



KOL

HAMEVASER

THE JEWISH THOUGHT MAGAZINE OF THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY

**Avoiding Mixed Messages:
Learning to Take Pride in
our Diversity**
Gabrielle Hiller, p. 4

Adjusting Our Microscope
Elisheva Friedman, p. 5

Israel's Best PR Campaign
Atara Siegel, p. 7

**The King and I:
Maimonides' and the
Besht's Views on Mans
Obligation to Cleave to the
Divine**
Zev Kahane, p. 8

**An Interview with Rabbi
Yehoshua Fass**
Staff, p. 14

Creative Arts Section
p. 22-24

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ABOUT KOL HAMEVASER

Kol Hamevaser, the Jewish Thought magazine of the Yeshiva University student body, is dedicated to sparking discussion of Jewish issues on the Yeshiva University campus and beyond. The magazine hopes to facilitate the religious and intellectual growth of its readership and serves as a forum for students to express their views on a variety of issues that face the Jewish community. It also provides opportunities for young thinkers to engage Judaism intellectually and creatively, and to mature into confident leaders.

Kol Hamevaser is published monthly and its primary contributors are undergraduates, although it includes input from RIETS Roshei Yeshivah, YU professors, and outside figures. In addition to its print magazine, *Kol Hamevaser* also sponsors special events, speakers, discussion groups, conferences, and shabbatonim.

We encourage anyone interested in writing about or discussing Jewish issues to get involved in our community, and to participate in the magazine, the conversation, and our club's events. Find us online at kolhamevaser.com, or on Facebook or Twitter.

Avoiding Mixed Messages: Learning to Take Pride in our Diversity 4
Editor-in-chief and soon-to-be Stern graduate has a message for the administration about diversity on campus.
Gabrielle Hiller

Adjusting Our Microscope 5
Response to Atara Siegel's Jerusalem Post article, "Why Israel is Losing Support from Jewish Students in US"
Elisheva Friedman

Israel's Best PR Campaign 7
In defense of openly acknowledging Israel's faults.
Atara Siegel

The King and I: Maimonides' and the Besht's Views on Man's Obligation to Cleave to the Divine 8
Entering the king's palace with Rambam and the Be"sh.
Zev Kahane

Morality and Advertising 11
An overview of morality and advertising in American and Jewish law.
Nora Ellison

The Right to Life for the Nation of Amalek 13
A survey of approaches to the moral nature of mehiyat Amalek.
Atara Siegel

An Interview with Rabbi Yehoshua Fass 14
Rabbi Yehoshua Fass talks about his experiences as co-founder of Nefesh B'Nefesh.
Staff

Putting Magic in its Place: Appreciating Contextual Differences 16
Considering the significance of contextual variance in the Torah's prohibitions of magic.
Sarah Robinson

Four Media of Worship: Rav Soloveitchik's Worship of the Heart 17
Revisiting the role of Israel in our religious lives.
Miriam Khukhashvili

Approaching Bereshit 18
Understanding how Bereshit is taught in American high schools.
Zahava Gersten

The Real Challenge of Tsniut 19
Exploring the benefits of dressing modestly, and discussing how to present the mitzvah of tsniut positively.
Jamie Epstein

CREATIVE ARTS
Walking the Tightrope Called Life 22
A review of Majesty and Humility, a book by R. Reuven Ziegler, which explores the thought of R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik.
Mati Engel

Images from the Yeshiva University Museum 23-24

Editors' Thoughts: A Remarkable Student Body

BY: CHESKY KOPEL

Four years of involvement with *Kol Hamevaser*, including two years with its editorial board, leave me feeling sentimental. I have tremendous appreciation for the staff writers, the larger community of event participants, and the readers, especially those among them who confront us with their severe grievances to help collectively make *Kol Hamevaser* the best Jewish Thought magazine it can be. I feel pride in what we have accomplished together and confidence that it only gets better from here. I encourage YU students and others to become involved in *Kol Hamevaser* under its incoming leadership, to take part in the valuable exercise of open discussion and serious engagement with Torah ideas.

Readers of this introduction have likely encountered *Kol Hamevaser* articles in the past. They may have read Elana Raskas' scrutiny of Modern Orthodoxy's role as an "other" in American Jewry,¹ or Davida Kollmar's open letter about the experience of *tefillah* on the women's side of the *mehitsah*,² or Roni Zemelman's illumination of Hanukkah's importance for Secular Zionism,³ or the exchange of Ariel Caplan and Ilana Gadish concerning women in Orthodox clergy,⁴ or the sparring of Elliot Resnick and his many responders over the religious value of the YC Bible Department.⁵ In fact, they very likely read all of the above articles, because *these articles all went viral*. *Kol Hamevaser* articles like these and many others have attracted widespread attention and engendered dynamic conversation, and they did so despite addressing ideas rather than scandals and rumors.

With pride, I can report that *Kol Hamevaser* has made a name for itself, but this name actually has a long and storied history. The original *mevaser* of the *mesorah* was the *mevaser tov* (good herald)⁶ of the prophetic vision of Isaiah 52:7, coming portentously over the hills to announce the arrival of peace and salvation. He makes his second appearance in a well-known eschatological *piyyut* of R. El'azar ha-Kalir in the *Hoshana Rabbah* liturgy, announced in the *piyyut*'s refrain with the declaration, "*kol mevaser mevaser ve-omer*" ("the voice of the herald heralds and proclaims!").⁷ Subsequently, the *Kol Mevaser* title was borrowed for a late-nineteenth-century Yiddish news periodical and literary magazine, affiliated with the early Hebrew weekly *ha-Melits*.⁸ Nearly a century later, R. Meshullam Rath, an influential Galician rabbi and religious Zionist *oleh* residing in Jerusalem,

published a work of halakhic responsa by the same title.⁹ Another decade later, *Hamevaser* was born in Washington Heights as the official student publication of RIETS and YU's other "religious divisions," the old term for the men's morning Torah Studies programs.¹⁰ *Hamevaser*, which later included women from Stern and became YU's first co-ed publication in 1979, rivaled *The Commentator* for four decades, at times as a religious oriented newspaper and at times as a Jewish Thought magazine, until its ultimate demise in 2002. In the fall of 2007, the staff of *The Commentator* re-launched the *Hamevaser* project but was prevented from reinstating the same title by a copyright dispute. Instead, *Kol Hamevaser* ("voice of the herald," or perhaps better rendered here as "echo of *Hamevaser*") was born as a fully gender-integrated, independent student Jewish Thought magazine.¹¹

Other institutions continue to bear a similar name, including a Yiddish broadcasting hotline (try 212-444-1100), a French online Jewish music service (www.kolmevaser.com), and a boys' yeshiva high-school in Mevasseret Tsion, Israel (www.kol-mevaser.com), but this publication is, to this writer's knowledge, the only English-language bearer of the name as well as the most recognized of the lot in Google searches.

Our own *Kol Hamevaser* has thrived over the last six years, earning its place in the aforementioned onomastical (study of proper names) tradition, thanks primarily to its committed, passionate readership among the remarkable students of Yeshiva University. I have no doubt that this institution's single greatest asset is its student body, full of talented and socially-concerned young adults poised to impact the Jewish world and larger society in profound ways. These students can be the heralds of YU's future, the ones who continue the conversation and never stop confronting the challenges of our community. And I fervently believe that it is incumbent upon YU students to take greater initiative in doing so in order for the community to continue to thrive and remain relevant.

It is all too clear to me where this initiative should be directed. We need to decry racism in the rabbinate, no matter whom it comes from. We need to protest loudly that no more Orthodox couples marry without signing a halakhic prenup. We need to stress the importance of *aliyah*

and active concern for Israel's future in our shuls and schools. We need to make our voices heard in the struggle for religious tolerance at Jewish holy places in Israel. We need to acknowledge more publicly that the majority of us are fully aware of homosexuality and perturbed by the continued state of alienation experienced by gay Jews in Orthodox communities.

We need to speak more loudly and with greater unity to decry the university's apparent complacency in investigating decades-old charges of sexual abuse in its boys' high school. This problem will not go away on its own; YU must show that abuse will not be tolerated on these campuses, that the administration cares more for the victims than for the legacies of its own faculty members, and the students are in the greatest position of all to make this happen. We have a great deal at stake in this scandal as well; the value of a YU education may even depend upon it, as *The Jewish Daily Forward* consistently labors to ensure that Yeshiva University is never mentioned in the public media without a accompanying reminder of the sex abuse history (and of *The Forward's* role in bringing that history to light).¹²

YU students have demonstrated how productive a forum like *Kol Hamevaser* can be. I am confident that they will continue to do so in issues to come. This issue, the last for me and for fellow editors Gabrielle Hiller and Chumie Yagod, concludes the academic year by engaging questions of morality and responsibility in the life of the Jew. I would also like to use this opportunity to welcome the new editors for the coming academic year: Adam Friedmann, currently the associate editor on the Wilf Campus, will become editor-in-chief along with Atara Siegel, and Kimberly Hay and Dovi Nadel will take over as associate editors.

Kol Hamevaser extends best wishes for the summer. Thank you for reading.

Chesky Kopel is a senior at YC majoring in History, and is an editor-in-chief for Kol Hamevaser.

1 Elana Raskas, "Modern Orthodoxy: The 'Other' within American Jewry," *Kol Hamevaser* 5,5 (2012): 10-11, available at: www.kolhamevaser.com.

2 Davida Kollmar, "Our Side of the *Mehitsah*: An Open Letter," *Kol Hamevaser* 6,3 (2013): 3-4, available at: www.kolhamevaser.com.

3 Roni Zemelman, "Agnon's 'Whirlwind of Voices': Secular Zionism, Hanukkah, and Contemporary Jewish Identity," *Kol Hamevaser* 6,3 (2012): 16-17, available at: www.kolhamevaser.com.

4 Ariel Caplan, "Rav Lakhen Benot Yisrael: Humility and Rabba-nut," *Kol Hamevaser* 5,1 (2011): 10-12; Ilana Gadish, "A Response to Ariel Caplan," *Kol Hamevaser* 5,3 (2012): 14-15; and Ariel Caplan, "Motivations, Populations, and the Essence of Humility: Ariel Caplan Responds," *Ibid.* 16-18, all available at: www.kolhamevaser.com.

5 Elliot Resnick, "Shut Down the Bible Department," *Kol Hamevaser* 6,5 (2013): 4; Simcha Gross, "How Long Will You Limp Between Opinions?: On the Difference Between the Academy and the *Yeshivah*," *Kol Hamevaser* 6,6 (2013): 3-4; Nathan Hyman, "In Defense of the 'Shocking' and 'Anti-Traditional': A Response to Elliot Resnick," *Ibid.* 4-5; and Judah Diamant, "Yeshiva College, Please Tolerate *Benei Torah*," *Ibid.* 5, all available at: www.kolhamevaser.com.

6 All translations in this article are my own.

7 *Hoshanot* service for *Hoshana Rabbah*.

8 See Sol Liptzin, *A History of Yiddish Literature* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1985), 41-42.

9 R. Meshullam Rath, *Shu"t Kol Mevaser* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kuk, 1956, Hebrew).

10 This phrase appeared on *Hamevaser's* masthead for over a decade. All *Hamevaser* history above derives from the author's own investigation with the resources of the Mendel Gottesman Library. The *Hamevaser* microfilm is glaringly incomplete and the definitive history of the publication has yet to be written.

11 All *Kol Hamevaser* history above derives from the author's own investigation of correspondence with the individuals involved in the founding of the publication.

12 See, for instance, Jane Eisner, "What David Brooks Didn't Say About the Orthodox," *The Jewish Daily Forward, Forward Thinking* blog, 8 March, 2013; and Paul Berger, "Yeshiva Alumni Angry Over Award for Jimmy Carter - Not Hershel Schachter," *The Jewish Daily Forward*, 14 April, 2013, both available at: www.forward.com.

Avoiding Mixed Messages: Learning to Take Pride in Our Diversity

BY: GABRIELLE HILLER

When I decided to attend Stern College for Women, I was warned that I would be in a bubble for the entirety of my college experience. I had conversations with concerned friends and family members who feared that I would not learn to interact with the larger world community. And, indeed, many of us at Stern are quite sheltered from the outside world, especially in comparison with our friends at other colleges. Yet, ironically, within my first few weeks at Stern, the warnings fell flat. Yes, Stern is a Jewish bubble. But people often fail to realize that this Jewish bubble is large and multifaceted. It is full of diversity.

Unexpectedly, I became apprehensive of that diversity. Prior to attending Stern, I had always been ensconced among people who valued, promoted, fostered, and supported women's Torah learning on an advanced level. While I knew that there were others who disagreed with the view I was raised with, this awareness was almost hypothetical. I never had to confront naysayers face to face. And so, when I began Stern, surrounded by people with different beliefs from my own, I did not know what to do or how to react. In my first semester here, I was very defensive of my values. Sitting in the *beit midrash*, I imagined passersby quietly criticizing me for learning Gemara. I would get upset whenever I heard someone say something that was contrary to my beliefs. I would discuss my frustrations with my friends for hours.

But, over time, things changed. Largely thanks to the amazing opportunities afforded students by the Center for the Jewish Future, including Torah Tours and the Winter Break and Summer missions, I was exposed to Jewish diversity up close. Unlike my previous experiences, I was not just hearing about the diversity; I was interacting with that diversity and learning to understand it. Many of us consider ourselves tolerant and (ironically) belittle those who we see as less open-minded. And indeed, before I started Stern, I thought I was a tolerant person. But seeing how much my perspective has changed over the past few years, I realize that I was not really tolerant before. I had been so focused on diversity among Jews that I forgot to appreciate our commonalities. I did not and could not understand the beliefs of Jews different from me. But my experiences with the CJF changed that. I learned to appreciate that just as I was raised in a certain way and taught to believe in certain things, so, too, was everyone else. I do not have to agree with other people's views, but I do need to respect them and

to understand them, and that is one gift that Stern has given me: the understanding that, despite our differences, we are, at the core, one nation. In this sense, I have truly been enabled and ennobled by my time at Stern.

And I do not think that I am the only one who has learned to appreciate our differences. An amazing atmosphere full of diversity has been created here at Stern College. On an extra-curricular level, the Torah Activities Council oversees a large variety of clubs, including Mechinah, TEIQU, Chabad, and Bavli Ba'Erev, that appeal to all different populations of the student body. While there exists the common stereotype of women grouped together by seminary in the caf, I have also seen a myriad of friendships flower among people from very different backgrounds. On an academic level, there are Jewish Studies classes to fit the needs of women with different interests and varying proficiency levels. Personally, I have been given exceptional opportunities

YU needs to seriously ask itself the important question: we claim to be a flagship institution of Modern Orthodoxy, a model, a beacon, of what the Jewish nation should emulate. If that is so, are we going to be followers, continuing to downplay our support for the multiple walks of life, or are we going to be role models, trendsetters, proudly preaching our ideals?

to continue my Gemara learning. Over my time here, not only has the number of women taking Gemara courses tripled, but a second advanced *shi'ur* was added to Stern's course offerings as well. I also feel privileged to continue my learning in Stern's Master's Program in Biblical and Talmudic Interpretation (previously known as GPATS) next year. While I can only speak for Stern, I think and hope that my experience is reflective of a greater university value.

Yet, while YU may have taught me the invaluable lesson of appreciating our diversity, the administration, those responsible for publicizing and advertising who we are and what we are about, do not appear confident enough to declare that value of diversity to the greater Jewish community, specifically when it comes to advanced women's learning. This disconnect between what YU teaches its students and what it publicizes to the outside world first became apparent to me after hearing about an incident that occurred a few months ago. Over the

summer, YU Admissions wished to create a brochure with a photo of women learning in the *beit midrash*. The two women who posed for this photo were specifically asked not to learn Gemara, and instead to have a Tanakh open in front of them. Why this odd request? Because, they said, the last time YU put out a brochure with a photo of women learning Gemara, people called and complained. They do not want that to happen again. While I was upset when I heard about this incident, I eventually dismissed it as one isolated occurrence. Yes, people say imprudent things, but I have been given amazing opportunities at YU, I reasoned. This was not worth blowing out of proportion. But then the same thing happened again. Just recently, an almost identical situation occurred in our *beit midrash*. Before posing for the photo, the women learning there were asked to put away their Gemarot. Despite the opportunities for advanced learning at Stern, the administration, which oversees Admissions, does not seem prepared to

publicize this aspect of our diversity.

Unfortunately, this is not the only example of YU downplaying the opportunities available to the population at Stern interested in Gemara learning. I have met numerous Stern women who have never even heard of GPATS, a program that takes place within our very walls! I have also met students who did not know that Stern even offered Gemara. While I originally felt frustrated with these students, I eventually realized that they were not at fault. Rather, their ignorance of these opportunities was a result of a lack of action by the administration. If YU offers a program and is, ostensibly, proud of it – or else why would the administration allocate some of its limited resources to the program? – they should be open about it and advertise it. All YU students should know about GPATS, just as they should know about Einstein, Cardozo, Ferkauf, Revel, Wurzweiler, and Azrieli. All YU students should know about the Gemara course offerings, just as they should know about the Bible, Physics, Jewish Philosophy,

and History course offerings.

Most students at YU are well aware, judging by the YU paraphernalia constantly showered upon us, that YU wishes for us to have school pride. And, indeed, graduating from Stern College at the end of this year, I do have school pride. I proudly tell my friends of the amazing opportunities and wonderful people that can be found on our campus. But there are moments, like when I hear about the instances described above, that confuse me. What exactly does YU want me to have pride in? Every community has values, and YU claims to have values as well. Judging based on the course offerings and the opportunities available here, YU really does value the diversity of our Jewish nation. My experiences here have made me proud of that. But are they, those in the administration, proud of it? They need to either pick one side, to choose to cater to one part of the Jewish community, or be proud that they cater to the needs of many.

Perhaps this is not a realistic expectation; if the wider Jewish community is not so tolerant and proud of its diversity – as demonstrated in one way by the angry phone calls to YU Admissions – then how can YU be proud and manage to stay open, continuing to attract students from across the spectrum? If this, indeed, is the problem, YU needs to seriously ask itself the important question: We claim to be a flagship institution of Modern Orthodoxy, a model, a beacon, of what the Jewish nation should emulate. If that is so, are we going to be followers, continuing to downplay our support for the multiple walks of life, or are we going to be role models, trendsetters, proudly preaching our ideals? YU has taught me the necessity of appreciating and valuing the complexity of our community. I just hope that YU will not only continue to teach its students this important lesson of valuing diversity but also proudly and confidently declare it to the world.¹

Gabrielle Hiller is a senior at SCW majoring in Jewish Education, and is an editor-in-chief for Kol Hamevaser.

¹ Many thanks to the numerous people who provided constructive feedback on this article.

Adjusting Our Microscope

BY: ELISHEVA FRIEDMAN

I am a Jewish undergraduate student on a secular campus. At universities like mine, there is a diverse array of intelligent, moral Jewish students. And yet, despite the different political and religious backgrounds, many of these students unite in appreciating the nature and urgency of the media crisis that threatens Israel as well as Diaspora Jewish communities. Campuses on which Jews are a minority have “boycott Israel” campaigns, apartheid walls, and signs equating Israel and Zionism with racism. There have been troubling incidents such as the defacing of the Israeli flag with red paint during “multicultural week.” Some professors and students make anti-Israel remarks during lectures and tutorials, and multiple student groups engage in anti-Israel activism. The majority of students (one hopes) do not care, but also want to “stay out of it” — leaving a tiny core of pro-Israel students who differ in religious and political backgrounds or beliefs, but who nevertheless unite to stand up for Israel. Yeshiva University students may not face this type of environment, but we can use your help.

To outside communities, Yeshiva University, as a formidable modern Orthodox Jewish institution, stands for something, and what comes from it carries weight. Even though many committed (and Orthodox) Jews are not at YU, YU is viewed by many as representative of Modern Orthodox Jews. Therefore, many committed Jewish communities understandably look to YU for support. Thus, it is important that people at YU keep these broader Jewish communities in mind. And, indeed, Yeshiva University’s Center for the Jewish Future does valuable work to enhance and strengthen prospects for the Jewish future and to prepare future Jewish leaders.

However, it is not just YU institutions that must be aware of their responsibilities. Student leaders at YU must also be cognizant of the differences and challenges faced by the majority of Jewish students in North America. Unfortunately, some of us on other campuses have been feeling more and more let down by the students at YU. We can understand expressive students who like to consider different viewpoints to get to the most honest and moral position possible. But we are very troubled by statements and articles from some articulate YU students that exhibit an overly negative, overly critical stance toward Israel.¹

A major example that stands out is a

recent Jerusalem Post op-ed by YU student Atara Siegel.² The article, entitled “Why Israel is Losing Support from Jewish Students in US,” takes an overly critical, unforgiving stance toward Israel. In fact, it even seems to suggest that standing up for Israel is not justified.

I respect Atara Siegel, her scholarship, and her past articles in Kol Hamevaser. She has talent and potential. That said, student writers and those involving themselves in public discourse need to understand the vantage point of others whom they represent. And although she may have meant well while writing her JPost op-ed, some of us found it hurtful, damaging, and offensive.

Ms. Siegel, in writing her Jerusalem Post opinion piece, perhaps wished to express indignation at possible evidence of racism and violence in Israel. I believe that she meant to express in a sufficiently vehement manner her revulsion and utter condemnation of any wrongdoing among Jews in Israel, especially since it seemed to her and to others as if these incidents are part of a growing phenomenon among Israelis. If she simply meant to address wrongdoing, then she had very good intentions.

But there is a major problem with her article. Despite her intentions to decry

Ms. Siegel... perhaps wished to express indignation at possible evidence of racism and violence in Israel... those who read it receive another message: that it is not worth supporting Israel unless it is flawless, even though other countries do not come close to Israel’s moral standards.

wrongdoing, those who read it receive another message: that it is not worth supporting Israel unless it is flawless, even though other countries do not come close to Israel’s moral standards. This approach does not place incidents in Israel within their broader context. And it is discouraging for students on other campuses who face pressure when they try to bravely stand up for Israel and must also deal with other groups who have no qualms about targeting Israel and only Israel.

It is healthy to have humility and to identify flaws within our own nation—we should always strive to improve. However, Ms. Siegel’s article was published in a forum

for a wider and more varied audience, including many who face irrational hatred of Israel that has nothing to do with fringe flaws. And although Ms. Siegel touched on important issues, the conclusions were too drastic.

The title, “Why Israel is Losing Support from Jewish Students in US,” is misleading and highly problematic. Whether or not the title was composed by the author, it is still very off-putting. The title implies that Ms. Siegel is speaking for most US Jewish students, yet most US Jewish students do not attend a unique campus like Yeshiva University, where the majority of the student body is likely to be pro-Israel. Most YU students do not know what it is like to be a student at a typical university, where many Jews confront vastly different challenges and environments from those at YU. Some students from other campuses were, therefore, nonplussed to see an article that allows itself to speak for all or most US Jewish students, that suggests that the writer’s conclusions are shared by most others. The article was written by one student about her personal experience. It is not representative of the varied experiences of pro-Israel students on other campuses. It is problematic for one person on a Jewish campus to generalize based on limited anecdotal experience, presenting her individual experience as the reason for a trend occurring mostly among people who neither experience her type of campus atmosphere nor share her highly committed and engaged background and upbringing.

Ms. Siegel’s article depicts settlers as largely being violent aggressors. Her only portrayal of settlements includes “settlers shooting Palestinians” and “price tag attacks occur[ring] with... regularity.” This representation bolsters anti-Israel groups like SAIA or SJP (Students Against Israeli Apartheid, or its counterpart, Students for Justice in Palestine, prominent and active on many campuses) who love to use articles such as this as “proof” in their attempts to delegitimize settlers or Israel as a whole. Furthermore, most Jews have a very vague notion of what “settlements” and the “Green Line” are in general, and tend to lump all settlements together. People think, “Wow, if an Orthodox person is admitting that those religious settlers are violent and immoral, imagine how much worse the truth must be!” Thus, the article contributes to the inaccurate, generically negative portrayal of settlers and settlements.

The article lacked context in its treatment of the “many...reports of ‘Price Tag’

attacks.” Ms. Siegel could have presented Yitshar as the disturbing exception that it is. She could have proceeded to mention mainstream yishuvim — which most people never hear about, and which house some of the most moral, sensitive human beings — such as Alon Shevut, Neveh Daniel, and Efrat, or she could have noted the Rami Levi supermarket where Palestinians and Jews coexist, working and shopping together in peace. Nothing was mentioned about the many cooperative initiatives by Israel and the many positive interactions



between “settlers” and Palestinians.

Of course we condemn racism, vandalism, and unprovoked violence, but this is condemned in Israel, too. The article suggests that the “Price Tag” attacks are “tolerated,” but reluctantly concedes that “many important politicians as well as ordinary citizens have deplored recent... statements and incidents.”³ Why does the author belittle these points? Instead of ostracizing Israel for what we perceive as an insufficient response, we must remember that Israel does respond. This article inadvertently fuels those pushing anti-Israel or anti-settlement agendas, and misleads those who are unaware of the nuances and reality of the situation.

Ms. Siegel cites “[p]oliticians making veiled and not-so-veiled racist statements about African migrants.” While there may have been some racist comments about the African migrants, there was no consideration that other comments may have just been valid concerns about security and demographic issues that apply to Israel’s unique situation. Although concerns about people claiming refugee status may invariably sound unwelcoming, they should not be categorically considered racist. Speaking of illegal migrants as “infiltrators” does not sound pleasant, but it is not racist either. The refugee situation is a complex, sensitive and painful issue, but not simply a race issue.

Moreover, there was no recognition in the article that distasteful comments are not unique to Israeli parliamentarians. Would we stop supporting the United States because of a few extremists, or because of some distasteful comments from representatives in Congress?

The JPost article went too far, sending the strong message that it is not worth supporting Israel if Israel is not perfect, if there is some activity in Israel that does not adhere to our ideal standards: "But even one racist slur is a problem, even one unprovoked price tag attack damages Israel's claim to have the moral high ground in its relations with Palestinians." We should be dismayed at bad behavior, and try to stop it in an effective way, to the extent it exists. But to say that instances of "racist slurs," or even some materially tangible, destructive acts ruin "Israel's... moral high ground" is unreasonable. It is simple to illustrate why.

When one has ninety-five points out of one hundred on an exam, would one suggest that the five mistakes should disqualify the ninety-five correct responses? When other test scores range from twenties to seventies, whether the final grade is absolute or bell-curved, the score is still the top of the class by a significant margin.

Israel is surrounded by enemies engaging in gross human rights violations. And yet, faced with local and external hostility, Israel still manages to maintain an army with impeccable moral standards.⁴ In relative and absolute terms, Israel has a superior ethical track record. No country is above reproach and we wish there were no mistakes, but there are distasteful elements in every human society. It would not be realistic to expect perfection anywhere. In our imperfect world, Israel's few misdemeanors do not outweigh her overwhelming positive achievements. We cannot treat Israel as if in a vacuum. The problematic aspects must be compared in size, proportion, and nature with the behavior of other societies.

It is saddening for a pro-Israel student on a secular campus to read that someone feels unable to lobby for Israel because of some fringe violence or distasteful comments. Ms. Siegel writes about how, due to stories of misconduct by Israelis, she "could...not bring [her]self to spend a day urging [her] elected representatives to financially and politically support Israel." This statement unfairly magnifies the misbehavior of a few to represent Israel as a whole. It alienates pro-Israel, Zionist students who encounter anti-Israel campaigns in public spaces on their campuses, and who know that there are many who are vocally antagonistic to Israel but silent about regimes that commit actual atrocities. Israel has few friends in the international arena, and yet Israel provides

jobs and humanitarian aid to those who antagonize her. It is, therefore, crucial that we support Israel and encourage others to support Israel as well. If we do not support Israel, she will be truly alone.

Ms. Siegel writes that after "reading about the recent Yitzhar shooting" she "cringed... this article was jolting enough. But the real problem...is that there are too many of these articles." Ms. Siegel raises an important point about too much violence in Yitshar and too many articles about the violence there. But there are too many articles unfairly picking on Israel, and not enough articles showcasing the immense



good that occurs there; hardly any reporting the good that goes on in the "settlements." The overwhelming focus on Israel's flaws may influence people to think that Israel is a terrible place and not worth supporting. It is worrying that well-read, caring, articulate people feel such discomfort from disproportionate media portrayal - to the point that they abstain from lobbying for Israel, that they are influenced to be silent rather than giving Israel the vital support she needs.

None of us likes when some of our own act in a way that does not measure up to our ideals. But most of us outside YU hear criticism of Israel all the time, and it is often unjust or hypocritical. The response of many Jews on other campuses is not to believe negative media portrayal automatically, but to ask: Is this a balanced, proportionate, accurate depiction of events?

We aim for high standards and recognize that self-reflection is important. But it is damaging to criticize ourselves without looking at context; it is patronizing and hypocritical if we do not demand moral standards from others, too. Unfortunately, many castigate us without criticizing themselves or other groups; some use our attempts at honest self-criticism against us. We must carefully consider the consequences of our well-intentioned

words.

If there is a lack of support by North American Jewish students, it is not because of a few unpleasant-sounding incidents; it is more likely because the incidents are blown out of proportion. In the words of (or at least, in a phrase commonly attributed to) Mark Twain: "If you don't read the newspaper, you are uninformed. If you do read the newspaper, you are misinformed." There may be a significant problem of students "distancing" themselves from Israel,⁵ but the solution to this issue is not clear. And many Jews who are not advocates for Israel are simply apathetic because they are not knowledgeable enough about the issues and details, or because they are not aware of, or connected to, Judaism or Jewish communities. That problem is a serious one. Concluding that "US students [are] not supporting Israel" because of Israel's flaws obfuscates this problem.

We cannot afford to spend too much time scrutinizing our blemishes under a microscope. Israel is situated in a belligerent, threatening environment; yet, in spite of the challenging circumstances, Israel still shines morally. Let's remember to have hakkarat ha-tov, to appreciate the big picture. Focusing only on flaws within Israel is unproductive, and it distracts people from truly horrendous situations in the world.⁶ Too much humility or fastidiousness can send a false message that Israel is not a good and moral place overall, or that it is in the same category as those that are truly immoral. And if we want Israel to continue to thrive, with a proud, strong Jewish community within Israel and outside of it, we must present the big picture.

If you write or voice public statements about Israel or any topic of import, consider the possible impact of your comments and actions. Greater awareness about other student communities can strengthen all of us. There are many Jewish students today who are not very connected to Israel. Those of us who are committed and connected to Israel must step up to the plate. Remember, you represent an institution that serves as a pillar for other vibrant Jewish communities. Please continue to support Israel, even as we recognize that there are areas to improve.

We need a strong core to confidently, intelligently, articulately speak out in support of Israel and the Jewish communities, "the nation that stands alone."⁷

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1 Many were dismayed at the recent news that students from Cardozo Law School bestowed an award on the notoriously anti-Israel former president Jimmy Carter. Unfortunately, few outside YU realize that Cardozo has a much more varied group of students than that of the undergraduate programs at Yeshiva University. The Cardozo incident unfairly harms the reputation of YU, as it is not truly representative of Yeshiva University. However, hearing the news and the inaccurate conflation of Cardozo with the rest of YU reminded me of a problem that is also present within the undergraduate YU student body. More troubling than Cardozo student initiatives are articles and statements coming from a few of the most erudite and articulate undergraduate students that seem to show a lack of perspective or an overly critical approach to Israel.

2 Atara Siegel, "Why Israel is Losing Support from Jewish Students in US," *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 Jan., 2013, available at: www.jpost.com. All subsequent quotes from Siegel are from this article.

3 The government is also trying to do something productive to stop these acts: See Akiva Novick, "Shin Bet to Educate Hilltop Youth," *Ynet News*, 16 May, 2013, available at: www.ynetnews.com.

4 As Dr. Shawn Zelig Aster points out, it verges on the immoral by endangering its own citizens to prevent "collateral damage" (Shawn Zelig Aster, "Explaining the Dead Children of Gaza- and How to Avoid them," *YU Commentator Online*, 5 Dec, 2012, available at: www.yucommentator.org). One notes that Aster starts by writing, "It is hard for outsiders to grasp..." We should keep this introductory phrase in mind when we read news about Israel.

5 See Dr. Lisa D. Grant, "A Vision for Israel Education," (Paper Presented at the Network for Research in Jewish Education Conference), 2 June, 2008, available at: www.virtualmelton.huji.ac.il. See also Dr. Daniel Gordis' concerns about some JTS rabbinical students: Daniel Gordis, "Of Sermons and Strategies," *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 April, 2011, available at: www.jpost.com. (And see his piece affirming his points and responding to dismissive reactions to his original article: Daniel Gordis, "Jokes My Grandfather Told Me," *Daniel Gordis*, 16 October, 2011, available at: www.danielgordis.org. See also an op-ed following up and expanding on Gordis' original article: Gary Rosenblatt, "Alienation from Israel Hitting Liberal Seminaries," *The Jewish Week*, 3 May, 2011, available at: www.thejewishweek.com.)

6 See article by Roz Rothstein and Roberta Seid, "Dangerous Decoy: Ignoring Human Rights Abuses," *Jerusalem Post*, 20 April, 2013, available at www.jpost.com.

7 *Bamidbar* 23:9.

Israel's Best PR Campaign

BY: ATARA SIEGEL

Dear Elisheva,
One year ago on *Shavu'ot* I came across a disturbing article describing a violent price tag attack perpetrated by Israeli citizens of Yitshar against their Palestinian neighbors. I was troubled by this event in particular, troubled by the sense that I had been hearing of too many of these price tag attacks lately. Recent news has corroborated this feeling,



with a report from the Yerushalayim police department this past March recording fifty-six new price tag attacks perpetrated in the Yerushalayim area this year. More important than the specific number was the finding that the number of this type of attack is increasing, having doubled since last year.¹ I felt that things were going in the wrong direction - violence against Palestinians and foreigners was increasing instead of abating. Not lightly, I made the decision to write publicly about how we, as supporters of Israel, must condemn and distance ourselves from these types of acts if we do not want them to define us.

Never having studied on a secular college campus, I cannot pretend to understand the virulent anti-Israel sentiments you face, the hurtful lies you must combat on campus. I applaud you for standing up to this unfair and exaggerated criticism. And yet, I stand by what I wrote in my article last year that we cannot simply ignore the challenges Israel faces. No matter if a newspaper uses biased or loaded language, no matter if many media sources focus on more negative than positive stories from Israel, at the end of the day, that bias does not cancel out the fact that these attacks do occur. Biased reporting also does not remove our responsibility to address our faults when

they occur. It is no excuse to say that we are "better" than our neighbors, that at least we do not kill our own citizens like President Assad of Syria or send hundreds of rockets at civilian areas. Morality is not measured relatively, and we should not aim to simply be better than evil terrorists or ruthless dictators. Searching around for who is deserving of more blame will do no

good in fixing true problems that do exist.

Sadly, the town of Yitshar has been back in the news lately. After the recent tragic murder of an Israeli citizen of Yitshar, father of five Eviatar Borovsky, nearby residents responded by throwing rocks at Palestinian cars and a school bus carrying Palestinian girls, burning fields near two Palestinian villages, and wreaking havoc in the Palestinian village of Urif.² It is natural (and important) for us to condemn violence against our brothers and sisters, such as the horrible murder of Eviatar Borovsky, but it takes much more courage to speak up when our fellow Jews attack other innocents. And yes, we must speak up. As religious Jews, we pride ourselves on being a nation of people who are modest, compassionate, and doers of kindness.³ When people claiming to be religious, as the town of Yitshar advertises itself to be,⁴

act contrary to these qualities and lash out with inexcusable violence, when this violence begins to increase and become a trend, it is not enough to assume that these people are marginal, radical extremists who are perverting Torah teachings. We have to choose to marginalize them, we have to speak up and remind ourselves and the world that this is not what Judaism and Zionism represents, just as we would hope others would do if their compatriots were attacking Jews or making statements like "Jews are a cancer in our body."⁵ We can fight and condemn human rights abuses by our neighbors, but it is in many ways more important to hold ourselves to a higher standard, to address our own flaws, which, at the end of the day, are the only actions that we can truly control.

The fact that some Israelis are perpetrating these inexcusable acts of violence does not make the whole country "bad" or undeserving of our support. There are many wonderful, miraculous aspects of the State of Israel and many inspiring, loving people who live there. As Kalev and Yehoshua proclaimed, "*Tovah ha-arets me'od me'od!*" - "the land is very, very good!"⁶ Of course we should refute unfair attacks against Israel and point out positive stories about Israeli culture, charities, advances in healthcare, and international aid. But it also does not do anyone any good when we hide from the challenges Israel faces, when we fear we cannot speak about them without being demoralizing or anti-Israel. In fighting the "media war" for Israel, we could attempt to put the best spin on Israel,

We can fight and condemn human rights abuses by our neighbors, but it is in many ways more important to hold ourselves to a higher standard, to address our own flaws, which, at the end of the day, are the only actions that we can truly control.

minimizing her flaws and emphasizing her amazing positives. Perhaps this method will, in fact, convince our fellow students to support Israel and deflect attacks from anti-Israel groups on campus. Personally, however, I believe a more honest and nuanced approach to be possible. Instead of glossing over true problems we face, would not the best PR campaign to illustrate Israel's morality and justness in its dealings with Palestinians be to acknowledge openly our flaws and failures and step up efforts to fight them?

This is a conversation that we need to

have honestly and openly. Thank you, Elisheva, for continuing it.

Atara Siegel is a junior at SCW majoring in Psychology and is a staff writer for Kol Hamevaser.

1 Ron Friedman, "Livni on Mission to Stamp Out 'Price Tag' Attacks," *The Times of Israel*, 29 April, 2013, available at: www.timesofisrael.com.

2 Itamar Fleishman, "Settlers Throw Stones, Burn Fields After Terror Attack," *Ynetnews.com*, 30 April, 2013, available at: www.ynetnews.com.

3 *Devarim Rabbah* 3:4, s.v. *ve-shamar*.

4 "Yitzhar," *Shomron Liaison Office*, available at: www.goshomron.com.

5 See Ilan Lior and Tomer Zarchin, "Demonstrators Attack African Migrants in South Tel Aviv," *Haaretz*, 24 May, 2012, available at: www.haaretz.com. In May 2012, Knesset Member Miri Regev addressed a crowd of anti-immigrant demonstrators and told them "the Sudanese were a cancer in our body." Regev continues to serve as a member of Knesset and, in a survey of 600 Israeli adults, the Israel Democracy Institute found that fifty-two percent of Israeli Jews agreed with her statement. See, The Israel Democracy Institute, "The Peace Index-May 2012," available at: www.en.idi.org.il.

6 *Bamidbar* 14:7. Translation is my own.

The King and I: Maimonides' and the Besht's Views on Man's Obligation to Cleave to the Divine

BY: ZEV KAHANE

Introduction

We all grew up hearing stories about mighty kings who ruled their kingdoms from their magnificent palaces. Often, the plot in these stories involves a lower-class commoner who moves into this palace, transcending his social status and breaking through the proverbial palace walls. We love these stories. Is it not great to see the ascent from rags to riches? But how real are these stories? What does it really take to live in the king's palace? Are stories like these merely fairytales and fantasies?

Sometimes stories are just stories. But, throughout history, great Jewish thinkers have used stories like these to convey important theological doctrines. Parables about kings sitting on their thrones can actually relate to profound theosophical ideas about the divine nature and praxeological ideas about human worship.

These parables can help us better understand our religious obligations. As worshippers, we are certainly obligated to cleave to God, the King of all Kings. But how is this accomplished? What is one obligated to do to approach the king in his palace?

With certainty, we can deem R. Moses ben Maimon, commonly referred to as Rambam or Maimonides, and R. Israel ben Eli'ezer, commonly referred to as the Ba'al Shem Tov or the Besht, as two of the most influential Jewish thinkers in history. Each of them presents a parable about a king in his palace. Although these parables may seem similar in some initial sense, the two parables are actually representative of two very different theological perspectives. Maimonides' parable highlights his transcendent view of God, while the Besht's parable highlights his immanent view of God. As we will see, these opposite world views will also yield opposite perspectives regarding elitism, human worship, and man's religious obligations.

Maimonides and the Elite

At the tail end of *The Guide to the Perplexed*, Maimonides brings his parable, which relates to the superiority of the intellect and the worshiper's obligation to gain a philosophical understanding of God. Maimonides writes:

A king is in his palace, and all his subjects are partly in the country, and partly abroad. Of the former, some have their backs turned towards the king's palace, and their faces in another direction; and some are desirous and zealous to go to

the palace, seeking to inquire in his temple, and to minister before him, but have not yet seen even the face of the wall of the house. Of those that desire to go to the palace, some reach it, and go round about in search of the entrance gate; others have passed through the gate, and walk about in the ante-chamber; and others have succeeded in entering into the inner part of the palace, and being in the same room with the king in the royal palace. But even the latter do not immediately on entering the palace see the king, or speak to him; for, after having entered the inner part of the palace, another effort is required before they can stand before the king – at a distance, or close by – hear his words, or speak to him.¹

Maimonides' parable depicts a king in his palace with six different levels of surrounding citizens, spanning from those who are completely outside of the country to those who sit in the palace but do not actually meet the king. It is obvious that the king represents the Almighty God. How, though, do we understand these six different gradations of proximity? Maimonides continues with an explanation of what these different positions correspond to in worship of the divine:

1. The people who are abroad are all those that have no religion, neither one based on speculation nor one received by tradition...I consider these as irrational beings, and not as human beings; they are below mankind, but above monkeys, since they have the form and shape of man, and a mental faculty above that of the monkey.

2. Those who are in the country, but have their backs turned towards the king's palace, are those who possess religion, belief, and thought, but happen to hold false doctrine.

3. Those who desire to arrive at the palace, and to enter it, but have never yet seen it, are the mass of religious people; the multitude that observe the divine commandments, but are ignorant.

4. Those who arrive at the palace, but go round about it, are those who devote themselves exclusively to the study of the practical law; they believe traditionally in true principles of faith, and learn the practical worship



of God, but are not trained in philosophical treatment of the principles of the Law, and do not endeavor to establish the truth of their faith by proof.

5. Those who undertake to investigate the principles of religion, have come into the ante-chamber.

6. Those who have succeeded in finding a proof for everything that can be proved, who have a true knowledge of God, so far as a true knowledge can be attained, and are near the truth, wherever an approach to the truth is possible, they have reached the goal, and are in the palace in which the king lives.²

Corresponding to those who can actually see and speak to the king, Maimonides continues with one final level, a level attained only by the greatest of prophets:

7. There are some who direct all their mind toward the attainment of perfection in Metaphysics, devote themselves entirely to God, exclude from their thought every other thing, and employ all their intellectual faculties in the study of the Universe, in order to derive therefrom a proof for the existence of God, and to learn in every possible way how God rules all things; they form the class of those who have entered the palace, namely, the class of prophets.³

There are certainly some very controversial aspects of this passage. For example, Maimonides' suggestion that general masses who fulfill the commandments are not even considered to be in the palace, and his opinion that those who engage in philosophical study are on even a higher level than the sages who devote themselves to Torah study certainly have engendered a plethora of critical responses. It is not my goal, however, to focus on these controversial views. Rather, I want to focus on one specific idea that arises from Maimonides, regardless of who is ranked in what order. This is the idea of elitism.

It is clear from Maimonides' parable that not everyone is afforded the opportunity to encounter the king. There are various levels, and some people are just closer than others. Access to the palace is completely dependent on one's capabilities, opportunities, and production. In the continuation of this passage, Maimonides outlines a rigorous philosophical

curriculum that obligates man to master mathematics, logic, physics, and metaphysics. The study of Jewish law alone does not cut it. The study of physics alone does not cut it. Describing this rigorous program required to achieve these heights, Steven Harvey writes, "Maimonides' meaning here is quite clear: total devotion to God requires complete concentration and the absence of distractions; therefore, solitude is recommended. In the terminology of 3:51, if man is to achieve his highest end, the intellectual worship and love God, the emptying of the mind of all thought, save that of God alone, then clearly solitude is required. The longer one remains in this state, the stronger the intellect will be until that individual becomes rational in actuality and attains his ultimate perfection."⁴ This is certainly no program for the masses.

What results, therefore, is that the ability to encounter God is extremely limited and exclusive. This elitism is not merely limited to experiencing God, but even to worship; Maimonides says that "true worship of God is only possible when correct notions of Him have previously been conceived."⁵ Put in extreme terms – although this formulation does seem to reflect Maimonides' intention – those who fall short of elite philosopher status do not truly worship God. Divine worship requires a lot of work.

Divine Transcendence

This elite outlook on religious worship seems to be a direct result of Maimonides' general understanding of divine unity. Maimonides formulates his view on divine unity in the first section of *The Guide to the Perplexed*, where he addresses the topic of God's attributes and other terms that are commonly applied to God. The starting point for this discussion is Maimonides' unique understanding of divine unity. He explains:

If, however, you have a desire to rise to a higher state, viz., that of reflection, and truly to hold the conviction that God is One and possesses true unity, without admitting plurality or divisibility in any sense whatever, you must understand that God has no essential attribute in any form or in any sense whatever, and that the rejection of corporeality implies the rejection of essential attributes. Those who believe that God is One, and that He has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume plurality in their thoughts.⁶

This formulation of divine unity is not simply that there are no other deities; but, rather, Maimonides adopts a notion of divine simplicity. Leo Strauss explains, "As Maimonides indicates, the meaning of 'the Lord is one' is primarily that there is no one or nothing similar or equal to Him."⁷ The moment you attach any human attributes to God, you have limited God and His unity. Because of this understanding, Maimonides assumes that no human terms can be used to describe God. Using human terms in reference to God would imply a connection between God and the physical, something that is simply impossible. Later Maimonides explains:

That there is no correlation between Him and any of His creatures can easily be seen; for the characteristic of two objects correlative to each other is the equality of their reciprocal relation. Now, as God has absolute existence, while all other beings have only possible existence, as we shall show, there consequently cannot be any correlation between God and His creatures...It is impossible to imagine a relation between intellect and sight, although, as we believe, the same kind of existence is common to both; how, then, could a relation be imagined between any creature and God, who has nothing in common with any other being; for even the term existence is applied to Him and other things, according to our opinion, only by way of pure homonymy. Consequently there is no relation whatever between Him and any other being. For whenever we speak of a relation between two things, these belong to the same kind; but when two things belong to different kinds though of the same class, there is no relation between them.⁸

Maimonides, therefore, adopts a doctrine of apophatic theology –also known as negative theology– which claims that the only way to describe God is through negation. He explains:

Know that the negative attributes of God are the true attributes: they do not include any incorrect notions or any deficiency whatever in reference to God, while positive attributes imply polytheism, and are inadequate, as we have already shown...The negative attributes have this in common with the positive, that they necessarily circumscribe the object to some extent, although such circumscription consists only in the exclusion of what otherwise would not be excluded. In the following point, however, the negative attributes are distinguished from the positive. The positive attributes, although not peculiar to one thing, describe a portion of what we desire to know, either some part

of its essence or some of its accidents: the negative attributes, on the other hand, do not, as regards the essence of the thing which we desire to know, in any way tell us what it is, except it be indirectly, as has been shown in the instance given by us ...It is clear that He has no positive attribute whatever. The negative attributes, however, are those which are necessary to direct the mind to the truths which we must believe concerning God; for, on the one hand, they do not imply any plurality, and, on the other, they convey to man the highest possible knowledge of God; e.g., it has been established by proof that some being must exist besides those things which can be perceived by the senses, or apprehended by the mind; when we say of this being, that it exists, we mean that its non-existence is impossible.⁹

What emerges from all this is that the Maimonidean concept of God is a God completely separate from the world. There is nothing we can even say about God. Any connection we make between God and this world will result in a faulty understanding of divine unity. God, according to Maimonides, is completely transcendent. Summarizing Maimonides' view on the divine, Alvin J. Reines writes, "The absolute transcendence concept of deity is set forth by Maimonides in his formal discussion of God's attributes. By absolute transcendence is meant that God is in no way an entity that is to be found in human experience, neither as an object of knowledge nor as an object that enters into relation with humans in any other way... In presenting his absolute transcendence view, Maimonides states that persons who think or feel that they have knowledge of God or that they are otherwise in relation with Him not only commit fundamental philosophic errors, but are also deluded by their imaginations into mistaking fantasy for reality."¹⁰

With this appreciation for Maimonides' transcendent view of God, we can now return to the parable we opened with. The parable presented in the end of *The Guide* speaks about approaching God and experiencing the divine. But for Maimonides, God is distant. God is not at all in this world. Therefore, one must transcend this world to experience the divine. It is understandable why this is a goal that can only be attained by an elite few. The masses do not have ability to encounter God because God is beyond. The masses, living only in this world, cannot approach a transcendent God. Rising from the lower class to the royal palace is, in fact, a fantasy. Most people are never given this opportunity. Maimonides' elitist approach to divine worship is a direct result to his transcendent approach to divine unity.

The Besht and Divine Immanence

Like Maimonides, the Besht also incorporated a parable about ascending to a royal palace in his teachings. This Hasidic teaching, however, because of a much different understanding of divinity, has a very different message. R. Jacob Joseph of Polnoy's version of the parable, recalling what he heard from the Besht, opens with a question based on a *Zohar*.¹¹ It goes as follows:

It seems to me that it is written in the *Zohar* that there are places of prayer, one higher than the other, and angels receive the prayer¹²... And behold, the Holy One, blessed be He, fills the entire world, and there is no place that is empty of His glory, and wherever someone prays, His glory, blessed be He, is found there. Therefore, why is there a need for the angels to go from one palace to another, in order that his prayer will be accepted?¹³

If God is everywhere, why do the prayers need to be delivered to God? R. Jacob Joseph quotes the Besht's parable to explain:

And it seems to me that I wrote elsewhere what I heard from my teacher, blessed be his memory, in a parable that he told before the blowing of the *shofar*: There was a great, wise king, and he made walls and towers and gates by means of illusion. And he commanded that people will come to him through these gates and towers, and he commanded that the treasures of the king be spread out at each of the gates. And there was one

***Sometimes stories
are just stories. But,
throughout history,
great Jewish thinkers
have used stories
like these to convey
important theological
doctrines.***

person who went until the first gate and took the mammon and returned. And there were others... [Each wall is higher, broader, and more terrifying than the one preceding, in order to induce fear so that not everyone who wants to approach the king will do so.] Until his son, his beloved one, made a great effort to go to his father, the king. Then he saw that there was no screen separating him and his father because everything was an illusion.¹⁴

He concludes with a message:

And the meaning of the parable is

understandable. And the words of the wise are attractive. And I have written elsewhere what I heard from my teacher, may his memory be blessed, that it is known that God, blessed be His name, who fills the entire world with His glory, and each and every movement and thought are from Him, blessed be He, and by this knowledge and by means "all the wrongdoers will fall apart..." (Psalms, 92:10), and all the angels and palaces, were all created and made as if from His substance, blessed be He...and there is no screen separating man from Him, blessed be He.¹⁵

Like Maimonides, the Besht tells a story about a king in his palace and the different barriers that prevent outsiders from entering. For Maimonides, the starting point is God's transcendence, for the Besht, however, the starting point is God's immanence. If God is truly everywhere, why do we need assistance approaching Him? Therefore, the Besht explains that the barriers are actually illusions, and, in reality, God is immanently present in this world.

One of the key components to Hasidic teachings, an idea quoted throughout the Besht's teachings and in the passage above, is that "there is no place that is empty of His glory." Elsewhere the Besht teaches:

The Creator is found in every act of physical movement. It is impossible to make any motion or to utter any word without the power of the Creator. That is the meaning of "The whole earth is full of His glory (Isaiah 6:3)."¹⁶

The Besht takes this verse, "The whole earth is full of His glory," quite literally. We get a much different picture when considering Maimonides' interpretation of this very same verse. Maimonides explains that when we speak of the earth being filled with God's glory, this does not mean that God Himself actually fills the world. Rather, when man uses his intellectual capabilities to praise God, he brings God's glory into this world.¹⁷ For the Besht, however, this verse is the prime formulation of God's immanence.¹⁸

Access for the General Public

Let us return to the two palace parables. If, for Maimonides, it was the transcendent nature of God that contributed to his elitist approach, conversely, we can say, that for the Besht, his immanent view of God will result in a non-elitist approach. This is because, if, in fact, God is immanently present in this world, He is available to everyone, even the masses. Communion with God does not require transcending this world, something only the elite can do after rigorous study in isolation. God can be found everywhere, thus anyone can approach God. "There is no place that is

empty of His glory." The only necessary requirement to enter God's palace is a realization that God fills the entire universe, thus breaking down the illusionary barriers that mask God's presence. This is certainly not analogous to the rigorous curriculum required by Maimonides. For Maimonides, the barriers surrounding the king are not only real, but also they are difficult to pass. For the Besht, the barriers are only hallucinations. All that is required to pass is an adjustment of one's mindset. This can be achieved by even the simple Jew. The barriers are not even really there.

Highlighting the Besht's idea that connection to God is attainable by every single Jew, not just the elite, Moshe Idel writes, "The clear accent on the divine presence in the world according to the plain sense of the parable fits well the direction of the interpretation according to which it is the divine presence in man, the *neshamah*, which stands at the core of the spiritual exegesis of the grandson... By the adoption of such an exegesis by the hasidic masters...every Jew becomes a potential candidate for the special status of a son of God, by the very existence of his soul."¹⁹ Every single Jew has the ability to speak to the king. This is a logical extension of the Besht's view of divine immanence.

The Besht does not put the elite on a great pedestal. Elsewhere, in a discussion about divine immanence, again we see the Besht focusing on the masses. He teaches:

An explanation of the verse: "And David blessed God before the eyes of the entire congregation (*kol ha-kahal*) etc'(I Chronicles 29:10), is that David showed through the senses, to the eyes of the whole congregation, that God fills the world in its entirety, and there is no place devoid of God. How did he show this to everyone? By saying: "To You, God, is greatness and strength etc. and kingship etc." Then everyone saw, even the masses (*va-afilu hamon ha-am*), that God is the source of everything and its happenings...each movement is sourced in God. For it is impossible to move or speak without the power of God.²⁰

Noting the words *kol ha-kahal*, or entire congregation, the Besht teaches that David conveyed the message of divine immanence to the entire nation, including the *hamon ha-am*, or the masses. The immanent understanding of God could be grasped even by the masses. This being the case, the masses, and not just the elite, are able to approach God in His palace. While Maimonides required the elite philosopher to go to God, the Besht is of the opinion that God is actually the one who travels into this world making Himself available to everyone.²¹

Conclusion

Let us return to our opening questions: Are stories about commoners ascending to the king's palace simply fairytales and fantasies? Or, when it comes to religion, is the common folk really given the opportunity to dwell in the king's presence? What is required from man to approach God? For Maimonides, it might very well be true that the masses do not have the ability to experience the divine presence. God's transcendent nature limits divine accessibility to the elite philosopher. The Besht, on the other hand, who highlights God's immanence, believes that communion with God is attainable even by



the masses. For him, ascending to the royal palace is not necessarily a fairytale.

Whether we accept the elitist approach of Maimonides or the egalitarian approach of the Besht, or something in the middle, the goal we should all be striving for is certainly agreed upon by all: In the words of the great King David, "One thing I have asked of the Lord, this I seek: that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the pleasantness of the Lord, and to visit His Sanctuary" (Psalms 27:4).

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1 *The Guide to the Perplexed*, trans. by M. Friedländer, (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1904), available at www.wikisource.org, 3:51.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.* Maimonides continues with a description of Moses, who achieved these lofty levels: "One of these has attained so much knowledge, and has concentrated his thoughts to such an extent in the idea of God, that it could be said of him, 'And he was with the Lord forty days etc.' (Exodus 34:28); during that holy communion he could ask Him, answer Him, speak to Him, and be addressed by Him, enjoying beatitude in that which he had obtained to such a degree that 'he did neither eat bread nor drink water (*ibid.*);' his intellectual energy was so predominant that all coarser

functions of the body, especially those connected with the sense of touch, were in abeyance."

4 Steven Harvey, "Maimonides in the Sultan's Palace," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer and Lawrence V. Berman (Oxford: Published for the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization by Oxford University Press, 1991), 67-68.

5 *The Guide to the Perplexed*, 3:51.

6 *Ibid.*, 1:50.

7 Leo Strauss, "How to Begin to Study The Guide of the Perplexed" (Introduction), in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, ed. By Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), xlvii.

8 *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 1:52.

9 *Ibid.*, 1:58.

10 Alvin J. Reines, "Maimonides' True Belief Concerning God," *Maimonides and Philosophy: Papers Presented at the Sixth Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter*, ed. by Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel. (Dordrecht, Netherlands: M. Nijhoff, 1986), 24.

11 The parable is told in the name of the Besht by many of his students, including R. Joseph Jacob of Polnoy, R. Moshe Hayyim Efrayyim of Sudylkov, and R. Nahman of Bratzlav. Each version has its own nuances and additions. See the Moshe Idel article cited below, which deals with these different versions and their different meanings and interpretations.

12 *Zohar Hadash*, 2:244.

13 *Keter Shem Tov*, 51, transl. by Moshe Idel.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Keter Shem Tov*, 273, my translation.

17 *The Guide to the Perplexed*, 1:64.

18 Commenting on the Besht's aforementioned parable, Gershom Scholem notes, "Its literal sense conveys no pantheistic meaning but rather an 'acosmic' one: the world is denied real existence, reality is seen rather as a sort of 'veil of Maya'... External reality is but an illusion." (*The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 224). Continuing his analysis of the nature of God as described in the parable, Scholem writes, "Others, as for instance the Rabbi of Polnoye, give it a pantheistic turn: 'People with true insight know that all the walls and partitions, all the outward clothes and covers are in truth of His own essence, for there is no place void of him.' If the formula alone were decisive, we might safely say that there is, indeed, a pantheistic element to be found, at least in some of the Baal Shem's disciples" (*ibid.*). Scholem himself suggests a more nuanced approach: "As to the Baal Shem himself, there is no proof, in his authentic sayings, of any doctrine which might properly be called pantheistic. In contradistinction to this absence of an identification of God and the universe, of the Creator and Creation, there is full proof of his belief in the immanence of God in

every one of His creatures. It is what most philosophers call 'pantheistic' teaching -all being in God, but not all Being God" (*ibid.*, 223). Moshe Idel also rejects a pantheistic interpretation of the parable: "The main point that permeates the parable as well as its interpretation is the Hassidic stand that God is found everywhere. This is the reason the term 'illusion' is used so often, since the distance between God and the worshiper is understood as a sign of misunderstanding. Such an approach is important in Hasidism, which combined some pantheistic elements with strongly personal imagery as we may amply see in the above parable. It should be emphasized that in the material addressed above, no full-fledged pantheism is assumed, despite the resort to the concept of illusion" ("The Parable of the Son of the King and the Imaginary Walls in Early Hasidism," 102). The exact nuances of the Besht's views may be up to debate, but it is clear to all that the Besht, at the very least, had a decidedly immanent view of God. According to the Ba'al Shem Tov, God is found and involved in everything that goes on in the world.

19 Moshe Idel, "The Parable of the Son of the King and the Imaginary Walls in Early Hasidism," *Judaism - Topics, Fragments, Faces, Identities*, ed. by Haviva Pedaya and Ephraim Meir, (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2007), 103.

20 *Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov*, Genesis 47, my translation.

21 It is important to point out an approach taken by Immanuel Etkes, which claims that even the Besht maintains an elitist approach despite his immanent understanding of God. Etkes writes:

The knowledge that the partitions that divide man from God are a kind of hallucination has the potential of helping those seeking *devekut* to surmount the obstacles set in their path. Yet this assertion also entails a risk: an over-simplistic understanding of the idea of divine immanence can lead a person to infer that *devekut* is attainable easily or without a large spiritual investment...It is in fact the immanent conception that expresses the state of affairs as they actually are. The transcendental conception, by contrast, is a sort of optical illusion. Yet this illusion is a pedagogical artifice that the Almighty employs: the illusion of distance is designed to stimulate man to invest the necessary effort to attain proximity to God. More generally, although the idea of divine immanence plays a decisive function in the path towards *devekut*, nothing about it diminishes the effort that is required of those who seek to take this path (*The Besht: Magician, Mystic, and Leader*, 135-137). See also *Keter Shem*

Morality and Advertising

BY: NORA ELLISON

As you walk down the street, a sign catches your eye. "Happy Hour" is written in neon lights, "\$3 martinis." You find the advertisement enticing, but why? If you decide to enter the bar, will you really experience a "Happy Hour" as the sign promises? If you buy the martini and do not experience an hour of happiness, has the advertisement deceived you?

Advertisements constantly send us messages about what we should think and how we should feel and act. These messages dictate not only our purchases but also our psychological processes. But how often are we cognizant of these advertisements and the illustrious promises they make? And if we are aware, do we challenge them? In the most benign scenario, a misleading advertisement can lead to the unnecessary purchase of a useless trinket. At worse, advertisements can perpetuate the neurosis of instant gratification and consumerism, leading to unfulfilled promises of intangible qualities like happiness, security, friendships, and meaning. In this article, I will examine the morality of the psychological effect that advertising has and how it is addressed in American and Jewish law.

The Power of Association

Advertisements employ associative properties to make their products instantly desirable. For example, a Bud Light advertisement portrays a study beach goer drinking a Bud Light while attractive young women in bikinis flock around him. After watching this commercial for Bud Light, the consumer is more likely to associate Bud Light with sex appeal. But, as the research of Creighton University professor Andrew Gustafson highlights, when the typical beer aficionado buys a Bud Light, he is less likely to attract a gaggle of girls in bikinis, and more likely to acquire a beer belly.¹ Advertisements use these associations to manipulate the buyer's psyche.

By associating a certain product or brand with positive attributes, like fame, fortune, success, sex, happiness, and friendship, the buyer comes to believe that these attributes will manifest themselves through his purchase. But no bottle of shampoo can fulfill these illustrious promises. However,

many buyers are unaware of the danger in these associative tactics. It is because of this lack of awareness that they are drawn to certain products over others, or to enter a bar during Happy Hour. Advertising is inexorably deceptive.

Buyer Beware (I'm shaping your subconscious!)

Advertisements are invasive by nature, partly because they are ubiquitous, but mostly because they manipulate our psyches without our being aware of their effects. Andrew Gustafson addresses advertising's moral nature and how it greatly influences societies' inclinations, habits, and desires. Gustafson's research is not concerned with what he calls "truth in advertising,"² namely issues of puffery and disclosure, etc., but, rather, he is concerned with the way in which advertising molds society's character. While Gustafson believes in the power of advertisement to *shape* our society's desires, other philosophers like Harvard economist Theodore Levitt argue that advertisement is simply *reflective* of society's pre-existing desires. Levitt would therefore take issue with Gustafson's contention that advertisers have a moral responsibility in shaping society's character.³

Do Jewish values share Gustafson's belief in the responsibility of advertisers? Brooklyn College professor Hershey Friedman agrees with Gustafson and maintains that advertising does play a role in shaping society. Friedman proposes that Jewish law may not explicitly prohibit or restrict manipulating the psyches of consumers to create detrimental desires, but insists that such practices clearly violate the spirit of the law.⁴

Gustafson questions whether the sentiment of "buyer beware" is a sufficiently moral policy to apply in the realm of advertising. This dictum assumes that the buyer is purchasing at his own risk and is aware of his own liability in purchasing. The buyer is at his own discretion in the marketplace, and if he makes a bad purchase due to false advertisement, this is his own fault. Gustafson challenges this idea because of two factors that both work against the buyer: "truth in advertising," that advertisements accurately portray the

product, and the potential psychological damage that the advertisements can have on the consumer. The buyer is not only lured into purchasing an exaggerated product because of deceptive advertising, but he is also mentally manipulated by the advertisement's subtle insinuations.

For example, perhaps the advertisers who use abnormally thin female models in their advertisements should consider the potential psychological implications that their ads may have on young impressionable females. After being exposed to this type of advertisement, girls may assume that abnormally thin is society's standard of beauty. As a result, many girls may develop body image issues, which could lead to unhealthy eating habits. They may starve themselves just to look like the emaciated stick figure portrayed in advertisements.⁵ In light of this, we can see how Gustafson maintains that advertisement deeply affects society's psyche, and, therefore, the advertiser is responsible for the psychological effects of the advertisement. The buyer is in no way accountable and, rather, is seen as a victim of this manipulation.⁶ Thus, because of these two factors, truth in advertisement and the potentially harmful psychological effects of advertising on the consumer, Gustafson sees inequity in the dictum of "buyer beware" and maintains that it is not the fault of the consumer.

In contrast, Kim Rotzoll, James Haefner, and Charles Sandage maintain that society should be clever enough to see through deceptive advertising. They argue, "Under the assumption that man is rational, it is

quite appropriate to attempt to persuade. ..."⁷ Under this assumption that society is comprised of rational men, Rotzoll, Haefner, and Sandage shift the responsibility of forming good moral character away from advertisers and onto consumers, who, they believe, should be able to discern fraudulent advertising.

Reasonable-Man Standard

According to American law prior to 1914, the criteria for honest advertisement were based on the reasonable-man standard that states that the advertiser is not liable for any ambiguity or deception that a reasonable man would see through. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) then instituted even stricter regulations on advertisers to prevent misleading advertisements altogether. The FTC aimed not only to protect the reasonable man, but also attempted to protect everyone in the marketplace, even the most credulous buyer. For example, Clairol was not allowed to advertise its hair dye as dye that would "color hair permanently." The courts ruled that this advertisement may lead people to believe that their hair would grow out in the color of the Clairol hair dye that they used. This seems like a ludicrous assumption to any reasonable person, but that was exactly the point—the FTC wanted to protect even the most gullible and unsuspecting consumer.⁸

Heinz W. Kirchner appealed against this extreme ruling. From his appeal emerged a "modified reasonable-man standard."⁹ R. Aaron Levine, who was





chairman of the economics department at Yeshiva University and published articles on Torah and economics in leading journals of Jewish thought, explains that this new standard "equated the reasonable person with the typical or average person as actually observed in the market-place."¹⁰ As a result of Kirchner's appeal, the legal system balanced the consumer's need for protection and the advertiser's need for creativity and business suave. Perhaps this "modified reasonable man-standard" acknowledges that advertising innately possesses some deceptive quality but that banning it completely would cause major economic distress.¹¹

Advertising in the Context of Halakhah

According to Jewish Law, how careful must an advertiser be when protecting the consumer? Does Halakhah require an advertisement, as in the case of Clairol, to be so explicit that even the most naïve consumer not be misled? As stated earlier, these issues are more concerned with the spirit of Jewish Law, rather than the letter, but before understanding the former, the latter must be addressed.

The prohibition of *geneivat da'at*, commonly translated as "stealing knowledge," is a halakhah understood to relate to that which creates a false impression. It is this halakhah that lays the foundation for the obligation of advertisers. The biblical source for *geneivat da'at* is disputed by various sages. R. Jonah b. Abraham Gerondi (Spain, ca. 1200-1264) determines that such behavior on the part of the advertiser is equal to the prohibition of falsehood, *sheker* (*Shemot* 23:7). However, R. Yom Tov Ishbili (Spain, ca. 1250-1330) considers *geneivat da'at* an act of theft (*Vayikra* 19:11); he equates stealing

knowledge to stealing physical property.¹² Regardless of the biblical source of *geneivat da'at*, however, it is clear that outright lying is not acceptable according to Jewish law, but a prohibition against deception through ambiguous statements is not as obvious.

A story in *Hullin* 94b illustrates this point. The local butchers of a certain town received a shipment of non-kosher meat. Surprisingly, the Talmud did not require the butchers to refer to the meat as *tereifeta*, a term with a negative connotation, and rather allowed the butchers to refer to the meat as *bisra*, a term with a neutral

Similar to American law, Jewish law values the delicate balance between protecting the consumer through honest advertising while simultaneously recognizing the needs of the business world.

connotation. Both expressions accurately describe the type of meat as non-kosher, but the latter expression of *bisra* is slightly more neutral and less descriptive. The Talmud ruled that it was permissible to refer to the meat as *bisra* as opposed to *tereifeta* to conjure a more positive image of the meat in the public's mind, in order to protect the local butcher's business. Had the more negative term been used, his business would have suffered. Similar to American law, Jewish law values the delicate balance between protecting the consumer through honest advertising

while simultaneously recognizing the needs of the business world.

Going Beyond the Letter of the Law (*Lifnim me-Shurat ha-Din*)

Although the Talmud rules that referring to the meat as *Nafla Bisra* is permissible despite it not being the most forthcoming description, there are various other sources that strongly suggest that any type of psychological manipulation is contrary to Jewish values. In II *Shemuel* 15:6 it says that David *ha-Melekh's* rebellious and narcissistic son Avshalom, "stole the hearts of the people," promising that under his rule the populace would enjoy a certain quality of life that he could not really provide. Advertisements operate in a similar way. Advertisements "steal" the hearts of consumers, and promise them a quality of life that no product can supply. For example, Virginia Slims promises liberation with a pack of cigarettes by associating the cigarettes with the liberated women on their ad campaign.¹³ Ironically, a purchase of Virginia Slims cigarettes is more likely to lead to the buyer's addiction than to his liberation. Countless advertisements promise a quality or life that, in reality, their products cannot follow through on.

Furthermore, Friedman suggests that advertising's aim to create desires and jealousy may be in conflict with the tenth commandment, which deals with the prohibition of coveting (*Devarim* 5:18). He then cites Ramban's concept of "a vile person within the permissible realm of Torah." One can still exhibit "vile" qualities without breaking any explicit halakhot.¹⁴ Friedman asserts that one must go beyond the letter of the law, and conduct one's business in a way that reflects Jewish ethics or, as he puts it, "the way of the pious."¹⁵

There may not be any absolute halakhic proof, but it would seem from these various sources and teachings that the spirit of the law does not allow for advertisers to create desires, perpetuate instant gratification, and dupe buyers into believing that love, success, and happiness can be bought. Jewish ethics teaches that we have to be sensitive to the kind of society that we want to create. Advertisers should aim to sell useful products, create positive desires, and instill good values in society to the best of their ability.

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1 Andrew Gustafson, "Advertising's Impact on Morality and Society: Influencing Habits and Desires of Consumers," *Business and Society Review* 106:3 (2001): 201-223, at p. 212.

2 Gustafson, 201.

3 Gustafson, 202-204.

4 Hershey Friedman, "The Impact of

Jewish Values on Marketing and Business Practices," *Journal of Micromarketing* 21 (2001): 74-80, available at: www.jlaw.com.

5 For a study on this topic see: Emma Halliwell and Helga Dittmar, "Does Size Matter? The Impact of Model's Body Size on Women's Body-Focused Anxiety and Advertising Effectiveness," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*: 23,1 (2004): 104-122.

6 Gustafson, 220.

7 As cited in Gustafson, 203.

8 Aaron Levine, *Case Studies in Jewish Business Ethics* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Pub. House, 2000), 33.

9 Levine, 34.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Levine, 35.

13 Gustafson, 217. Virginia Slims was a cigarette company that associated their product with the liberated women of the feminist movement. This advertisement, and others like it, led to an increase in female consumption of cigarettes.

14 See Ramban to *Vayikra* 19:2, s.v. *kedoshim tiheyu*.

15 Friedman.



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The Right to Life for the Nation of Amalek

BY: ATARA SIEGEL

“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way when you left Egypt. That he met you on the way and struck you, all the feeble behind you, and you were tired and weary and he did not fear God. And it shall be, when Hashem your God grants you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land that Hashem your God is giving you as a heritage to inherit, you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens, do not forget!” - Devarim 25:17-19, Parashat Zakhor.¹

“So said Hashem of Legions, I have remembered what Amalek did to Israel, that he encamped against them on the way, when they went up from Egypt. Now, go and smite Amalek and destroy all that is his and do not pity him. And put to death from man to woman, from infant to suckling, from ox to sheep, from camel to donkey.” - I Shemuel 15:2-3

“On the second Sabbath they bring out two Torah scrolls: From one he reads the weekly portion, and from the second he reads ‘remember what Amalek did to you...’ and he reads from the Prophets ‘I’ve remembered what Amalek did....’ - Shulhan Arukh 685:2

The month of Adar marks the beginning of one of the most festive times of the Jewish year. As the Talmud states, “When Adar comes in, we increase in joy.”² Today, we happily fulfill this mandate, spending the beginning weeks of Adar preparing for the holiday of Purim, dressing up in silly hats, socks, or ties, blaring extra music in schools and in the streets, running carnivals and preparing an abundance of candies and other foods to send to friends as *mishloah manot*.

But before the holiday, we also engage in another preparation for Purim, one that is heavier and more serious. The Shabbat before Purim we read *Parashat Zakhor*, thereby fulfilling the Torah’s commandment to remember the attack of the nation of Amalek on the nation of Israel on their way out of Egypt. This obligation is taken very seriously in Jewish law. In his *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, Rambam lists two biblical commands regarding the people of Amalek. Mitzvah 188, to “destroy the seed of Amalek, as it says, ‘erase the memory of Amalek,’” is no longer practiced today, as we can no longer identify the Amalekites among us. However, the obligation to forever remember Amalek’s evil assault, which Rambam lists as commandment 189, remains in full force, and Orthodox Jews today are, in fact, very careful about and attentive to the details of this mitzvah. People make special effort to come to

the synagogue to hear *Zakhor*, and extra readings are arranged for latecomers. Reading and hearing each word of the passage correctly is emphasized to such an extent that we read the last verse of the *parashah* twice with different vocalizations in order to ensure that we are reading the passage precisely. However, for many Jews today the content of the passage remains troublesome and can make fulfilling the mitzvah uncomfortable.

Throughout Jewish history, traditional thinkers have struggled with the moral implications of the command to wipe out the nation of Amalek. While at first glance it seems brazen to challenge the morality of a command from God, R. Aharon Lichtenstein observes that it is impossible to ignore the fact that the command to destroy Amalek simply fails the “reasonable person” test of morality: “Wiping out Amalek does not conform to what we would normally expect a person to do.”³ The question of how God could command us to destroy an entire nation, including individuals who did not themselves sin, is a thorny one that has bothered Jewish thinkers throughout the ages. Different commentators’ approaches to the problem can be divided into three separate categories.

“It Doesn’t Seem Moral to Me, but God Knows Better”

Early Jewish thinkers were not unaware of the moral difficulty involved in the command to destroy Amalek; in fact, the challenge is already raised in the Talmud. Commenting on the story in I *Shemuel perek 15* where King Sha’ul is commanded to obliterate Amalek, the Talmudic sage R. Mani imagines King Sha’ul debating with God about the justice of what he is about to do. How is it fair to punish the Amalekites collectively, R. Mani’s Sha’ul asks, “if man sinned, how did the animals sin? If the adults sinned, how did the young ones sin?”⁴ Granted, Sha’ul implicitly agrees, the Amalekites who attacked the Jews may be worthy of death, but is it really possible that all the Amalekites deserve to die?

The rest of this *aggadah* continues with oblique criticism against Sha’ul and his own morality. “Do not be exceedingly righteous!” a heavenly voice answers Sha’ul’s challenge, quoting a verse from *Kohelet*.⁵ The Midrash contrasts Sha’ul’s indignation and hesitance about obliterating Amalek with his later

willingness to destroy the entire priestly city of Nov, as if to ask, “are you so righteous and just yourself that you can challenge the righteousness of God’s decrees?!” R. Mani here raises a serious theological question: If God lays down a command, is the command moral by necessity? However, this question is not answered directly. God does not explain why it is fitting for the Amalekite children to die, but instead chides Sha’ul and reminds him that God has a better understanding of the situation and of morality than he does. As the prophet Yeshayahu put it, “as the Heavens are raised above the earth, so My ways are raised above your ways, and My thoughts above your thoughts.”⁶ Sha’ul’s (or R. Mani’s) objection that the destruction of Amalek is immoral is not refuted; however, the reader is reminded that human morality is limited, and only God’s morality can be trusted.

R. Lichtenstein, in his lecture “Being Frum and Being Good: On the Relationship Between Religion and Morality,”⁷ addresses the challenge similarly. According to R. Lichtenstein, the destruction of the entire nation of Amalek is, “morally, a frightful thing.”⁸ However, the seemingly immoral act is justified in “response to an unequivocal divine command.”⁹ R. Lichtenstein later makes it seem that God’s command not only justifies a seemingly immoral act, but even turns the act into a moral one: “Although generally such an act would be considered immoral, it assumes a different character when God, from His perception and perspective, commands it.”¹⁰ Like R. Mani in the Talmud, R. Lichtenstein argues that the command to destroy Amalek does not seem moral to us. However, whatever our sense of what is moral, the principle of *yir’at Shamayim* reminds us that God, in His mysterious ways, simply understands the situation better than we do.¹¹

This approach of “it may not seem moral to me, but God knows better” truly appreciates and acknowledges the challenge posed by the command to destroy Amalek, and makes no attempt to hide from the great moral struggle the command engenders. This approach does not discount the discomfort we may feel at the seeming injustice of this command, but also does not place so much importance on resolving the challenge, instead relying on ascribing the gap between what we see as moral and what God is telling us to do to

God’s unknowable mysteries.

However, some challenges still remain with this approach. Is it really possible that there is *any* justification, hidden from us, for taking the lives of children who did not sin? Is our moral sense so faulty that we cannot even be confident that killing children is wrong? What possible mysteries could God reveal to us that would make this command more understandable? Perhaps bothered by these questions, other commentators look at this challenge and approach it differently.

“The Command is Moral”

Other classic commentators and modern thinkers bothered by the issue justify the morality of the command to kill Amalek in human terms, without the need to invoke God’s mysteries as justification. Rambam, in the forty-first chapter of the third volume of *Moreh Nevukhim*, sets out to explain the reasons behind different classes of punishments prescribed in the Torah. In explaining the rationale behind the command to destroy Amalek, Rambam assumes that those individuals among the Amalekites who themselves attacked the Jewish people truly deserve to be destroyed in return. Additionally, collective punishment against the entire nation of Amalek is also necessary in order to teach people not to assist their fellows in treacherous acts in the future. Rambam implies here that although the Amalekite children and women did not attack the Jews themselves, they were in fact responsible for standing by or perhaps assisting the men in their plans. While this rationale, if one accepts its premise, explains how the entire Amalekite people living at the time of their attack bears some culpability for the assault, how compelling is it in explaining why the command extends to avenging Amalek’s descendants throughout the generations? When God commands the destruction of Amalek in Sha’ul and Shemuel’s time do we really expect that the Amalekites of the day should have prevented their ancestors from sinning centuries earlier?

Another approach to explain the legitimacy of wiping out Amalek is to contend that Amalek’s evil was so special and unchanging that utter destruction is the sole method of dealing with it. R. Aron Moss, a frequent contributor to Chabad.org, wrote an inspirational article discussing how the mitzvah to destroy Amalek can be fulfilled today by eradicating Amalek-like tendencies in ourselves.¹² Explaining why the original command was meant to be carried out literally, he argues that the hatred of the people of Amalek for Israel

Throughout Jewish history, traditional thinkers have struggled with the moral implications of the command to wipe out the nation of Amalek.

was so intrinsic that as long as Amalekites were alive, the nation of Israel was at risk of attack. Accordingly, destroying Amalek becomes a matter of necessary self-defense. Viewing Amalek this way, drawing on the statement of R. Shimon Bar Yohai quoted in the Sifrei that “it is an established law that Esav hates Yaakov,”¹³ leads to the conclusion that the hatred of Esav, and by extension the people of Amalek identified with Esav’s grandson, is immutable. This approach does a good job of explaining why the Torah is so emphatic that the duty to remember and destroy Amalek is eternal. Destroying Amalek turns into a matter of simple, constant self-defense. This threat will never go away on its own; the only way to deal with it is to entirely eradicate its source.

However, this approach has its difficulties as well. Most individuals who are bothered today during *Parashat Zakhor* by the morality of the command to destroy Amalek would probably be just as bothered by this explanation. Part of the original reason the command to remember to destroy the entire people of Amalek is so difficult for us today is precisely because we value looking at people as individuals, and view stereotyping entire groups as a great ill and fallacy. The same people most conflicted about their obligation to remember Amalek’s crime probably also agree with Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel’s declaration that “all collective judgments are wrong. Only racists make them ... No human race is superior; no religious faith is inferior.”¹⁴ Labeling an entire group as intrinsically and unchangeably evil is not convincing to many people today, and, in fact, was rejected in Talmudic times by R. Mani and his claim (through the mouth of King Sha’ul) that at least the Amalekite minors and animals must be innocent of sin.

An Interview with Rabbi Yehoshua Fass

BY: STAFF

Note to Readers: R. Yehoshua Fass is the co-founder and executive director of Nefesh B’Nefesh, an organization that helps people from North America and the UK make aliyah. The organization aims to ease the transition of émigrés to Israel as much as possible. Since its founding, Nefesh B’Nefesh has helped 30,000 people move to Israel, 97% of whom have chosen to remain in Israel. R. Fass received his semicha from Yeshiva University and will be the Keynote Speaker at this year’s YU Commencement.

What inspired you to found Nefesh B’Nefesh and what do you see as its mission?

My wife and I always had the intention to make *aliyah*, but our plans never seemed to concretize. However, in 2002, when a family member was tragically killed in a

A Way Out

Another way to deal with the morality of the command to kill Amalek is to reconsider the meaning of the command itself. While the plain meaning of the text in *Devarim*, “You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens,”¹⁵ and the fleshed out command in *Shemuel*, “Now, go and smite Amalek and destroy all that is his and do not pity him. And put to death from man to woman, from infant to suckling, from ox to sheep, from camel to donkey,”¹⁶ seem to provide no way for the Amalekites to escape death, Rambam claims this is not so in *Mishneh Torah*. In the sixth chapter of *Hilkhot Melakhim*, Rambam claims that if the Amalekites (or members

However, whatever our sense of what is moral, the principle of yir’at Shamayim reminds us that God, in His mysterious ways, simply understands the situation better than we do.

of any of the Seven Nations of Canaan) were to surrender, and accept the seven Noahide laws as well as servitude to and taxation by Israel, they would be kept alive.¹⁷ This approach greatly reduces the moral challenge of Amalek. The Amalekites are not rejected by God and doomed to destruction. Like any other sinners, if they do *teshuvah* and change their ways they are accepted.

While this approach does reduce the degree of the moral challenge of the

command to destroy Amalek, it does not resolve the problem entirely. Even if one accepts Rambam’s controversial reading of the commandment and agrees that the Amalekites can escape death through surrender, if the Amalekite adults do not surrender, is it right to kill the Amalekite children? Though the command to physically eradicate Amalek is no longer carried out today, we continue to remember the evil assault and commandment to exact vengeance upon Amalek yearly with the annual reading of *Parashat Zakhor*. Some individuals also daily recite after *Shaharit* the biblical passage containing this command. In these ways, the command to destroy Amalek lives on, as does our discomfort with it. As we have seen, different commentators and thinkers have dealt with this challenge in different ways over the centuries, with each approach containing its own strengths and weaknesses. For different people, some, all, or none of the previous approaches may prove satisfying. *Mi ke-amekha Yisra’el*, who is like Your people Israel, who over the centuries have not stopped investigating and thinking about this challenge?

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1 All translations are my own.

2 *Ta’anit* 29a.

3 See R. Reuven Ziegler based on addresses of R. Aharon Lichtenstein, “Being Frum and Being Good: On the Relationship Between Religion and Morality,” *The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash*, available at: www.vbm-torah.org.

4 *Yoma* 22b.

5 *Kohelet* 7:16.

6 *Yeshayahu* 55:9.

7 See Ziegler.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 See Ziegler. R. Lichtenstein has another interesting approach to the challenge of Amalek in this lecture. He explains that his own doubts about Amalek and other morally challenging mitzvot were resolved by learning more about the great level of *gemilut hasadim* achieved by R. Hayyim Soloveitchik. If R. Hayyim, who had such a high moral sensitivity, was able to live with the command to destroy Amalek, he, R. Lichtenstein, should be able to live with it too. As the heavenly voice in the Midrash reminded King Sha’ul, “are you so confident in your own morality that you question God’s?!” While one might argue that perhaps R. Hayyim too struggled with this command, this story is a humbling reminder of the limitations of our own perceptions of morality and our responsibility to work on improving our own sense of kindness and morality.

12 Aron Moss, “Wipe Out Amalek, Today?,” Chabad.org, available at www.chabad.org.

13 *Sifrei*, *Bamidbar* 9:10 s.v. *o be-derekh*.

14 Elie Wiesel, “Have You Learned the Most Important Lesson of All?,” *Parade Magazine* (24 May, 1992), available at: www.thehypertexts.com.

15 *Devarim* 25:19.

16 *I Shemuel* 15:3

17 Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 6:4



an organization that would address the specific challenges of North American Jews making *aliyah*. We felt that if people had the proper resources and guidance, these obstacles could be overcome and North American *aliyah* would start to grow. This, in essence, was the beginning of Nefesh B’Nefesh.

Our mission over the past decade has been to help facilitate and revitalize successful *aliyah* from North America and the UK by removing or minimizing the financial, professional, logistical and social obstacles that potential *olim* face. This goal reflects our belief in *aliyah* as Israel’s life source, a concept at the very core of Zionist ideology.

Can you explain the origins and meaning of the organization's title?

The inspiration for the naming of the organization - Nefesh B'Nefesh - came following the tragic terrorist attack that took the life of my first cousin, Naftali Lankron. I was overcome with the emotion of wanting to fight terror and darkness with hope and optimism while searching for a meaningful way to memorialize his legacy. Hence Nefesh B'Nefesh was created - "Jewish Souls United" or a soul to soul - for his soul to be remembered and his legacy continued through building the Jewish homeland and connecting our nation.

Were there any challenges that Nefesh B'Nefesh faced when it was first founded?

When we first began, the existing obstacles to Western *aliyah* discouraged many potential *olim* from even considering it as an option. The challenge we took upon ourselves was to change this paradigm and make *aliyah* more mainstream among North American Jewry, so that it would be a realistic and attainable goal at the forefront of Diaspora consciousness.

As the organization grows, and we continue to help thousands of *olim* from different countries, it is a challenge to maintain the same level of personalized service so that each *oleh* feels part of Nefesh B'Nefesh's extended family. We also find ourselves operating in a very dynamic environment, as the social, economic, and Jewish organizational spheres are constantly evolving. We are, therefore, constantly adapting and improving the way we provide our services.

Between financial subsidies, help with bureaucracy, career and school advice, and more, Nefesh B'Nefesh supports olim in many different ways. What do you see as your most important/impactful service?

The decision to make *aliyah* is a major life choice, affecting every aspect of one's life - socially, economically and culturally. Being that the success of such a move will depend largely on the amount of planning and preparation that goes into it, Nefesh B'Nefesh aims to provide the most comprehensive assistance and guidance for people making *aliyah*. This holistic approach is vital to making sure *olim* have all the information and resources that they require in order to make the best decisions for a successful transition. This extends to all aspects of the move - from employment assistance, to where they are going to live, and how they will support themselves in the beginning stages.

How do you envision Nefesh B'Nefesh growing in the future?

We celebrated Nefesh B'Nefesh's tenth anniversary last year, and we are still constantly striving to improve our efforts to provide the most comprehensive assistance and guidance for people making *aliyah* from North America and the UK. In addition to increasing programming in North America and having more specialized and enhanced seminars, we are focusing on building Israel's periphery, with the tremendous support of Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael (the JNF), through our flagship "Go North" and "Go South" programs. We are also expanding the services we provide to Lone Soldiers (together with FIDF - Friends of the Israel Defense Forces) from around the globe, providing them with assistance throughout every stage of their *aliyah*, army service, and post-army acclimation.

In addition, we are working to increase our promotional efforts to expand the pool of potential *olim*. For example, over the past few years we've noticed a growing trend of young couples and professionals making *aliyah* who are taking advantage of the healthy job market and great social opportunities available in Israel. We have created social media-based contests to increase awareness of *aliyah* by encouraging friends and family to share in the journey, and actively follow and support the contestants as they launch careers and start new lives in Israel.

Right now, Nefesh B'Nefesh serves the United States, Canada, and the UK. Are there any plans to expand Nefesh B'Nefesh to other countries?

At present, our mandate from the Government of Israel is to help *olim* from North America and the UK; however, we just currently expanded our services worldwide for all "lone soldiers."

In your professional and personal experience, what are the biggest challenges new olim face?

When *olim* arrive in Israel, the transition into their new lives requires them to adapt their lifestyles to a new reality. Apart from choosing the right communities to live in, finding schools for their children, and finding suitable employment, it can be challenging to acclimate to a new social and cultural environment with a new language.

When we founded Nefesh B'Nefesh, we conducted extensive research

into the challenges potential *olim* face and discovered four major areas that consistently presented obstacles for North American *olim*: financial concerns, employment, social integration, and the challenge of navigating Israeli bureaucracy.

Nefesh B'Nefesh works to solve each of these challenges for potential *olim*. With this in mind, we provide *olim* with grants to help alleviate the financial strain of *aliyah* during the first year. In addition,

When sharing my feelings about aliyah with friends and colleagues, I began to hear echoes of similar ambitions. We shared a dream, but many people feared that the practical and economic challenges of making aliyah were too difficult to overcome.

our Employment Department works with each individual, providing counseling regarding career opportunities in Israel and helping *olim* connect with other professionals in their fields. In terms of social integration, our Guidance and Community Resources Department helps *olim* find the right communities and suitable schools for their children, helping people meet the challenges that

come along with adapting to life in Israel. Finally, our Absorption Department works closely with various government offices, removing the red tape that frustrates so many *olim*.

Do you believe that Anglo olim play a unique role in Israeli society?

Nefesh B'Nefesh *olim* have not only become integrated, and not only succeeded in adapting and thriving, but they also have an invaluable impact on Israeli society. This is true both on the ideological and the practical level. Ideologically speaking, we live in an era where some argue that Zionism is subsiding; however, the growth of *olim* from North America and other Western countries presents a strong case against this supposition. These individuals are making *aliyah* out of choice. They are not coming to Israel because they are running away from threat or persecution; rather, they choose to move because of an ideal in which they deeply believe. This type of *aliyah* makes a significant statement about commitment and love for the Land, and it strengthens the roots of Zionism on which this country was built.

From a more practical standpoint, *olim* from North America bring with them a set of talents and professional skills that are unparalleled. Nefesh B'Nefesh has welcomed successful and accomplished *olim* with varied backgrounds, each bringing his or her own unique experiences to the table. Our *olim*, who include engineers, physicians, entrepreneurs, teachers, and many other types of professionals, have

joined the workforce and have positively impacted on all sectors of Israeli society.

Looking beyond the professional realm, Nefesh B'Nefesh has also welcomed home students and soldiers, young people who are incredibly idealistic and have committed themselves to the future of Israel. The impact of these unusually dedicated individuals on Israeli society is something we can't measure yet, but I have no doubt we will reap the benefits of their contributions in years to come.

Is there any particularly rewarding or special moment or experience that stands out to you over your years working at Nefesh B'Nefesh?

I have had the remarkable privilege of joining every single charter flight since Nefesh B'Nefesh was founded in 2002. The feeling of excitement, the expressions of hope and optimism that are felt on each flight, are still one of the most emotionally charged experiences I have ever encountered.

Sitting on each *aliyah* flight, I look around and see Jews of all backgrounds, all affiliations, a full range of ages and professional skills. All of us are joined together through shared experiences and emotions: a passionate love of Israel and commitment to building a life in the Jewish homeland, a common journey away from the country we grew up in, a flight together towards a new place that we have decided to call home.

The flight has also become an incredible social experience. We've had *olim* who have met their future spouses on the flights, and more commonly we've had *olim* of all ages who have made new best friends through serendipitous seating arrangements in the air.

However, I also feel that it's not just the personal stories I'm witnessing. I'm also watching the very fabric of Jewish history being woven before my eyes. Each individual on the plane brings his or her own story, a story being joined with the national story of our people. And as each plane lands, *olim* step off the plane and into a sea of family and friends who have been waiting for hours at the airport, anxious to see them and excited to welcome them home. It is truly an inspiring scene of homecoming, which makes a deep impression each time and reminds me - and everyone involved in these efforts - why we love what we do.

Putting Magic in its Place: Appreciating Contextual Differences

BY: SARAH ROBINSON

Moses' farewell speech in Deuteronomy functioned as a "last lecture," recounting forty years of history and laws to the generation imminently entering the Land of Israel. Thus, we as readers should anticipate the rehashing of laws that once appeared in earlier books of the Bible. Does this make for boring reading? Absolutely not. Appreciating the literary and contextual differences between what is stated in Deuteronomy in contrast to the earlier biblical works is a nuanced and thought-provoking endeavor.

One example of this phenomenon is the Bible's prohibition against performing magic. The prohibition is first stated in Exodus 22, then again in Leviticus 19, and finally in Deuteronomy 18.¹

The starkest difference is the context, the verses surrounding the prohibition of magic. While the prohibitions in Exodus 22 and Leviticus 19 are stated in the same breath as the prohibition to engage in inappropriate sexual unions, the one in Deuteronomy 18 is stated in the context of a commandment to heed the words of prophets.

This is the progression of verses in Exodus 22: Verses fifteen and sixteen mandate that a man who engaged in premarital sex with a virgin is obligated to pay a dowry and wed her unless her father objects to the marriage. Then verse seventeen inserts, "a sorceress shall not be suffered to live."² Returning to the topic at hand, verse eighteen commands death for one who engages in bestiality.

The commandment to kill a sorceress has no (apparent) connection to sexuality whatsoever, but this oddity also appears twice in Leviticus.

In a potpourri of laws ranging from instructions for proper sacrifices³ to honoring one's parents,⁴ Leviticus 19 also recounts the prohibition of magic in the context of illicit sexual unions. In verse twenty-nine, the law prohibits a father from making his daughter into a harlot. Two verses later, the law prohibits one from seeking out ghosts and spirits. The same occurs in Leviticus 20. The prohibition of magic appears in verses six and twenty-seven, with all the forbidden sexual unions (i.e. *arayot*) sandwiched in the middle.

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch takes a creative *peshat*-based approach to explain the relationship between these two topics. He notes that the sorceress and the one who engages in bestiality meet the same end: the death penalty.⁵ Both deserve the death penalty because of the sin's inherent immorality. The sorceress has a "corrupting influence on society,"⁶ because sorcery is "ludicrous"⁷ and "absurd."⁸ The one who engages in bestiality does not affect society

like a sorceress, but is worthy of the death penalty, because bestiality is "a crime of the most vile degradation."⁹ Although both sins will result in the death penalty, the subtle differences in the phrasing of the verdict indicate how the crime affects the community. The blanket statement that a sorceress "shall not be suffered to live" charges the community with abolishing "corrupting influences"¹⁰ from within its midst, while the one who engaged in bestiality "will be put to death," because he "forfeited his life through his crime."¹¹

Unlike R. Hirsch, who connects the punishments, the authors of *Da'at Mikra* insert a key point of information to connect sexuality and magic. The succession of laws reflects the common practice in biblical times of sorceresses sleeping with animals in order to engage in sorcery.¹² In the name of practicality, therefore, it was logical to couple the two laws together.

The patterned connection of magic and sexuality, however, does not continue in Deuteronomy; the reference to forbidden sexual unions is conspicuously absent when the verses in Deuteronomy discuss the prohibition of magic.¹³ Instead, the prohibition is padded by laws regarding Levite portions¹⁴ and commandments to heed righteous prophets.¹⁵

Many contemporary and medieval commentators on Deuteronomy suggest that the juxtaposition of magic to prophecy is a logical progression.

For example, medieval commentators Ramban and Seforno¹⁶ argue that the contrast between magic and prophecy is the inappropriate and appropriate forms of ascertaining the Word of God. Considering the verses through a psycho-analytic lens, Ramban articulates that "people desire to know the future and delve into many faculties,"¹⁷ indicating that people will tap in to all sorts of means, even magic, to learn their fate. Therefore, "a prophet will rise from within your midst [and God] will give words to his mouth and you shall listen to it."¹⁸ The prophet's role validates the impulse to learn one's fate, showing how the desire is appropriate so long as it is achieved through appropriate means. Magic would be inappropriate, but prophecy is not.

Ramban and Seforno were not only extrapolating from the *peshat* meaning based on the immediate context of the chapter, but also speaking to a meta-theme in the laws of Deuteronomy – that the law often allows the ends so long as one utilizes appropriate means. Two of many examples include a warrior acquiring an *eshet yefat to'ar*¹⁹ and the permission to eat meat outside the Temple.²⁰ In both instances, the law offers an avenue of acceptable action in

response to a less than ideal situation.

Modern Bible scholar James Kugel interpreted the proximity of magic and prophets to be indicative of Moses' personal agenda. Moses feared that the Israelites would panic over his death, thinking that his death would break their most direct line of communication to God. This would entice the Israelites to turn to the aid of non-Jewish magicians presiding in Israel, even though the law in Leviticus already prohibited such behavior. Thus, Moses offered a subtle message, indicating that Israelites should not succumb to magic to ascertain the future. Rather, they should first look to God's prophets.²¹

This explanation comes to answer the hiccup in the parallel, the split between the presentation of the prohibition in Deuteronomy and the presentation in prior books of the Bible. How could it be that the prohibition in Deuteronomy is not stated in the context of immoral sexuality as it is in Exodus and Leviticus? Kugel shows that the book of Deuteronomy could not pose the prohibition in the same terms. Doing so would have been a lost opportunity. Moses needed to state the prohibition to impart a crucial message to his people – that the Almighty will continue guiding the Israelites even when new leadership takes the place of the old. Moses spoke to the needs of his people.

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1 This article contrasts the prohibition in Exodus and Leviticus to the prohibition in Deuteronomy. I take this approach because Deuteronomy is inherently a book of repetition.

2 My own translation

3 Leviticus 19:5-8.

4 Leviticus 19:3.

5 It is likely that R. Hirsch predicated his thoughts on *Berakhot* 21b where R. Yehudah stipulates that "*mah Ov ve-Yid'oni be-sekilah, af mekhashefah be-sekilah*" – "just like the *Ov* and *Yid'oni* [are given the death penalty of] stoning, so too [the] sorceress [is given the death penalty of] stoning." Both sins carry the identical punishment. That is what they share in common.

6 R. Hirsch to Exodus 22:17-19, s.v. *mekhashefah*.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 *Da'at Mikra* to Exodus 22:18, s.v. *kol shokhev im behemah mot yumat*.

13 Deuteronomy 18: 9-15.

14 Deuteronomy 18:1-8.

15 Deuteronomy 18:16-22.

16 Ramban to Deuteronomy 18:13, s.v. *tamim tiheyeh im Hashem Elokekha* and Seforno there, s.v. *tamim tiheyeh*. Note that Ramban lived between 1194-1270 while Seforno lived between 1470-1550. Perhaps Seforno had access to the Ramban and intentionally echoed his interpretation – hence the similarity of their language and content.

17 Ramban to Deuteronomy 18:9-12, s.v. *lo tilmad la'asot ke-toevot ha-goyim ha-hem*. Translation is my own.

18 Ibid.

19 Deuteronomy 21:10-14. These verses permit a warrior to take a captured woman as a wife and sleep with her after she de-beautifies herself and spends a month mourning for her family. *Kiddiushin* 22b records Rav's rationale to permit this practice as "*lo dibrah Torah elah ke-neged Yetser ha-Ra*" – "the Torah only speaks to the evil inclination." According to Rav, the Torah takes a practice to be objectively bad and, through more appropriate means, permits one to indulge. In context, the Torah allows the warrior to take this woman home because his evil inclination would impulsively desire this woman. Granted, the view that the *eshet yefat to'ar* is the Bible's avenue for permitting something that should ideally be avoided falls in the camp of Rashi and Ramban who argue that the de-beautification process occurs before the warrior can sleep with the captive, but this is not a universally accepted understanding.

20 Although Deuteronomy 12:6 explicitly states that one should offer sacrifices in the Temple, Deuteronomy 12:21 permits people to sacrifice within their own towns. R. Yishma'el in *Hullin* 16b is sure to emphasize that this permits the slaughter of only *basar ta'avah*, meat for which one has an appetite. In other words, in response to the human impulse to eat meat, slaughter even outside the Temple is permitted.

21 James L. Kugel, *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), 507-508.

Four Media of Worship: Rav Soloveitchik's *Worship of the Heart*

BY: MIRIAM KHUKHASHVILI

Worship of God, that elusive and daunting concept, often conjures up images of contemporary life that we would like to believe aptly represent its actual meaning. There is the uniform-clad *hayyal* (soldier) dancing with the “*Na Nach kippah*”-wearing *hasid*, the earnest old lady assigning people *mizmorei Tehillim* at the *Kotel*, the meditating Jew in a spiritual trance, and the secular Jew invited into an Orthodox Shabbat meal. These models reflect the idea that, within the realm of Halakhah, there are many *hashkafot* (worldviews) that are accepted, and these constitute a beautiful element of the multiplicity of Judaism. A major facet of what comprises *avodat Hashem* is thus often overlooked: we are quick to group people into various categories, neglecting to recognize that even individuals have unique methods of worship and means with which to connect to God. R. Soloveitchik, in *Worship of the Heart*, his collection of essays on prayer, lists four media of self-expression in a Jew's relationship with God. R. Soloveitchik's media encompass a wide variety of emotions, personality traits, and modes that can be used as vehicles of *avodat Hashem* within one individual. However, after exploring the four media delineated by the Rav, I would like to humbly suggest a fifth medium of worship for the modern Jew.

First, the Rav describes the “intellectual medium.”¹ Knowledge and cognition are gifts from God. Through intellect, we can achieve both cognitive and rational awareness of God. When our minds are turning and our thoughts are reeling, we exist in a world where only we and God exist. No one else can hear our thoughts. This is the crux of Rambam's religious philosophy.² In the attempt to intellectually understand the workings of the world, we forge a stronger bond with God by attaining knowledge. Torah study is the center of this pursuit. In stretching our minds' capabilities, in trying to reveal and unearth the wisdom of the text at hand, the nature around us, and the societies within which we live, we encounter God in an intellectual union.

The second medium is that of emotion. We, as humans, are blessed with an abundance of emotions with which we can connect to God. The mind is not the only tool in our worship of God; our emotions, represented in the Torah by the

heart,³ enable us to develop a *passionate* relationship with God as well. The intellect does not passionately crave. It seeks wisdom and is thirsty for knowledge, but real craving for a close relationship to God, for *devekut* (clinging to God) occurs in the emotional realm. Various facets of Halakhah therefore recognize human nature and emotion, and both play a significant role in determining proper conduct in the Torah.⁴ Man's emotions play a large role in his worship of God.

The third medium is that of volition, which is an expression of our moral free will. This medium reflects those parts of halakhic Judaism that are about suppressing human desires so that man

may emerge as a Godly being. Rationally

understanding a mitsvah, feeling its impact—none of that matters without the actual fulfillment. The volitional medium of serving God requires action. It is expressed through our acts. This is most classically manifested in the fulfillment of *mitsvot* known as “*hukim*”

(commandments that transcend logical reasoning).⁵ Man overcomes his rationale, his urges, and his desires to submit to the will of God in action.

The Rav's final medium is dialogical. The only way to develop a relationship with another person is to converse with him, to get to know him. In the dialogical medium, man meets God through speech. Dialogue is essential for developing a relationship with God. This, according to the Rav, is expressed through our daily activity of *tefillah*. Man converses with God as though God is right in front of him, attentive and caring to his every need. The bond between man and the Creator on which man is dependent becomes stronger.

The Rav limited his media of connection with God to just four. These four encompass all methods of communication: understanding, feeling, interaction, and activity demonstrating one's relationship with God. However, I would like to humbly suggest another mode of self-expression in one's worship, a mode that has been more readily available to the Jewish populace in recent years. This is the mode of connecting to God through land, namely, the land of Israel. This terrestrial medium is different than the other media because it enables us to connect to God through the physical.

One's mere presence in Israel is thought to increase a Jew's spirituality and interaction with God.⁶

The land of Israel is a gift to the Jewish people, a gift that enables us to develop a closer relationship to God. The Torah indicates to us numerous times that the land of Israel features a spiritually sensitive aspect. For example, “for the Land which you are about to enter and possess, is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come...the eyes of the Lord, your God, are always on it, from year's beginning to year's end.”⁷ The land is conscious of the spiritual state of the people within it in some way. Furthermore, a relationship with God is impossible without connecting through the land of Israel: “Whoever dwells outside of Eretz Yisrael is considered to be one who is Godless.”⁸ To live outside of the land of Israel, according to Hazal, greatly limits one's relationship with God. By inhabiting Israel, Jews enable the land to become earthly proof of their belief in the divinity of the Torah. God promised them the land of Israel, and, therefore, the next logical step is to live there and develop a relationship with God through the land. Any Jew outside of the land of Israel who does not recognize its inherent *kedushah* and power might as well be considered Godless.

The Land of Israel is directly linked to the spiritual level of the people dwelling in it. The land is in tune with the actions of the people and yields its fruit accordingly.⁹ Thus the Land of Israel is not mere physical dust; it is connected to the spiritual essence



of the Jewish people.¹⁰ When the majority of its inhabitants were not Jews, Israel was “a desolate country whose soil [was] rich enough, but [was] given over wholly to weeds.”¹¹ In the last sixty years alone, we have seen the unprecedented development of a land previously thought to be infertile. Through the changes the land undergoes in connection to the spiritual level of the

Jews, the land becomes an alternative method of communication with God. Crops alert the dwellers to their spiritual failures, thereby becoming a method of reward and punishment and God's way of communicating approval or disapproval.

Spirituality is awakened in the land of Israel. The phenomenon of “the year in Israel” is built upon the premise that spending a year (or two or three) in the land causes a spiritual rejuvenation and recommitment that is not likely to occur anywhere else. A psychological study of this phenomenon has even been conducted. Shalom Berger of Bar-Ilan University's Lookstein Center for Jewish Education, who surveyed male students on their attitudes and behavior before, during, and a year after their Israel experience, found that the overall religious observance admitted to by the students increased by over seventy percent.¹² Recent psychological discoveries have focused on the negative impact of this spiritual awakening, something dubbed “the Jerusalem Syndrome,”¹³ in which one experiences a state of psychosis of a religious nature in the Holy City. The land itself preempts a spiritual revival, and in some people the increased perception of holiness from being in contact with the land becomes too much to handle.

In addition to this spiritual aspect, the Rav, in his famous essay “*Kol Dodi Dofek*,” presents the State of Israel as a clear way of God connecting to us through the physical. The Rav describes six “knocks” of miracles and fortunate circumstances that enabled the creation of the State of Israel. Those “knocks” came via political, military and religious wake-up calls signaling to the Jews that God was returning the Land of Israel to them. Israel, according to the Rav's view, was God's way of communicating with the Jews in an era devoid of open miracles. Israel becomes that piece linking God and the Jews in a two-way line, deepening the spiritual qualities of the land.

Thus, the Land of Israel is the perfect combination of both the spiritual and the physical. Spiritually, it enhances the Jew and the Jew's worship and thereby becomes a way of communicating with God. Physically, the “knocks” that have occurred (both the ones mentioned by the Rav and others) and continue to occur within the land and the produce that the land yields are God's methods of communication with us. Through this fusion of these two elements, a Jew's presence and attachment to the land becomes a new medium of connecting with God. Additionally, through the feeling of nationhood evident when walking the streets of Israel and the feeling of

[We are quick to group people into various categories, neglecting to recognize that even individuals have unique methods of worship and means with which to connect to God.]

history evident when walking the areas mentioned in Tanakh, the land strengthens the communication between a Jew and his brethren and a Jew and his ancestors. The land becomes a way of truly connecting with oneself, one's people, and, ultimately, God.

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1 R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Prayer and the Media of Religious Experience," in *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer* (New York, NY: KTAV Publishing House, 2003), 4.

2 See introduction to *Moreh Nevukhim*.

3 This element is signified by the word *lev* in the Torah. One example is "*lev Par'oh*," which conveyed Pharaoh's undecided emotions concerning the state of the Israelite slaves. See, for instance, *Shemot* 7:13.

4 Take, for example, the mitzvah of *eshet yefat to'ar*, which allows a soldier to marry a non-Jewish woman after some halakhic guidelines are met. See Rashi to *Devarim* 21:11 for further explanation on the mitzvah's consideration of human nature.

5 See *Yoma* 67b. Although the commandments may not make sense, we still do them simply because they are God's will. We are bound to complete the action whether it makes logical sense or not.

6 R. Chaim Friedlander, *Sifte Hayyim*, vol. I, 422.

7 *Devarim* 11:10-12, JPS translation, with a few modifications.

8 *Ketubot* 110b, Artscroll translation.

9 *Devarim* 11:13-17.

10 *Bamidbar Rabbah* 23:7.

11 Mark Twain's description of the land from an 1867 visit, published in *Innocents Abroad* (New York: American Publishing Company, 1869).

12 Shalom Z. Berger, Daniel Jacobson, and Chaim I. Waxman, *Flipping Out? Myth or Fact: The Impact of the Year in Israel* (Brooklyn, NY: Yashar Books, 2007), 52.

13 Yair Bar El, Rimona Durst, Gregory Katz, Joseph Zislin, Ziva Strauss, and Haim Y. Knobler, "Jerusalem Syndrome," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 176 (2000): 86-90. Psychologists found that many tourists during the decade of 1990-2000 experienced a psychosis state upon their visit to the Holy City. The psychoses ranged from people thinking they were biblical characters, to allegedly received prophecies, to attributing a miraculous healing nature to the land.

Approaching Bereshit

BY: ZAHAVA GERSTEN

It is a common scene in many Jewish elementary schools. A boy is learning *Humash*, and his *rebbe* tells him that dinosaurs never existed. Perplexed, the boy asks how this could be true if archeologists had actually found evidence of dinosaurs' existence by digging up their bones. "Those are elephant bones," his *rebbe* replies. The student is unconvinced. "Wouldn't the paleontologists know if the bones were elephant bones?" he asks himself.

Many Jewish children all over the world learn *Bereshit* in a simple and clear-cut manner in the early years of their education. They are taught that God created the world in six days, Adam and Eve were tricked by a snake, and the flood covered the entire planet. While it may be necessary to teach young children *Bereshit* in a very basic manner, once students reach high school, new questions arise. Teachers will be challenged with questions such as, "How can we believe that God created the world in six days if we learned in science class that it actually took billions of years for the world to form?" and "How is it possible for Adam to have been the first person if we learned that many *Homo sapiens* existed at the same time?" And explaining that dinosaur bones are really elephant bones will not answer those thirsting for a convincing explanation. If this method does not satisfy a student's curiosity, then what method does? How should a teacher present *Bereshit* to inquisitive high school students?

While interviewing Jewish teachers from across North America I was able to discern the use of three basic approaches to this issue. One extreme approach would be to say that the stories in the beginning of *Bereshit* are merely allegorical, fictional accounts meant to convey lessons. For example, R. Jonathan Sacks writes that "when a biblical text is incompatible with either reason or observation, that is sufficient evidence that it is to be read figuratively, allegorically, poetically, or in some other way." A second approach would be to focus on the moral messages found in *Bereshit*, by emphasizing the literal without claiming that it is actually an allegory. The third approach would be to show that the stories of *Bereshit* do fit with science, as seen from many biblical commentators and modern Jewish scientists, such as Nathan Aviezer and Gerald Schroeder.

I interviewed five different teachers from Modern Orthodox schools in North America to find out how they teach *sefer Bereshit*. Interestingly, all of these teachers use either the second or third approach.

The approach most used among the teachers is the second approach—to focus on lessons of *Bereshit* and not on the actual

historical events. R. Nathaniel Helfgot, a teacher at SAR High School, as well as the Chair of the Departments of Bible and Jewish Thought at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, chooses to focus on the messages that the text is trying to convey. He says that it is important for him not to get too concerned about historical content. The Torah contains messages about God and the world, morality and human potential, and more. R. Helfgot believes that Adam and Havvah were real people, but he does not get caught up in teaching whether or not the events actually happened. He would not be against saying that one of the stories is an allegory, but he does not know which stories could be classified as allegories. Rather, the point of learning *Bereshit*, according to R. Helfgot, is to learn about the nature of human existence and the foundation of society. If a student does come to him, questioning the interplay of science and Torah, R. Helfgot directs him or her to the works of Nathan Aviezer, Gerald

The focus does not need to be whether or not Adam and Havvah were real, or whether or not the story in the Garden of Eden happened exactly as it is described in the pesukim. Rather, the focus should be the key morals that emerge from these chapters and how they set the stage for the rest of the events in the Torah.

Schroeder, and Natan Slifkin, but he does not grapple with the issue of Science vs. Torah in his class.

Others that I contacted teach in a similar style. Barbara Freedman, a former *Humash* teacher at the Hebrew Academy of Montreal, said that her basic approach in teaching *Bereshit* is that Torah is not a book of science. Rather, she says, "it is *hora'ah* – teaching about [Jewish] belief and faith." When she teaches the stories of creation, Adam and Havvah in the garden, and Noah and the ark, she presents the material as though these events really did happen. However, she chooses to "focus on the moral lessons and, of course, medieval commentary in each of these events, and

the paradigm of the events in *Bereshit* for civilization." In her words, "science tells how and the Torah tells why." When the focus is on learning morals, she does not find it necessary to bring scientific theories into the discussion.

Mrs. Freedman is not the only Jewish educator who takes this approach. Melissa Perl, the Tanakh Department Chair at the Margolin Hebrew Academy Upper School, presents the first few chapters of *Bereshit* in a very similar manner. Mrs. Perl was my teacher for *Bereshit* when I was in high school, and the recurring motifs in her class were morals and ethics. The first eleven chapters of *sefer Bereshit*, as Mrs. Perl teaches them, set up an ideal world and the major ethical and moral principles upon which the entire world rests. From chapter twelve on, there is a major shift in the way the story is told. Chapter twelve begins the story of ethical monotheism, and the man (Avraham) whose mission it was to carry out the principle of ethical monotheism set up in chapters one through eleven.

Mrs. Perl's teaching style is to focus on the key principles that emerge in the first few chapters. She explains to her class that in chapters one and two a natural hierarchy of the world is set up, with God ruling man. Humans are charged with acting in accordance with principles of ethical and moral behavior, which are critical to our existence. The focus does not need to be whether or not Adam and Havvah were real, or whether or not the story in the Garden of Eden happened exactly as it is described in the *pesukim*. Rather, the focus should be the key morals that emerge from these chapters and how they set the stage for the rest of the events in the Torah.

This approach does not address the contradictions between science and Torah. How then do teachers who use this approach respond to such questions? Mrs. Perl, like Mrs. Freedman, explained that although she certainly does not ignore these questions, they are not so pressing; because of her particular teaching style, these questions do not arise. The lessons that are imparted are relevant and true regardless of whether or not God created man from dust, and regardless of whether or not Adam and Havvah were real individuals or simply allegories. In other words, the lessons remain whether or not the stories are true.

There is a second approach that is drastically different from the others. Instead of circumventing the scientific issues, some teachers choose to use *Bereshit* as a means to confront the questions of science and Torah directly and show that the two can be reconciled. In my junior year of high school, I took a course on

Bereshit taught by my father, R. Yonason Gersten. R. Gersten's class is very much oriented towards helping students resolve their concerns regarding Science vs. Torah, and how we can learn *Bereshit* in a way that shows students that secular education does not discredit the Torah. The first thing R. Gersten does in his class is to point out that one cannot ask questions on science to the written Torah because we do not believe in learning Torah just from what is written; Jews also learn from oral Torah. He puts off the questions on science until after reading through chapter one with his students. During this first reading, he helps the students ask questions on the *pesukim*. For example, before the issue of science even presents itself, R. Gersten has the students question the meaning of day in the creation story. Since the sun and the moon do not appear until the fourth day, it must mean that the word "day" does not mean a typical twenty-four hour time period—the first three "days" could have been millions of years long. This interpretation of "day" is one that has been used by the *mefarshim* (commentators) for thousands of years. After reading through the chapter and asking questions to gain an understanding of what is written, R. Gersten will intentionally bring up science. He even spends a number of days explaining the theory of evolution itself so that the students will have a better understanding of the issues they are facing.

After spending time learning in depth about how each day of creation can be explained, the class learns about Adam and Havvah. When students learn about the emergence of modern man in science or history class, they learn that it took

thousands of years for *Homo sapiens* to emerge, and that there were many *Homo sapiens* that developed at the same time. How then is it possible for the Torah to say that Adam was the first person? R. Gersten presents a solution to the question to his class. He explains that Adam was the first being created *be-tselem Elokim* (in the image of God). Based on Ibn Ezra,¹ R. Gersten explains that the snake was a human being without the *tselem Elokim*. The difference between the snake and Adam is that Adam had a concept of God, while the snake only understood that there is a powerful force in the world. When the Torah writes that Adam is the first human, it means that Adam was the first to develop abstract thought. This approach develops a way to read all of the stories in *Bereshit* as literally true, but still consonant with scientific facts. It accomplishes this by adopting interpretations of the events that, while different from traditional interpretations, still present viable readings. R. Gersten's goal in his class is to avoid apologetics and to demonstrate that the interpretations we use in our learning were not written in response to modern scientific discoveries, but, rather, were espoused long ago.

R. Gersten's approach is similar to that of R. Daniel Weiss, a teacher at Northwest Yeshiva High School. Rabbi Weiss starts from the premise that the same God that created and designed the universe (science) is the God that provided us with the Torah. Therefore, both systems must work together, and if we find a contradiction between our scientific observation of the physical world and our understanding of the Torah, we must attempt to reconcile that contradiction. This can be done by

gaining a clearer and better understanding of either the Torah or of science. R. Weiss is willing to concede that one does have to be intellectually honest at some times, and admits that sometimes we do not always know the answer to a question.

Both Rabbis Gersten and Weiss found that their students have a positive reaction when taught this way. Both teachers are trying to make the Torah rational and understandable, and students appreciate learning that science does not necessarily contradict the Torah.

Rachel Kosowsky, a teacher at the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy, encourages her students to investigate the relationship between science and Torah. Mrs. Kosowsky wants her students to choose for themselves the approach that they are most comfortable with, so she teaches the different approaches: that science and Torah do not conflict, that the people in the stories were real, and also that the stories are allegories. She presents material from Gerald Schroeder, a physicist, who explains how the biblical six days of creation can be explained using Einstein's theory of relativity. She also teaches about the morals and ethics of *Bereshit*. She opens up the questions, but she does not promote one particular approach; she wants her students to consider the various options. Instead of feeding her students answers, Mrs. Kosowsky gives her students the freedom to grapple with the issues themselves in order to find answers that they both identify with and understand.

Interestingly, amongst all the teachers I interviewed, nobody adopted the "allegorical approach." I posted my query about the contradictions between science

and *Bereshit* on the Lookjed listserv, and none of the responses I received suggested teaching stories as allegorical tales. Why is it that no one uses this approach? In a way, it seems like the easiest answer. If you teach that a story is an allegory, you no longer have to justify the Torah against science. But people are not comfortable taking this approach. If we decide that one story is an allegory, what will stop us from discounting the literal truth of the entire Torah?

Additionally, learning Torah and thinking of it as allegory may detract from our whole religious experience of the Torah. When you learn *Humash* and think about Adam and Havvah as fictional people, the religious experience may be very different. This perspective is shared by the teachers I interviewed. Even the teachers who said they would be willing to accept some stories as allegories were not willing to say that people, like Adam and Havvah, did not exist. Interpreting the *Bereshit* story as an allegory can leave one religiously unsatisfied. If *Bereshit* is viewed as an allegory, how would one decide what else in the Bible is just a *mashal*? It is a foundational belief of our religious heritage that God created Adam, and that there is a *yad Hashem* in the world.

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1 Ibn Ezra to *Bereshit* 3:1.

The Real Challenge of *Tsniut*

BY: JAMIE EPSTEIN

Many non-Jews are puzzled when they see a woman walking with long sleeves in the summer. I have experienced this myself multiple times. When walking around on a summer day, I always feel like people are looking at me strangely, almost as if to say, "Is she insane?" Although covering up more, even in such hot weather, may seem odd to those unfamiliar with the practice, after discovering the meaning behind modest dress many are fascinated by it. However, many Orthodox women are not as fascinated. Especially for young women, *tsniut* is a very restrictive and troubling rule. As Jews, we have many practices that are different from general society, but they are not all as troubling as the idea of *tsniut*. *Tsniut* is very different from other practices in that it is an immediate way to peg someone as a religious Jew. The idea of dressing in a way that obviously sets us apart from the rest of society is especially troubling to many young women. However, being different from the society around us

is not the real challenge. The real challenge is taking the "restriction" and revealing its true meaning and benefit.

In the modern, secular world we look to the surrounding culture to define standards of dress and fashion. When you flip through a magazine, through channels on the TV, or even walk through a mall, it is very rare to see a model or celebrity wearing modest clothing. Despite the recent trend of maxi dresses, dresses that go to the floor, the majority of the fashion that is on display is not considered modest by the halakhic standard, and even by completely secular people. Furthermore, it is difficult to take yourself out of popular culture and stray from the group. When religion is pitted against popular culture, it is very hard for many to choose religion. However, paradoxically, the same situation that creates the challenge of following the laws of *tsniut* becomes part of the importance of doing so. *Tsniut* is an opportunity to go against trends and live a

life dedicated to a higher standard. When one differs from the popular culture, it will sometimes result in strange, puzzled looks, but ultimately it leads to more respect. People respect those who do what they believe is right instead of giving into the pressure of popular culture.

Although *tsniut* really can be meaningful and impressive to those around us, many orthodox women find it to be oppressive. This is often because of how the message of *tsniut* is delivered to them. There are many people who educate women in a way that focuses on the negative aspects of dressing modestly. Instead of focusing on positive benefits of *tsniut*, they try to scare people into dressing modestly. When people feel as if they are being punished for not doing what they are told, it often leads to resentment of not only the messenger, but the message as well.

A letter that was sent out to Bnos Yaakov Elementary School parents in Lakewood, NJ, is an example of people focusing on

negative aspects of dressing immodestly.¹ The letter tells a story of a group of travelers who heard someone screaming for help. When they reached the source of the screams, they saw an older woman and a younger lady. The older woman was taking clothes out of a boiling pot of water and putting them on the young woman. The travelers, terrified, immediately ran away, and later remembered that there had never been a house in the place where they had seen this event. They realized this was really a vision of the world to come: this was the punishment of a woman who had not raised her daughter to dress in a *tsanua* manner. The story says, "This is the *onesh* of women who burn the *neshamos* of their children in this world when they 'have *rachmanus* on them' and do not lead them in the ways of *tznius*."² I do not think this is a very effective way of teaching girls, especially teens, to dress more modestly. This negative approach could be the reason why many girls grow up with a feeling

of resentment towards dressing more modestly.

There are others who take approaches like this, only focusing on the negative aspects of not dressing modestly. R. Pesach Eliyahu Falk in his *Oz ve-Hadar Levushah*,³ a book that has become a standard text in the Haredi world, follows this method. R. Falk focuses on the rules of *tsniut* in great detail, but not as much on the reasoning behind the halakhot. When he does discuss reasoning, he often explains why not dressing in a *tsniut* way is wrong, not why one should be more attracted to *tsniut*. Additionally, he writes disparagingly about people who do not dress in the way that he deems appropriate (which happens to be an extreme view). For example, he writes, “A *tzaddik* marries a *tzenua*; a *rasha* marries a *perutza*.”⁴ If this had been my first exposure to the concept of *tsniut* I would have been completely turned away.

Another example of educators focusing on negative aspects of modesty is found on a blog for Camp S’dei Chemed.⁵ Dovid Teitelbaum tells the story of a girl who was in an accident and was told she may not have the use of her legs anymore. A rabbi came to visit her and Teitelbaum recounts what the rabbi told her: “It was her legs that were no good and...Hashem was sending her a message. She must have used her legs for some un-tznius reason or maybe some yeshiva boy was staring at her legs and causing him improper thoughts.”⁶ This disgusted the girl and she vowed that whether she could use her legs or not, she was going to uncover them in the summers. She stuck to her promise until she was inspired again in Camp S’dei Chemed where “the new counselors and rabbis she met during the summer ...showed her that there is another kind of Judaism that exists. One of love and kindness.”⁷ The focus on the negative aspects of dressing immodestly really has an effect on the way a teen will look at *tsniut* for the rest of her life.

Even within the Modern Orthodox world we encounter those who focus on negative aspects of *tsniut*. Although it is not always as obvious and extreme as seen in Haredi and Ultra-Orthodox communities, there are community members and even rabbis who use *tsniut* as a way of judging others. I often hear people complaining about how girls in various communities dress, and people using lack of *tsniut* as a way to judge others. Many people see a girl not dressed in a modest way and automatically assume the worst of her. I think that this is detrimental to those that may be attracted to the idea of dressing more modestly because they begin to view modest dress as something negative. I think that many rabbis are aware that there are girls within their communities not dressing in a modest way, but they choose not to address it. Many of the rabbis who I have met see that there is a problem, but they know that if

they call too much attention to the issue young women may be further repelled from the concept of *tsniut*. Although there is not as big of an issue with rabbis making the concept of *tsniut* unattractive in the Modern Orthodox world, there is a big problem with members of communities making modest dress seem like a simple tool with which to judge people.

If, instead of focusing on enforcement, we educate young women about the



reasons why dressing in a *tsnua* manner is meaningful and a value that anyone in society could and should appreciate, young women would develop a more positive outlook toward *tsniut*. Allison Josephs of “Jew in the City” tries to communicate Jewish values, thoughts, and ideas to a broader audience.⁸ She contends that modesty is not about making one look unattractive, but rather about keeping some things private. She writes, “While you can find some strains within Orthodoxy where the women seem to do less to enhance their physical appearance, there are many groups that believe that it’s fine, even commendable to look attractive and put together.”⁹ The things that we are expected to keep private are things that many people find reasonable to keep private. Josephs relays a personal reflection of when she decided not to wear pants and describes it as “a good personal reminder about who I was, what I believed in, and what I wanted to represent to the rest of the world.”¹⁰ This is the focus that Josephs conveys to her readers: The purpose of *tsniut* is not to protect men from sinning. We are also not just dressing this way to avoid punishment. Rather, *tsniut* is something that betters each of us as individuals by showing ourselves and others who we really are, not just what we look like. After relaying the story of a student who commented that by dressing modestly it

When people feel as if they are being punished for not doing what they are told, it often leads to resentment of not only the messenger, but the message as well.

is easier to find those that are similar to us, Josephs ends with the following idea: “I think all too often we Jews see our laws and customs as restrictive and limiting, so it was nice to be reminded, especially by someone from the outside looking in, as to how fortunate we are to have them.”¹¹ You can hear a million people say how meaningful *tsniut* is, but you will only see the beauty of it if you experience that beauty yourself. On the surface, the idea of

modest dress may seem restrictive, but it opens up a whole new way for people to look at you, to see you as the person you really are.

Blima Moskoff develops a different, positive approach to the value of *tsniut*.¹² She suggests the idea that *tsniut* separates physical traits from spiritual, personal ones. People are not defined by what they wear, what they achieve, or any other physical qualities. Rather, they are defined by their inner, more personal qualities. She expresses this with a very simple question: “Even if I would give a very detailed physical description, does that give a true portrait of my friend?”¹³ Instead of focusing on what we cannot wear, she focuses on what we can expose: the face and the hands. “The face reveals who we are: the smile, the eyes (which are windows to the soul), facial expressions, etc. Our hands represent what we do, our endeavors in life.”¹⁴ Moskoff shows that by dressing in a modest way, women are allowing the outside world to get a peek of what they are truly made of. Moskoff also contends that *tsniut* is not a sexist idea, but that it actually fights against sexism. Women are guaranteeing that others see them as they truly are, not just based on how they look. Instead of focusing on the negative, restrictive aspects of dressing modestly, Moskoff focuses on the beauty of *tsniut*: “When a woman covers up her body, she is not

hiding her true identity. To the contrary, she is exposing her real self.”¹⁵

To try and better understand the way that young women think about *tsniut*, I spoke to many of my peers from various cities and places on the Orthodox spectrum. There are teens who feel as if *tsniut* is a negative, restrictive law. However, this is not because the teens think the concept of *tsniut* lacks value, but because they think people use dress as a way to judge others. Hudis Lang, a high school junior from Brooklyn who until recently attended Haredi schools with very strict standards of dress, said that forcing people to dress in a certain way only tempts people to go in the opposite direction. Lang says, “You can’t force someone to dress modestly and get them to feel that they actually want to dress like that.” People should find their own level of modesty and decide for themselves how reserved they should be, instead of being forced to follow guidelines. If this were allowed, Lang feels that there would be more people dressing in a modest way. Lirona Freund, a student at Sha’alvim for Women in Israel, seems to think that *tsniut* is an impetus for negative feelings between various groups of Jews. Freund expressed the idea that “people begin to judge people based on it.” She says that although there is value to dressing in a modest way, there is more to a person than what she wears and sometimes people are too busy judging others based on clothing to notice this. From what I have found, many feel that *tsniut* has value; however, the way it is enforced and used as a way to judge people often overshadows that value.

However, despite some of the negative energy surrounding *tsniut*, I have found that many young women think of modest dress as something that is beneficial and very important. Remy Kaskel, a high school senior from Chicago said, “*tsniut* is a way of representing yourself.” She expressed the idea that dressing modestly is difficult in an environment where *tsniut* is not “the norm” and you receive stares, but this difficulty is what gives *tsniut* meaning. Sarah Lennon, another high school senior from Chicago not only addresses the idea of *tsniut* as a way to respect yourself, but also as a way to protect yourself and get others to respect you. She said, “If one cannot respect one’s body and be modest, then how can she expect others to respect her?” To express the idea of *tsniut* as protecting yourself, Lennon compared the concept of *tsniut* to a seatbelt: even if one is a careful driver, one must be careful and cautious by wearing a seatbelt out of fear of other drivers. Similarly, Lennon says, *tsniut* is an act to protect yourself from others. Although both Lennon and Kaskel acknowledge the difficulty of dressing in a way that is so different from today’s culture, they both agree that the benefits of dressing modestly make the difficulty easy to overcome.

Because of the value inherent in *tsniut*, people who are not raised dressing in a modest way often come to it on their own. Brittany Prero, 24, says that although she grew up wearing pants and short sleeves, she always identified with, and even admired, those that dressed in a modest way. She truly realized the beauty of dressing modestly during her year in Israel. She explains, "As I transitioned into dressing more modestly, I began to feel like I was going in the right direction to truly being myself, which I realized was what I admired in those who already dressed modestly." Prero explained that although it took time to get used to and can be frustrating, she is proud of her decision to dress modestly because she feels as if she is truly herself. Courtney Thomas, 20, is another example of a woman who decided to dress more modestly as she became older. Thomas truly learned the value of dressing modestly as she started to work. Instead of dismissing the puzzled looks and questions about how she dresses with a simple "I prefer skirts," Thomas took her time to explain the concept of *tsniut* to her co-workers. She relayed the idea that *tsniut* is well received by people of all religions and that people respect it. She ended the discussion about *tsniut* by saying, "Not only is dressing [in a *tsanua* manner] a *kiddush Hashem*, but also it defines who I am as a Jew in the secular workplace." People who find value in dressing in a modest way are not free of obstacles, but they find

the strength to push past these obstacles.

As a child, I was raised to dress in a way that was respectful towards others and myself. This was certainly not based on religious beliefs, but instead on the idea

If, instead of focusing on enforcement, we educated young women about the reasons why dressing in a tsanuah manner is meaningful and a value that anyone in society could and should appreciate, young women would develop a more positive outlook toward tsniut.

that how you dress gives off an image of the type of person you are. My parents would not consider themselves religious people, but modest, respectable dress is still an important value for them. My parents instilled this value in me and, although when I was young I never fully appreciated it, I did later when I grew older. I think this value is what made modest dress the most attractive thing to me in religious people. I did not grow up in a religious home, but I did grow up attending a religious school.

I was surrounded with friends and family that had customs that I did not take part in. Yet, when I looked around at them, I did not see people who were restricted; I saw people who dressed in a way that challenged me and forced me to look at them for who they were, not what they wore. Appropriately enough, when deciding to become more religious, *tsniut* was the first thing that I decided to take on.

People often question me, asking why I wanted to dress in a restrictive way when I did not have to. I think that is exactly why it appealed to me so much. It was not something that people were forcing upon me. The idea that *tsniut* does not simply define what you wear, but who you are and the potential you have was something that spoke to me. Contrary to what I had previously thought, I found that

dressing more modestly does not mean you have to dress in an ugly way, or throw away your physical qualities; you just have to integrate them into who you really are. I took the opportunity to learn more about dressing modestly. I spoke to teachers who inspired me, friends who dressed modestly, and family members who had begun to dress that way on their own as well. I realized that *tsniut* is not something restrictive, weird, or stupid, like many around me had thought. I realized that in society, people use your exterior appearance to define you. However, I do not feel like that is what defines me. All of my exterior qualities and achievements are things that can be taken away from me, and I define myself by more than just those things. Dressing modestly forced people to find my inner qualities, it made people see who I really am and not just what I wear. Some people were even inspired to learn more about the concept of *tsniut*.

I realized that there were two challenges in dressing more modestly. Popular culture pulls us in the opposite direction of modest dress. We also live in a world that promotes rights and freedoms. In this world we cannot imagine that someone, even an authority figure, could tell us to do something, especially in an area as personal as how we dress. But the greater and more important challenge is finding meaning in those commandments that we do not connect with so easily and making them something we want to do, using our free choice. We all want to be appreciated and valued for who we really are, and this is the opportunity that *tsniut* gives us.

If we all look at these aspects of *tsniut* and focus on them as we teach the next generation, people will be more attracted to the idea of dressing in a modest way. When people use *tsniut* as a way to judge others or only focus on its negative parts, it seems restrictive. However, if we focus on the positive, beneficial aspects of dressing more modestly, we cannot argue that it is negative or restrictive. Although *tsniut* is something that is extremely personal, strikingly different from the culture around us, and often looked upon as weird, it does not lack value. The concept of *tsniut* is a way for us to show people who we really are. It forces people to look at the true, inner us as opposed to judging us by our exterior qualities. In Judaism, we are taught that our inner selves are our souls. If we make our bodies seem less important by covering them up, it allows us to reveal our souls, or inner selves, to other people. If we focus on these positive characteristics of *tsniut*, I think we can all work together to restore its true, beautiful meaning.

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1 The Lakewood View Staff, "Reader

Submitted: From Bnos Yaakov..." *The Lakewood View*, 5 June, 2012, available at: www.thelakewoodview.com.

2 Ibid.

3 R. Pesach Eliyahu Falk, *Modesty, an Adornment for Life: Halachos and Attitudes Concerning Tznius of Dress & Conduct* (Nanuet, NY: Feldheim Publishers, 1998).

4 Falk, 580.

5 Dovid Teitelbaum, "An Open Letter to Bnos Yaakov of Lakewood: Doing More Harm Than Good," *Tales from a Summer Camp...*, available at: blog.campsdeichemed.com.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 A website that is "breaking down stereotypes about religious Jews and offering a humorous, meaningful look into Orthodox Judaism."

9 Allison Josephs, "Where's The Line Between Tznius (Modest) and Sexy?," *Jew in the City*, available at: www.jewinthecity.com.

10 Allison Josephs, "Why Don't Orthodox Jewish Women Wear Pants?," *Jew in the City*, available at: www.jewinthecity.com.

11 Ibid.

12 Blima Moskoff, "Uncovering the Mystery of Modesty," *Chabad*, available at: www.chabad.org.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.



Creative Arts

Images and information provided by the Yeshiva University Museum



Walking the Tightrope Called Life

BY: MATI ENGEL

Reviewed Book: Reuven Ziegler, *Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications).

Yeshiva University is an institution that seeks to exemplify the relationship between *Torah u-Madda*, a philosophy adopted by the university in 1946 as its overarching mission. It is hard to identify oneself as a Modern Orthodox Jew without being literate in the pivotal works of *Torah u-Madda*, particularly, and most importantly, the fundamental teachings of the Rav. Despite this, I often hear from non-Judaic major/minor students that they regret having such a limited knowledge of the works of R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

Even for those who exhibit interest in his teachings, there is but one course offered on campus that would satisfy their curiosity yet at the same time does not require preliminary knowledge of the subject.

The phenomenon of disconnection from the teachings of the Rav became apparent to me during my first year on campus, mostly among those who do not generally opt for heavy *beit midrash* learning. I admit that I cannot speak with confidence on behalf of the YC/RIETS campus, yet I am curious to know if their experience is comparable with that of the Stern campus. I personally attended a Modern Orthodox high school like most Yeshiva University students, and there too I was barely, if at all, exposed to the Rav's philosophy in a classroom setting. A possible reason for this may be that my high school administration chose to hire educators that were chiefly Haredi and that, in turn, softly pushed my education in the realm of Modern Orthodoxy to the margin. Don't get me wrong, I cherish my high school educators; they planted within me a deep sense of commitment and love for my Judaism. However, it is embarrassing

for me to admit that my first interactions with the Rav's teachings were here at Stern in my first semester, while enrolled in the one non-advanced Philosophy of the Rav class that was offered.

If you find yourself under this category of people who have little to no familiarity with the philosophy of the Rav, then consider reading *Majesty and Humility*,

Majesty and Humility creates a window of opportunity for anyone who has yet to encounter the major themes and motifs that encapsulate the Rav's thinking, while also thoughtfully expanding concepts with which an avid Rav reader is already familiar.

a comprehensive study of the Rav's essays by R. Reuven Ziegler. R. Ziegler is the Director of Research and Archiving at Toras HoRav Foundation, where he identified and pieced together the original manuscripts of the Rav, manuscripts that had previously only been seen by the Rav himself. The work of several years of

research, *Majesty and Humility* masterfully integrates the Rav's sharp knowledge and mastery of the Talmud, Bible, and Mishnah alongside his background in Western secular philosophy. *Majesty and Humility* records the way in which the Rav combined his staunch commitment to the *mesorah* while also addressing an exchange of conversation between reason and revelation, between modernity and tradition.¹

The review contains a corpus of the Rav's published and unpublished works. The goal of this piece is to provide a peek into R. Reuven Ziegler's summary on R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik's stream of consciousness as it is embodied in his essays. Ziegler's book was written with the intention not of being a substitute, but rather an accompaniment to the Rav's essays. *Majesty and Humility* creates a window of opportunity for anyone who has yet to encounter the major themes and motifs that encapsulate the Rav's thinking, while also thoughtfully expanding concepts with which an avid Rav reader is already familiar. R. Ziegler successfully takes the complex ideas and

the difficult language used constantly in R. Soloveitchik's essays and presents them in an organized and audience-friendly manner. The book is arranged systematically into chapters according to theme and specific essays written by the Rav, with a summary of the entire book at the end.

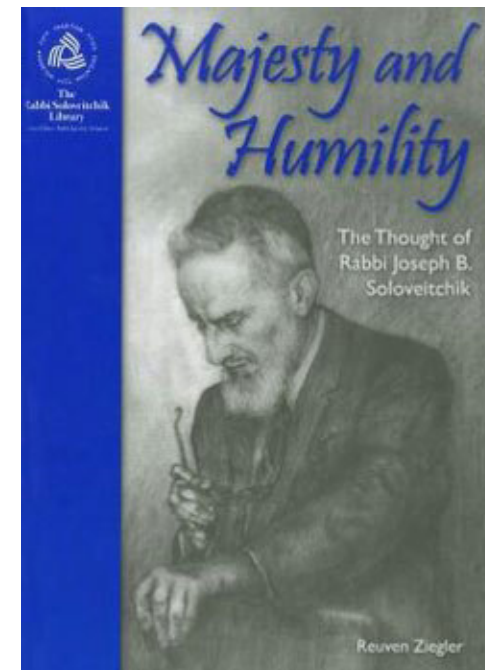
A major overriding theme that R. Ziegler sets forth in this summary on the Rav is the centrality of the halakhic system in the Rav's works. The Rav lived his life conducting a demanding search for knowledge that looked to elevate, rather than forfeit, the physical world. Ziegler explains that Halakhah serves as the primary medium for the ideal religious experience of relating to God – encapsulating both self-development and community-building. It is a system that regularly takes into account human nature and its opposing internal forces. Physicality, in that case, is in conflict with spirituality; feelings of self-transcendence stand against the harsh reality of human frailty. Dialectic, a word originating in ancient Greece, is often used by the Rav in the context of a dialectical method. Dialectical method is a discourse between two or more fundamentally different ideals with the purpose of resolving the conflict between them.² Use of the dialectic method in contending ideas is a process displayed consistently in the Talmudic approach of establishing a guided religious life. Halakhah, therefore, defines truths by means of thoroughly deliberated arguments. It is not surprising then that the Rav viewed Halakhah as the main text in understanding Jewish thought.³

Ziegler explains that, for the

Rav, a desire for simplicity stems from a "rebellion against knowledge and against objective thought" – for the exposure and knowledge of the greater world does in fact disrupt peace of mind.⁴ It causes man to reflect and to question his duality in nature, as discussed above. These are the thoughts of a religious leader who blazed the trail of a *Torah u-Madda* mindset, and I wonder if these thoughts are still present in our Yeshiva University mentality. Would we describe our daily experiences as centered on a halakhic, God-centered ideal, combined with an attempt to enrich our religious experiences with secular pursuits? Are Judaism and the halakhic man at the core of our functioning existence, as they were for the Rav?

In Ziegler's footnotes, he mentions that, for the Rav, the practice and study of Halakhah is comparable to that of mathematics. Just as a mathematician creates an *a priori* abstract construct, focusing his attention on that ideal equation when attempting to apply it to the physical world, similarly, our individual conceptions of the world ought to appear only as a consequence of the superior divinely revealed principles (the halakhic ideal). The halakhic expert uses Halakhah as an ideal system of laws through which she then sees nature and reality. A celebrated example of this is when the Rav's Halakhic Man comes across a spring of water. He possesses

a fixed *a priori* relationship to the nature of the spring regarding his halakhic construct. He questions whether the spring corresponds to the requirements of the ideal halakhah in regards to the immersion of a *zav* (a man with a discharge) in *mei*



hattat (waters of purification), whether the spring requires forty *se'ah* of water, and so on. This is a striking illustration of taking the ideal halakhic equation and applying it to the natural experiential world.⁵

Ziegler articulates that "there is no phenomenon, entity or object in this concrete world with which an *a priori* halakhah does not approach its ideal standards; all aspects of creation fall under a Halakhic category: nature, society, commerce laws, government, family etc."⁶ We thereby bring God into this world through halakhic cognition (*talmud Torah*) and halakhic action by means of *shemirat ha-mitsvot*.⁷ It is a system that guides us in the swinging pendulum of human motivation. Halakhic Man is entirely unconcerned with the next world; he prefers the real world over a transcendent existence. According to the Rav, "Here, in this world, man is given the opportunity to create, act, accomplish, while there, in the world to come, he is powerless to change anything at all."⁸ Halakhah is meant to be alive; it is the agent that engages man's intellect, will, emotions and activity, all of which are harnessed toward serving God. No realm of life could be tedious or neutral.



The Rav addresses the sense of constraint that many feel in observing Halakhah, but believes that the inner struggle can lead to self-sacrifice and ultimate commitment, a process he calls "catharsis," i.e. purging oneself in submission to a higher purpose.⁹ A clear display of the Rav's intellectual honesty is that he places no emphasis on a feeling of reward or inner tranquility gained through observance. He writes, "Religion is not, at the outset, a refuge of grace and mercy for the despondent and desperate, an enchanted stream for crushed spirits, but a raging, clamorous torrent of man's consciousness with all its crises, pangs and torments."¹⁰ By no means is religion a psychological relief, an "opiate to the masses," as Karl Marx and others would reckon it to be. A religious lifestyle is laced with tensions of values and sacrifices of self for a higher purpose -- God.

Majesty and Humility attests to the notion that religion, and especially Modern Orthodoxy, is a difficult all-encompassing pursuit. One is constantly on a tight rope trying to balance the dialectic tensions between utilitarianism and submissiveness,¹¹ majesty and humility,¹² individual and community,¹³ Adam I and Adam II,¹⁴ etc., all terms used in the Rav's work. There is no trait, talent, urge, and no aspect of life, which cannot be used in the service of God.

Ziegler bridges coherent themes within the Rav's works, formulating his teachings in a comprehensive, organized

fashion. He consistently displays the notion that, for the Rav, Halakhah is a way of perceiving reality as a blueprint for the world. It is the guide to human development and self-transcendence, facilitating a man-mediated relationship with God, sanctifying man's natural, mundane day-to-day experience, and filling his life with meaning and direction. The Rav believes that man becomes a collaborator with God in the development of Halakhah; he is not simply being submissive to a higher force. For the Rav, Halakhah is the supreme knowledge. It requires no harmonization of external philosophical views because Halakhah is a crystallization of the most authentic expressions of Jewish thought.

R. Joseph B. Solovietchik defended Jewish tradition and yet confidently embraced science, technology, and philosophy. He allowed Orthodox Judaism to flourish in conjunction with the modern world, instead of encouraging Jews to isolate themselves from it. He viewed Halakhah as a source of Jewish philosophy, a tool in balancing one's life and a guide to everyday decision-making. Being an observant Jew according to the Rav is an active existence, a cerebral activity, where questions are demanding and at times tormenting, but, in its complexity, one finds creativity and meaning.

Majesty and Humility by Reuven Ziegler successfully gives the reader a broad, yet profound and comprehensive, understanding of the Rav's teaching and insights. A worthwhile read for an observant and committed Jew walking the tightrope called life.

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1 Reuven Ziegler, *Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Jerusalem, Israel: Urim Publications, 2012).

2 "Dialectic," *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, available at: www.merriam-webster.com.

3 Ziegler, 147.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid, 308.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid,

9 Ibid, 69.

10 Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), xi.

11 Ziegler, 130.

12 Ziegler, 51.

13 Ziegler, 39.

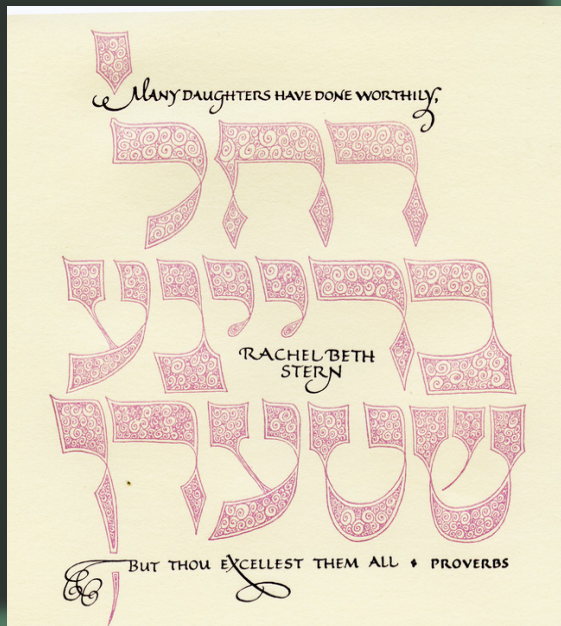
14 Ibid.,308.



BAR MITZVAH PHOTOGRAPH OF YOSSEL FISCHER
Poland, early 20th century
Collection of Yeshiva University Museum Gift of Mrs. Joseph Lempel



Confirmation invitation of Paul Goldstein January 14, 1922
Philadelphia, 1922
Collection of Yeshiva University Museum



Bat Mitzvah invitation of Rachel Stern
Calligraphy by Abigail D. Chapman
New Jersey, 1981
Collection of Yeshiva University Museum
Gift of Leonard Seastone



FOR THE CHILD WHO IS UNABLE TO INQUIRE, THOU SHALT EXPLAIN THE WHOLE STORY OF PASSOVER
Harriete Estel Berman
San Mateo, California, 2000-2001
Steel, tin, Plexiglas, silver and brass
The Miriam and Israel Wertentheil Children's Judaica Collection
Yeshiva University Museum
Harriete Estel Berman's Pesach Plate: 'For the Child who is Unable to Inquire, Thou Shalt Explain the Whole Story of Passover' uses pre-printed steel from doll houses, re-cycled tin containers, and other materials to create a window into daily domestic life, traditionally a feminine domain and the center of family life.



Bat Mitzvah needlepoint
Pauline Fischer
New York, mid 20th century
Collection of Yeshiva University Museum
Gift of Eric R. Fischer



Shifra and Puah
Artist: Miriam Stern
Teaneck, 2002
Oil and decoupage

On the bottom rungs of both chairs are painted slogans in Hebrew and English symbolizing Shifrah and Puah's rebellion against Pharaoh. These two brave women were our first feminist role models.



Roosevelt Golden Book JNF Contribution acknowledgment in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Arthur L. Kimmelfield United States, ca.1940
Collection of Yeshiva University Museum