Teshuvah and Tattoos<sup>2</sup>

### *Baal Teshuvahs at the Mikvah*<sup>3,4</sup> *Yehoshua November*<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes you see them  
 in the dressing area  
 of the ritual bath,  
 young bearded men unbuttoning  
 their white shirts,  
 slipping out of their black trousers,  
 until, standing entirely naked,  
 they are betrayed by the tattoos  
 of their past life:  
 a ring of fire climbing up a leg,  
 an eagle whose feathery wing span  
 spreads the width of the chest,  
 or worse, the scripted name of a woman  
 other than one's wife.

Then, holding only a towel,  
 they begin, once more, the walk  
 past the others in the dressing room:  
 the rabbi they will soon sit before  
 in Talmud class,  
 men with the last names  
 of the first Chasidic families  
 almost everyone,  
 devout since birth.

And with each step,  
 they curse the poverty  
 that keeps the dark ink  
 etched in their skin,  
 until, finally, they descend the stairs  
 of the purifying water,  
 and, beneath the translucent liquid,  
 appear, once again,

2 Only part of the poem is presented here.

3 From the book *G-d's Optimism* by Yehoshua November, *Main Street Rage* (2010).

4 Yehoshua November, who is a Lubavitcher Chassid, is the author of *Two Worlds Exist*, a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award and Paterson Poetry Prize, and *G-d's Optimism*, a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in Poetry. His work has been featured in The New York Times Magazine, The Sun, Harvard Divinity Bulletin, and on National Public Radio.

5 I asked Yehoshua about his unlikely name. He assured me that it did not originate from Ellis Island, but, rather, from 19<sup>th</sup> Century Hungary.

like the next man,  
 who, in all his days,  
 has probably never made a sacrifice  
 as endearing to G-d.

We are all familiar with the adage: Where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand, complete *tzaddikim* cannot stand—מקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין.<sup>6</sup>

Yehoshua November's dramatic and empathetic poem provides us with an insight—namely the tortuous route that extends beyond the inner turmoil which, presumably, accompanies the decision to become a *ba'al teshuvah*: being (sometimes visibly) the *other*, and seeking acceptance in a new life.

November may also be invoking several other possible motifs, each of which is thought-provoking in its own right. These include, but are not limited to, the mark of Cain, possibly self-imposed; *yichus*; and the role of water in purifying as well as providing redemption.<sup>7</sup> I will focus on one of these—the relationship between tattoos and the mark of Cain.

After he kills Abel, G-d removes His protection from Cain—and this is recognized by the fearful Cain who says

הן גרשת אתי היום מעל פני האדמה ומפניך אסתר והייתי נע וגד בארץ והיה כל-  
 מצאני י הרגני:

Since You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth—anyone who meets me may kill me.<sup>8</sup>

The *רד"ק*<sup>9</sup> (*Radak*) says that the abstention from G-d's presence i.e., the *הסתר פנים*,<sup>10</sup> is part of Cain's punishment: G-d will not watch over him. His *השגחה פרטית* has been taken away. In its place, Cain is given an *אות*—the mark of Cain, to warn others not to kill him. According to this interpretation, the mark of Cain is a substitute for G-d's protection which has now been taken away from him.

It is interesting to note that in many ancient pagan cultures tattoos were often used as the equivalent of a protective talisman—a sort of “take-it-everywhere-you-go” shield. Having come back to G-d, November's *ba'alei teshuvah* no longer need pagan protection. But the past is difficult to shed: their now obsolete tattoos are effectively indelible. And, for them, being where they are now, tattoos are a source of shame. November, however, recognizes that the others at the mikvah, i.e., the men (some with *yichus*) who do not

6 ברכות דף לה.

7 ושאתם מים בששון ממעיני הישועה, יב' ג ישעיהו.

8 English translation from The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006.

9 Rabbi David Kimchi (the *רד"ק*), lived in Narbonne, France from 1160–1235. He was a Rabbi, Biblical Commentator, philosopher, and grammarian.

10 See *Radak's* commentary on this פסוק.

share the *ba'alei teshuvah's* past, the *frum from birth*, have probably never “made a sacrifice as endearing to G-d.”

## The Things We Keep in the Attic

### *Signs of the Lost Tribe*<sup>11</sup> Howard Schwartz

One day  
 I found the first sign:  
 old boxes stacked in the attic  
 in a room I've never entered.  
 After that.  
 I found signs everywhere:  
 in every drawer I opened,  
 on every doorpost I passed,  
 when I lay down  
 and when I rose up.

Somehow  
 one of the ten lost tribes  
 had wandered  
 out of the desert,  
 and all of them were living  
 in my house.

Since then  
 I've become accustomed.  
 to their ways.  
 Of course, I never acknowledge.  
 their presence.  
 who knows  
 what they would do  
 if their secret were known?

They have travelled in exile  
 ever since they were born,  
 following the path of the exodus  
 wherever it leads them.

Somehow, they still fulfill  
 the rituals  
 carved out of so many years  
 wandering:

11 From *Contemporary Jewish Poetry*, edited by Deborah Ager and M. F. Silverman (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

blessing the moon,  
counting the stars,  
casting their sins in the water.

During the day.  
they search everywhere  
for the land that has been lost.  
At night, they hide  
from the unsuspecting.  
in closets filled with invisible families,  
and drawers crowded with sorrows,  
on shelves full of their sad.  
songs.

They even inhabit  
my dreams.  
There,  
above all,  
they are at home.

Schwartz has wandered, randomly, serendipitously, unfortunately, into a room where old, useless artifacts are kept—things like memorabilia from a great-great-grandparent. Artifacts that are not really wanted or needed, but the disposal of which would cause a tinge of heartache. Burdensome things best kept hidden even from oneself. And yet, for better or worse, these relics have come alive, and will not let him go—they are like a bad penny, accosting him constantly, “on every doorpost I passed, when I lay down and when I rose up”—*בשכבו ובקומו, ועל מזוזות ביתו*.

The poet appears to be uncomfortable (and possibly fearful) of this resurrection of artifacts. He refuses to acknowledge these come-to-lives because who knows what “they would do.” Ultimately, he gives them space in his dreams, where they will, he hopes, feel at home and hopefully let him be. And yet, the consignment of something to a dream might suggest ambivalence, since dreams are often used to describe the unattainable. We are therefore left with uncertainty as to Schwartz’s wish in this context. Is this a case of “Please G-d, make me accept this burden, but not just yet”?<sup>12</sup>

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12 With apologies to St. Augustine (354–430 CE).

## The Shofar in our Heads

To Tarshish<sup>13</sup> Shlomit Fisher

Some just escape from him  
like Jonah  
on a ship to Tarshish.  
Something in the air  
makes it impossible  
to remain  
in the land of prophecy  
on the Days of Judgement.  
But in the main bazaar in Delhi,  
a red-backed heifer,<sup>14</sup>  
a barefoot hawker of jewelry,  
a leprous beggar,  
and I,  
wearing the new festival clothes I  
bought there this morning  
pass in front of Him,  
like *bene maron*  
The memory of the *akeida*,  
and distant, ancient altars  
rises before me on the banks of the  
Ganges.  
And even the noise of the waves,  
and all the crowd in a foreign city,  
cannot silence the sound of the shofar

יש שבורחים מלפניו  
כמו יונה  
באניה תרשישה  
משהו באוויר  
שלא מאפשר  
להישאר  
בארץ הנבואה  
בימי הדין  
אבל במיין באזר של דלהי  
פרה אדומת גב  
מוכר תכשיטים יחף  
מקבץ נדבות מצורע  
ואני,  
בבגדי חג חדשים שקניתי שם הבוקר  
עוברים לפניו  
כבני מרון  
זכר עקדות  
ומזבחות רחוקים  
עולה לפניי על שפת הגנגס  
גם רעש הגלים  
וכל המון בעיר זרה  
לא משתיקים את קול השופר

How often have you wanted to escape, if only for a moment, the heaviness, the severity, the expectations, yes, mainly the expectations, your own and those of others, of the Orthodox Jewish community? The poet alludes to the reason for her own (current) escape: an atmosphere that is thick with judgment and prophecies (perhaps of doom), which are particularly prevalent in Israel during the **ימים נוראים**.

The poet evokes the prayers that are being said in the landscape from which she had escaped, even as she walks in the main bazaar of Delhi. The story of the *akeida* is read on *Rosh Hashana*. The phrase *b'nei maron* is part of one the most significant prayers on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur—**ונתנה תוקף**. The poet thought that she had escaped, but the

13 From 2017, **שברים נאספים לשירה** עורך מרדכי דוד כהן מו"ל יואב איתמר.

14 I thank Ken Stollon, an editor of this Journal, who pointed out to me the “red heifer” reference.



sound of the שופר in her head is louder than the waves of the Ganges and the vast crowds in Delhi; reminiscent of the *pasuk*: יהי קול השופר הולך וחזק מאד.

Again, as in Howard Schwartz's poem, one can attempt to put one's history, imagined, handed down, or personal, in an attic, but this history sits there, ready to spring into ambush. And when it does, it brings back personal memories, a *seder* with a long-gone grandparent, the flickering *Shabbat* candles, being Queen Esther at *Purim*. And, also, it brings back reminiscences of things one has never experienced, the collective memories of our people: the splitting of the Red Sea, the one-day oil jug lasting for eight days, the Temple burning, Yonah in the whale, and many others.

You can take the person out of their tradition, but you can't take the tradition out of the person.

### Pleasant Are Her Ways—דרכיה נעים

#### *Prayer for the road*<sup>15</sup> Varda Ben Hur

My L-rd  
Save me from drivers  
Right-side overtakers,  
Cursers of my soul,  
Insulters of my appearance.  
And if you are truly kind and  
merciful,  
Spare them from my own curses.

אלוהי  
שומרני מנהגים  
עוקפי ימיני  
מקללי נפשי<sup>16</sup>  
מחרפי צורתי.  
ואם חנון ורחום אתה  
שמור עליהם מקללותיי.

This proposal for a new *tefillat haderech* is Israel-ready.

For anyone who has ever driven (or even walked) in Israel, the tone of the poem will come as no surprise. This asphalt jungle somehow facilitates the acceleration of road rage from 0 to 60 in a split second. It often involves blood-curdling curses wishing other drivers an early and painful mortality, and, in their milder form, insulting all aspects of their being, as well as questioning their pedigree. Interesting to note the poet's use of the words "מחרפי נפשי"—insulters, shamers, demeaners of my appearance. The root חרפ is closely related to חרפה—shame. The poet is subtly distinguishing between the nuances of cursing (which doesn't necessarily involve shame) and insulting (which generally involves shame).

But, ultimately, we (mostly, or maybe most of us) don't mean it. And since, by the time we cool down, the other driver has long disappeared and we cannot retract our words to him, the poet asks us to remember to request of G-d not to act on our curses and insults.

<sup>15</sup> קרבת מקום, עורכים גלעד מאירי ונועה שקרגי, משכל, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> and my—ולמקללי נפשי תדום Paul Shaviv, pointed out to me that this is a play on the words of the phrase ברכות דף יז and whose origin is in the *amidah*, and whose origin is in the *amidah*, and whose origin is in the *amidah*.

## Our Days Are Like a Passing Shadow—<sup>17</sup> כצל עובר

*A man, in his life* <sup>18,19</sup> *Yehuda Amichai*

A man, in his life, does not have the time  
to have time for everything.

And he does not have enough seasons to  
have a season

For each thing. Kohelet was wrong when  
he said so.

A person must hate and love at the same  
time

With the same eyes cry, and with the  
same eyes laugh

With the same hands throw stones  
And with the same hands collect them  
Make love in war and war in love.

And hate and forgive and forget and  
remember

And organize and confuse and eat and  
digest

That which a long history

Has been doing for very many years.

In his life, a man does not have the time

When he loses, he searches

When he finds, he forgets

When he forgets, he loves

And when he loves, he begins to forget.

He will die a death of figs<sup>20</sup> in the autumn  
Wizened and full of his own essence, and  
sweet.

The leaves are drying on the ground  
And the naked branches are already pointing  
To the place where there is time for  
everything.

אדם בחייו אין לו זמן שיהיה לו  
זמן לכל  
ואין לו עת שתהיה לו עת  
לכל חפץ. קהלת לא צדק כשאמר כך

אדם צריך לשנוא ולאהוב בבת אחת  
באותן עיניים לבכות ובאותן עיניים  
לצחוק  
באותן ידיים לזרוק אבנים  
ובאותן ידיים לאסוף אותן  
לעשות אהבה במלחמה ומלחמה  
באהבה.

ולשנוא ולסלוח ולזכור ולשכוח  
ולסדר ולבלבל ולאכול ולעכל  
את מה שהיסטוריה ארוכה  
עושה בשנים רבות מאוד.

אדם בחייו אין לו זמן  
כשהוא מאבד הוא מחפש  
כשהוא מוצא הוא שוכח  
כשהוא שוכח הוא אוהב  
וכשהוא אוהב הוא מתחיל לשכוח.

מות תאנים ימות בסתיו  
מצומק ומלא עצמו ומתוק  
העלים מתייבשים על האדמה  
והענפים הערומים כבר מצביעים  
אל המקום שבו זמן לכל

<sup>17</sup> תהילים, קמ"ד ד.

<sup>18</sup> Only part of the poem is presented here.

<sup>19</sup> שעת החסד, שוקן, ירושלים תשמ"ג.

<sup>20</sup> A possible reference to the famous poem, *Figs*, by D.H. Lawrence.

In this magnificent poem, which begins as a dialogue with *Kobelet*,<sup>21</sup> Yehuda Amichai, one of Israel's greatest poets, is bursting with action, discovery, and feelings. But he is pressed for time—so he compresses.

A brief history of this poem. It originates as sentiments expressed in a letter written by Amichai in 1947, in the period between the Holocaust and the creation of the state of Israel. A time of despair and hope. These sentiments waited for approximately thirty-five years, until Amichai was around sixty, to be converted by him into the above poem. There is something about nearing old age and death, that focuses the mind on the *מלאכה מרובה*—the much work to still be done.

We can love and hate at the same time, and sometimes the objects of our love and our hate are one and the same. We can be jealous and proud and admiring, and angry and sad, and tired and resigned and yearning. Amichai suggests that we are emotional multi-taskers, human oxymorons. And we have to be, because we do not have enough time in our brief lives to feel only one thing at a time. To be fully ourselves, we must be walking contradictions.

There is an interesting debate on the consequences of human beings being given an infinite lifetime. In his novel, *Einstein's Dreams*,<sup>22</sup> Alan Lightman postulates that, facing an infinite lifetime, humanity would divide into two distinct groups: the *Laters* and the *Nows*. He says:

The *Laters* reason that there is no hurry to begin their classes at the university, to learn a second language, to read Voltaire or Newton, to seek promotion in their jobs, to fall in love, to raise a family. For all these things, there is an infinite span of time. In endless time, all things can be accomplished. Thus, all things can wait. Indeed, hasty actions breed mistakes. And who can argue with their logic? .... The *Laters* sit in cafés sipping coffee and discussing the possibilities of life .

And

The *Nows* note that with infinite lives, they can do all they can imagine. They will have an infinite number of careers, they will marry an infinite number of times, they will change their politics infinitely. Each person will be a lawyer, a bricklayer, a writer, an accountant, a painter, a physician, a farmer. .... In order to taste the infinities of life, they begin early and never go slowly. And who can question their logic? .... They are the owners of the cafés, the college professors, the doctors and nurses, the politicians, the people who rock their legs constantly whenever they sit down.

Would Amichai be a *Later* or a *Now*?

<sup>21</sup> *Kobelet*, chapter 3.

<sup>22</sup> See the chapter titled "9 June 1905," in Alan Lightman's *Einstein's Dreams* (Vintage, 2004).

## Art Thou Orthodox?

Orthodox Judaism has an uneasy relationship with art. And this goes well beyond the biblical prohibition on ‘graven images’ *פסל וכל תמונה* <sup>23</sup>. As a compromise, Orthodoxy has now broadly limited this prohibition to explicit images of physical human beauty, but art is not solely about beauty. It is often about *commentary*, be it pictorial or verbal. As is clear from the next poem, the Orthodox artist must negotiate a fine line—to be and to be not.

### *A Jewish Poet*<sup>24</sup> *Yehoshua November*

It is hard to be a Jewish poet.  
 You cannot say things about G-d  
 that will offend the disbelievers.  
 And you always have to remind someone  
 it wasn't your people who killed their savior.  
 And Solomon and David are always laughing  
 over your shoulder  
 like a father and son ridiculing the unfavored brother.  
 And you cannot entice people with the sloping  
 parts of a woman's body  
 because you must always remain pure.  
 And every day you have to ask yourself why you're writing  
 when there is already the one great book.  
 It is hard to be a Jewish poet.  
 You cannot say anything about the disbelievers,  
 which might offend G-d.

The poet's message is that an ongoing balancing act is required of an Orthodox Jewish poet. This is captured by lines two and three, and again the last two lines of the poem. “You cannot say things about G-d that will offend the disbelievers” is the sense that much of the modern, secular world views an Orthodox G-d (as opposed to their “a la carte god”) as incompatible with poetry. And, ironically, because G-d does not negate his creations, “You cannot say anything about the disbelievers, which might offend G-d.” Notwithstanding the fact that an Orthodox poet may disagree with the lifestyle of the secular, he cannot criticize *them*, because that will offend G-d.

An Orthodox, and, in particular, an ultra-Orthodox poet such as November, must therefore continuously walk on eggshells, and live, at least professionally, in internal and external conflict.

<sup>23</sup> I am still old enough to remember seeing some Hassidic Rebbes covering their faces so as to avoid being photographed. *Tzadikim* cards came much later.

<sup>24</sup> From the book by Yehoshua November, *Two Worlds Exist* (Orison Books, 2016).

Internally, the poet must face his own self-doubt in presuming to write poetry in the face of the great Jewish poets of the bible: King David and King Solomon. And, is he wasting his time given that he already has a Book that contains all there is to be said? Is his writing בטול זמן—the negation of time? And, moreover, how far can he go without explicitly or implicitly wandering over the line of לשון נקיה—clean language?

Externally, the poet living in an Orthodox society may also have to be careful not to offend those in his community who may be quietly (at least for now) disapproving. And then, we all want recognition by our peers. Do non-Jewish or secular Jewish poets consider his work worthy? Do they even accept that there can be an Orthodox poet?

November is convincing—it is hard to be a(n Orthodox) Jewish poet.



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