



# KOL HAMEVASER

THE JEWISH THOUGHT MAGAZINE OF THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY

## JEWISH COMMUNITY: MODELS AND IDEALS

*Of Blood and Hope:  
Building a Community:  
Lessons Learned with  
Max Profeta*

by Chaim Goldberg

*Communal Cry: The  
Paradox of Tefillah  
Be-Tsibbur*

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*Elu V'elu Divrei Elokim  
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*Rabbi Shimon Shkop's  
Imitatio Dei  
and the Value of Fun*

by Arie Sklar

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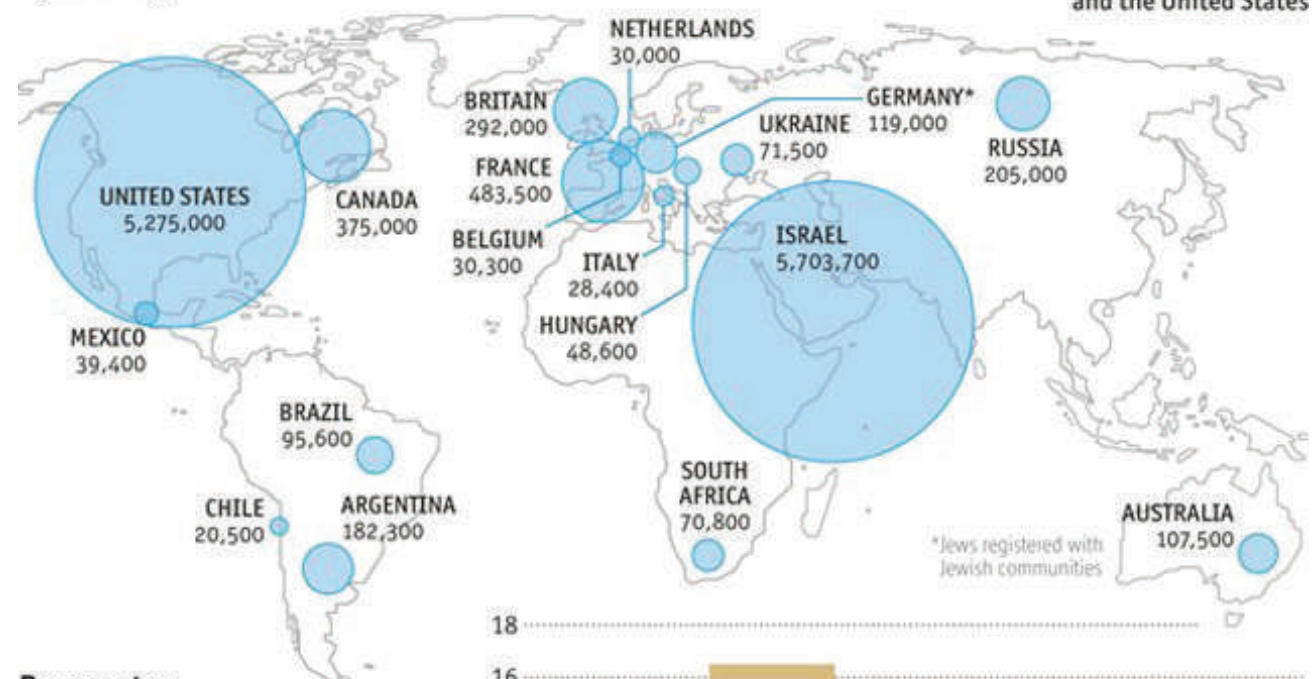
By country

13,580,000

World total

81%

of whom live in Israel  
and the United States



By country  
or region, m



Source: "Jewish Demographic Policies", by Sergio DellaPergola, The Jewish People Policy Institute

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*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.



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# Editor's Thoughts: Is there an Ideal Jewish Community?

BY SHOSHANA HALPERN

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*Mishnah* in the second chapter of *Pirkei Avot* teaches “*al tifrosh min ha-tzibbur*--do not separate from the community.” Community is an integral aspect of Jewish practice and we have mitzvot such as those that fall under “*devarim she-bikedusha*” that cannot be done by individuals. Judaism does not allow us to live in isolation. The *gemara* in *Taanit* says, “When the people find themselves in trouble, let not a man say, I will go into my home and eat and drink, and all will be well with me.”<sup>i</sup> As members of a community we are obligated to care for one another. Rav Yisrael Salanter explained that people should view their fellow Jews’ physical needs as their own spiritual needs.<sup>ii</sup> Perhaps, this is one way to interpret Hillel’s statement, “Do not separate yourself from the community.” When your community needs help you must help them. However, an alternative interpretation of Hillel’s statement is

reading it as an admonition to not veer from normative communal practice.

What makes a particular practice normative? The designation “normative” implies behavior that is standardized and anticipated. The constant struggle between individual values and traditional Orthodox Judaism provides fertile ground for this debate on both uptown and downtown Yeshiva University campuses. “*Al tifrosh min ha-tzibbur*” and similar sources are often used as the basis for an argument about why practices should not change. However, it is important to ask ourselves who is the *tzibbur* referred to in these discussions? For instance, when Women’s Tefillah Groups were first becoming popular, a major objection to them was that women who participated would be separating themselves from the *tzibbur*. Rabbi Avraham Weiss in his book, *Women at Prayer: A Halakhic Analysis of Women’s Prayer Groups* makes the argument that to solve the issue of “*al tifrosh*” Women’s Tefilah Groups

should meet in a separate room but in the same building as the regular *minyan*. This essentially ameliorates the problem of separating from the community. The borders that define where a community starts and ends can be murky; often we find ourselves being part of more than one community whose values may or may not harmonize.

This issue of *Kol Ha-Mevaser* attempts to tackle some of the challenging questions that come up when talking about the concept of Jewish community. While reading this issue and reflecting on our community, let us try to remember that the exhortation not to “separate from the community” also carries the reverse message. We must strive to ensure that we don’t make a community that people want to separate themselves from. *Midrash Bamidbar Rabba* teaches that there are “*shivim panim la-Torah*.” The phrase literally translates “there are seventy faces of the Torah,” and this principle is classically used to explain the

myriad of explanations and interpretations that can exist for one source.<sup>iii</sup> This idea that Judaism is a religion of multiple truths implies that a Jewish community does not need to have one uniform practice and *hashkafah*; therefore, one must wonder: is there really a singular ideal Jewish community? I think the ideal community is one where multiple opinions and practices are studied, respected and examined, through lenses that foster spiritual growth and a positive sense of belonging.

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*Shoshana Halpern is Editor-in-Chief of Kol Hamevasser. She is a senior at Stern College majoring in psychology.*

i. *Taanit* 11a

ii. <http://www.mussarinstitute.org/>

iii. *Midrash Bamidbar Rabba* 13:15-16

## Of Blood and Hope: Building a Community: Lessons Learned with Max Profeta

BY CHAIM GOLDBERG

In *Parashat Vayechi*, after Ya’akov’s death, the Torah spends numerous verses describing the narrative of the mourning process for Ya’akov as well as his funeral procession to *Eretz Yisrael*. Amongst what is a rather lengthy description, there’s one verse which seems somewhat unnecessary; not misplaced or irrelevant, but perhaps extraneous. The Torah tells us, “*Va’yar... Va’yomeru eivel kaveid zeh l’Mitzrayim, al kein kara shemah ‘aveil Mitzrayim*.” “And the people of Cana’an saw the mourning (taking place for Ya’akov) in *Goren Ha’atad* (a place) and said, ‘What an intense (literally, “heavy”) mourning this is for Egypt!’ Therefore they called the name of the place ‘The mourning of Egypt.’”

The purpose of this verse is unclear. With all due respect to the people of *Cana’an*, is it so important to know that they too saw Ya’akov’s funeral proces-

sion? Why do we care to know a random historical fact, such as what they named a nearby city? Why do we need the seemingly random historical perspective of the non-Jewish onlookers?

On one level, I believe this question gives us a window into understanding an earlier statement made by Ya’akov.

***Creating a community is not an easy task. Through Max, the YU community has been blessed to discover an oft-hidden sense of unity amongst its student body.***

In the beginning of the *parasha*, Ya’akov calls over Yosef and insists that he be buried in the Land of Israel as opposed to

in Egypt. One of several reasons given by the *Midrash* for this command is that Ya’akov was afraid his burial place would become a place of idol worship.

Why, according to the *Midrash*, is Ya’akov worried about his burial place turning into a place of idol worship? Our knowledge of the Egyptian culture of mummifying and pyramid-like tombs provides one answer. However, our verse illuminates Ya’akov’s concern even more clearly, for we see even when his funeral procession was merely passing by, it still warranted the naming of a city after him! Clearly, Ya’akov’s tomb was liable to be idolized.

That being said, I believe this verse lends itself to an even deeper level of understanding, one which carries much relevance to



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our lives. It seems that Ya'akov not only successfully avoided becoming an attraction for idol worship, he in fact generated a tremendous *Kiddush Hashem*.

The name given to the site of Ya'akov's funeral procession is not an insignificant one. The name given is, "The Mourning of Egypt," indicating it was an ideal. This funeral procession was seen as the ultimate way to properly mourn for the deceased. The non-Jews didn't simply passively notice the event; they experienced it actively, and having clearly been moved by the nature of this funeral, they concretized the experience by designating it as a lesson for the ages, as the paradigmatic way to mourn for a leader.

The idea that this verse is teaching us about *Kiddush Hashem* can be framed by the following two factors. The first stems from a *Gemara* on *Yoma* 86a, which teaches the idea of one who brings about love of G-d through his actions. It depicts how if one is a Torah scholar, community leader, or rabbinic mentor, if he interacts

positively with his colleagues, pays his bills on time, assists the needy and other such virtuous acts, those who see him will praise him and his G-d. In essence, the *Gemara* is saying that a person whose neighbors respect and appreciate him creates a *Kiddush Hashem*.

The second factor is the simple idea that places and positions are only named after people who are respected and appreciated. Earlier this year, two streets in New York City were named after two police officers who were tragically murdered in cold blood. Why? Because we recognize that these two men were killed in the line of duty, have the utmost respect for them and are infinitely appreciative for the sacrifice they made on our behalf.

Consequently, if the people of *Cana'an* named a city after Ya'akov's fu-

neral procession—and again, a name with such long-term import—it only follows that they must have had immense respect and appreciation for the beneficiary of that funeral, Ya'akov. In other words, the dictum of *Yoma* 86a was fulfilled and G-d's name was sanctified: A *Kiddush Hashem* was made.

The question is, then, what were the factors that produced this sanctification of G-d's name? To this, I believe, the Torah gives us two answers. One is quantity, the other is quality. Earlier in the narrative, a lengthy list is given of the people who joined Ya'akov's funeral procession, and it concludes by saying, "And the camp was very *kaveid*," (again, literally meaning heavy, but) indicating a substantial amount of people. The non-Jewish observers were astounded by the sheer number of people who accompanied Ya'akov to his final resting place.

As for quality, we have to keep in mind that the Torah is not simply talking about Ya'akov's memorial service where

the eulogies took place; rather, it is discussing the entirety of the funeral procession and the burial. Accordingly, all of the numerous participants sacrificed a significant amount of days from their regular schedule and undertook what was surely an arduous trek from

Egypt to Israel! And not just Ya'akov's family, but a substantial amount of people. This exertion clearly impressed the non-Jews as well.

While this is a nice story from thousands of years ago, its lessons and underlying roots continue to reverberate in today's times as well. A few months ago, Max Profeta, a YU student from Indianapolis, was unfortunately diagnosed with leukemia. A few weeks later, Rabbi Yonasan Shippel, head of Max's Judaic Studies program, gave a regularly scheduled



*sichah* in the *Beit Midrash*. During this *sichah*, he briefly mentioned that blood can be donated and earmarked specifically for Max and he thanked those who had already done so. Soon after, I went with a friend to Sloan Kettering Hospital to donate blood for Max.

While I have donated blood numerous times before, this time it was an eye-opening experience. While booking the appointment by phone, we were asked if we were donating for someone specific and after I mentioned Max Profeta, the woman gave a ready acknowledgment of Max. Nothing explicitly out of the ordinary yet, but her familiarity seemed a bit unusual. When we arrived at the donation center and were asked the same question by the receptionist there, we again received a notion of familiarity with Max's name and she commented on how nice it was that we were donating for Max. The comment struck me as slightly strange only because there are hundreds of patients in the hospital.

After we finished donating, we asked if we could visit Max. The receptionist said she would call and see, but first requested that we tell her our relationship to Max. We responded that, in fact, we had never met Max. We explained that we merely went to the same school as him and wanted to visit if possible. At this point, she could not hold herself back and proceeded to shower us with compliments of all sorts, about what incredible people

we were, what a tremendous kindness we were doing, *et cetera*. When we finally got to the 9th floor where Max was staying, as one could imagine the nurses who actually knew Max were even more effusive in their praise than the receptionist who had never met him. Without exaggeration, as we walked out of the elevators, one of the nurses called to us, "So you're the special people who just donated?"

Now, all of these accolades caught me quite by surprise. While I won't be one to deny that I was doing a kind deed, I by no means felt that what I did was extraordinary. And, in fact, it wasn't extraordinary, as I proceeded to learn during my visit with Max that I was only one of many to donate for him. Deserving of a compliment? Perhaps. But endless praises? I couldn't quite wrap my head around it. Luckily, all the answers soon became clear.

During what was truly a nice visit with Max, I discovered two exceptional pieces of information. The first was that, in his relatively brief time at the hospital, Max had already nearly set the record (2<sup>nd</sup> most) of blood donations earmarked for a specific patient. Around 150 people had donated blood specifically for Max!

The second tidbit was that though Max had needed approximately 50 blood transfusions by that point, only twice had they needed to go to the general blood bank! All the other transfusions came from blood earmarked specifically for

***During what was truly a nice visit with Max, I discovered an exceptional piece of information. During his relatively brief stay at the hospital, Max had nearly set the record of blood donations earmarked for any specific patient at Sloan Kettering: Around 150 people had donated blood specifically for him!***



him, which is significant because even though there were 150 donations, if unused after a few weeks, earmarked blood is transferred to the general blood bank. What that means, therefore, is that blood wasn't donated to Max just in the initial week or two after his diagnosis while emotions were running high; rather, people had been constantly donating blood for Max, going 3 weeks after, 5 weeks after, 2 months, 10 weeks....so much so that throughout his treatment he virtually never needed the general blood bank!

What I realized later was yes, perhaps I didn't do anything extraordinary, and neither did the other 150 individuals, but something did. Max's school did something extraordinary, Max's people did something extraordinary, the Jewish nation as a collective did something extraordinary. While I saw my action as simply a nice act, for the hospital workers it was in fact extraordinary, because this was a depth of caring which goes well beyond what they are generally exposed to. Ultimately, what this was, of course, was a remarkable *Kiddush Hashem*, a sanctification of G-d's name, for much the same reasons that Ya'akov's funeral procession was a *Kiddush Hashem*. First, the pure numbers—the 2<sup>nd</sup> most donations in the hospital's history! And second, the effort. After all, the NY Blood Center comes to the YU and Stern campuses every few months and anyone who wants to do so is able to at their convenience, with a mini-

mum of time taken from their day. Nonetheless, over a hundred students, not just his close friends but many who did not know Max, got up and traveled to Max's hospital so that they could donate especially for him.

I believe this element of effort really underscores one of the fundamental differences between Judaism and other religions. Judaism is a religion of effort, a



life of initiative, a commitment to seeking out knowledge of what G-d wants from us, and an experience of sacrifice. We are blessed with the day of Shabbos, but it entails sacrifice. We are blessed with the laws of *Taharas Hamishpacha*/family purity, yet they demand sacrifice.

There are no “free lunches” in Judaism. What I find to be one of the most

striking teachings in the entire *Gemara* is what we learn in *Yoma* that even the day of *Yom Kippur*—our ultimate day of repentance and renewal—only acquires meaning after we have done our part to make amends and to achieve our own renewal. Only after we have made ourselves vulnerable to our friends and close ones is G-d, so to speak, willing to make Himself vulnerable to us.

Similarly, creating a community is not an easy task. To form an entity whose individual parts feel responsible for one another requires opening oneself up to those around him, desiring to march towards a common goal with them, and, ultimately, acting on that desire. Through Max, the YU community has been blessed to uncover an oft-hidden sense of unity

amongst its student body. May G-d give us the strength to continue to put forth our best efforts in all that we do, and may we realize that while our own individual actions may seem small, together, they can produce something extraordinary.

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*I recently spoke to Max over the phone. Max is deeply appreciative for all that everyone has done for him the last few months and would like to extend his gratitude to the YU community for its unwavering support. With much gratitude to G-d, we are happy to say Max recently concluded all his treatments and was released from the hospital. In fact, he is even back to living in the Heights and please God anticipates continuing his education at YU in the fall.*

*Additionally, it is worth noting that by the time Max was released for the final time, the number of blood donations earmarked for him was up to around 200. Furthermore, approximately 300 donations were made in his name in his hometown, Indianapolis, IN.*

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## Communal Cry: The Paradox of *Tefillah Be-Tsibbur*

BY YAKIR FORMAN A well-known *midrash*<sup>i</sup> gives prayer the moniker “*avodah she-be-leiv*,” “service of the heart.” *Tefillah* thus takes on an intensely individual character. Unsurprisingly, the image of Hannah's highly personal prayer dominates our heritage's perspective on *shemoneh esreih*, the centerpiece of *tefillah*<sup>ii</sup>; the *halakhot* which emerge from this image, such as the proscription that *tefillah* be whispered such that only the prayer and G-d can hear<sup>iii</sup>, further the individualization of *tefillah*. Yet this most personal of *mitsvot* ironically frames the most commonplace public element of *halakhah*, the institution

of *teiflah be-tsibbur*. Instead of praying alone in their homes, Jewish individuals make their way to a gathering place, a *beit ha-keneset*, specifically designated for prayer, and make a conscious effort to whisper in a group of ten. It is this *halakhah* which gives rise to a central paradox of the Jewish life experience: while prayer is one of the most personal actions a Jew takes, the prayer service and its house become the centerpiece of the Jewish community. What can such a public gathering possibly contribute to *avodah she-be-leiv*? If prayer is so intensely personal, how can a community pray?

Careful analysis of the Talmudic passages which discuss *tefillah be-tsibbur* can offer some insight into its nature. Consistent with *tefillah*'s nature as personal *avodah she-be-leiv*, the *gemara* never mandates *tefillah be-tsibbur*<sup>iv</sup>, but a collection of statements toward the beginning of *massekhet berakhot* establish it as

laudatory. In one place (*Berakhot* 7b), Rabbi Yokhanan proclaims that the time

***If tefillah is avodah she-be-leiv, if the very essence of tefillah is shaped by the thoughts of the individual who pours his soul before G-d, how can a tefillah be attributed to a community?***

a *tsibbur* prays is an “*eit ratson*,” an auspicious time for prayer's acceptance. Elsewhere (*Berakhot* 6a), Abba Binyamin proclaims that a person's *tefillah* is heard only in the *beit ha-keneset*<sup>v</sup>, and Rashi explains that the *beit ha-keneset* houses the *tsibbur*'s beautifully



sung praises.

An eminently plausible minimalist reading of both these statements can maintain that the institution of *tefillah be-tsibbur* exists merely to bolster the participating individuals' *tefillot*. Both sources describe the acceptance of a personal *tefillah*, not a joint *tefillah* of the *tsibbur*. If such a joint *tefillah* does not exist, the paradox of *tefillah be-tsibbur* is merely an apparition. The *tsibbur* provides only a framework to help the individual's prayer.

How does the framework of the *tsibbur* create this “*ait ratson*”? Once again, a simple explanation presents itself. Praying in a room designated for prayer, surrounded by others also praying, focuses the individual on his prayer. *Tefillah be-tsibbur* is thus a mechanism for encouraging *kavanah*. Indeed, this position is adopted explicitly by Rabbeinu Manoah<sup>vi</sup>. According to Rabbeinu Manoah, far from being a paradox, *tefillah be-tsibbur* is one of the most internally-focused halakhot of *avodah she-be-leiv*.

Yet a third Talmudic statement suggests this minimalist approach may not suffice. According to Rabbi Natan (*Berakhot* 8a), G-d does not reject “*tefillatan shel rabbim*,” “the prayer of the masses.” A simple reading of this statement reignites the heart of the paradox, the claim which Rabbeinu Manoah seemed to set out to deny: the masses can pray. It seems, according to Rabbi Natan, that *tefillah* need not be an individual's *avodah she-be-leiv*; the prayer of the masses is a valid metaphysical halakhic entity<sup>vii</sup>.

Such a claim seems to have support in the halakhic tradition. Notwithstanding Rabbeinu Manoah's interpretation, Rambam<sup>viii</sup> seems to believe in this view of *tefillah be-tsibbur*. He opens his discussion of the topic with the phrase, “*tefillat ha-tsibbur*,” “the masses' prayer,” already indicating that he believes in the existence of such a

concept. He then chooses to quote Rabbi Natan's statement, as opposed to Rabbi Yokhanan's. Rambam also believes in the concept of being “*meshateif im ha-tsibbur*,” an individual's joining a *tsibbur*.

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***According to Rav Soloveitchik,  
tefillatan shel rabbim is, in fact,  
the paradigmatic example of a prayer.  
Rav Soloveitchik opines that  
when G-d accepts prayers,  
He accepts them as one  
conglomerate tefillat ha-tsibbur –  
for, after all, there is only one  
korban tamid each morning  
for the entire nation.  
The tefillot ha-tsibbur of various  
communities form the core of this entity.***

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If the *tsibbur* were just a framework for bolstering the individual's *kavanah*, the individual would never truly “join” the *tsibbur* but merely surround himself by it; it is only the metaphysical creation of a *tefillat ha-tsibbur* which would require the individual to “join.”

Rav Soloveitchik<sup>ix</sup> notes that the very roots of *tefillah* are in the *tsibbur*, since the *tefillot* were established to

correspond to the *korbenot tamid*, which were public offerings<sup>x</sup>. Thus, according to Rav Soloveitchik, *tefillatan shel rabbim* is, in fact, the paradigmatic example of a prayer. Rav Soloveitchik opines that when

G-d accepts prayers, he accepts them as one conglomerate *tefillat ha-tsibbur* – for, after all, there is only one *korban tamid* each morning for the entire nation. The *tefillot ha-tsibbur* of various communities form the core of this entity. According to Rav Soloveitchik, ten men are required not merely to bolster *kavanah* but to represent the entirety of the Jewish nation, creating an entity which is not the prayer

of an individual or even a community, but the prayer of a nation.

There are a number of halakhic ramifications to these two different perspectives. For example, Rambam<sup>xi</sup> defines *tefillat ha-tsibbur* as one person praying while the congregation listens. Such a construct is possible only if the goal of *tefillah be-tsibbur* is to create one entity of *tefillatan shel rabbim*; if the goal is to help ten or more individual prayers, each of these prayers must be recited by the individuals of the congregation!<sup>xii</sup> Thus, the form of *tefillah be-tsibbur* may change depending on which perspective is taken.

The nature of the *mitsvah* of *tefillah be-tsibbur* also depends on one's perspective. According to the minimalist approach, *tefillah be-tsibbur* is an individual *mitsvah*; according to the Rambam's apparent approach, it is a *mitsvah* fulfilled by the community, instead of by a specific individual. This may have ramifications in different areas of *halakhah*. For example, the *Gemara* (*Berakhot* 47b) tells the story of Rabbi Eliezer, who violated the Biblical prohibition against freeing his slave in order to form a *minyan*<sup>xiii</sup>. The *Gemara* justifies this act on the basis of *tefillah be-tsibbur*'s<sup>xiv</sup> being a “*mitsvah de-rabim*,” a *mitsvah* of the masses. This is most directly true if one views the *mitsvah* as being accomplished by the community. If the *mitsvah* is accomplished by specific individuals, one must interpret *mitsvah de-rabim* differently; for example, Rosh (*Mo'eid Katan* 3:3) sees the advantage

of *tefillah be-tsibbur* in the mere facts that it is accomplished by all individuals, and that Rabbi Eliezer's freeing his slave helped multiple individuals fulfill the *mitsvah*.

The different perspectives toward *tefillah be-tsibbur* also necessitate different perspectives toward how an individual becomes part of the *tsibbur*. As noted above, according to Rabbeinu



Manoah, it seems likely that the individual merely needs the presence of a quorum, while Rambam seems to require some act of “joining” the *tsibbur*. The concept of “joining” is amorphous, but it may reflect more stringent requirements of adding oneself to a quorum. For example, Shaarei Teshuvah (55:14) rules that if an individual can hear the *tsibbur* from a different building, he is considered to be praying with the *tsibbur*. This should certainly be true according to Rabbeniu Manoah, since merely hearing the *tsibbur*’s prayers assists his *kavanah*. Peri Megadim (90:15), who may disagree<sup>xv</sup>, may believe in a more stringent concept of “joining.” Global

perspective toward *tefillah* be-*tsibbur* also has ramifications in the related issue of how the quorum forms. According to the *Gemara* (*Berakhot* 47b), the higher form of *zimmun* (a group’s unifying for Grace After Meals), which also requires a quorum of ten, can be recited even if ten are not quite reached, such if the tenth is a minor, or nine people are arranged in such a way that they appear to be ten. Can these leniencies be duplicated for *tefillah* be-*tsibbur*? If the quorum of *tefillah* be-*tsibbur* is necessary merely to bolster *kavanah*, the answer is almost certainly yes<sup>xvi</sup>; but to create a metaphysical communal prayer may necessitate an actual quorum.

One final halakhic question concerns the content of the *tefillot*. Magein Avraham (90:17) asks whether an individual who prays *mussaf* while the *tsibbur* is praying *shakharit* is considered to have fulfilled *tefillah* be-*tsibbur*. Such a *tsibbur* certainly creates an environment which contributes to the individual’s *kavanah*. According to the minimalist perspective, therefore, the individual should fulfill *tefillah* be-*tsibbur*, consistent with the opinion of *Mishnah* Berurah

(90:30). Magein Avraham himself, however, believes such an individual does not fulfill *tefillah* be-*tsibbur*. This seems to reflect a need to create a communal prayer; *mussaf* and *shakharit* are too different to conglomerate into a single *tefillatan shel rabbim*. Interestingly, Tslach (*Berakhot*



6a) adopts both perspectives of *tefillah* be-*tsibbur* in different situations. According to Tslach, if the case arises outside the *beit ha-keneset*, only the *tsibbur*’s prayer is heard<sup>xvii</sup>, and an individual who prays *mussaf* while the *tsibbur* prays *shakharit* is not considered part of the *tsibbur*. Inside the *beit ha-keneset*, on the other hand, the individual’s *tefillah* is heard as long as he is in an environment of prayer, which can be created even if the *tsibbur* is reciting *ashrei* and of course exists if the *tsibbur* is praying *shakharit*. Tslach’s exposition beautifully showcases the simultaneous existence of two levels of *tefillah* be-*tsibbur*: the core *tefillat ha-tsibbur*, which is created by a quorum praying the same prayer together, and the prayer environment, which is created in a *beit ha-keneset* even by a *tsibbur* who is done with *shemoneh esrei* and can be joined by an individual praying a different prayer. These two levels correspond to the two perspectives the rishonim had on *tefillah* be-*tsibbur*.

While the existence of communal prayer as a metaphysical entity seems to be a well-supported halakhic option, it brings the paradox of *tefillah* be-*tsibbur*

upon us in full force. If *tefillah* is *avodah she-be-leiv*, if the very essence of *tefillah* is shaped by the thoughts of the individual who pours his soul before G-d, how can a *tefillah* be attributed to a community? It is possible that the nature of the communal *tefillah* is entirely different from the nature

the individual *avodah she-be-leiv*, and the communal *tefillah* is centered in shared words instead of personal thoughts.<sup>xviii</sup> There seems, however, to be a subtler option.

The crucible of Egypt provided our nation with its opportunity for the first national *tefillah* in its

history. The *tefillah* of the Jews in the second chapter of Shemot is beautiful in its simplicity. According to the *pasuk* (Shemot 2:23), “*Va-yei’anehu venei yisrael min ha-avodah va-yizaqu, va-taal shavatam el ha-elokim min ha-avodah*,” “*Bnei Yisrael* groaned from the labor, and they cried out, and their prayer rose to G-d from the labor.” A national groan and cry, the most basic expression of pain and yearning for G-d’s salvation, was enough to start the wheels of redemption.

The model of this *tefillah* can solve the paradox of *tefillah* be-*tsibbur*. Perhaps a community cannot think the complex thoughts of personal *tefillah*, but a community shares a basic yearning to G-d. The *tefillat ha-tsibbur* is formed, in its essence, by a communal cry; it is this basic yearning which unites the *tsibbur* and allows the individuals’ disparate and distinct *tefillot* to share the basis of communal prayer as they rise to and are heard by G-d.<sup>xix</sup>

One other element also unites the disparate individual prayers: the individuals themselves think of themselves as part of the community. “Joining” the community, as Rambam mandates,

requires more than merely being present for prayer with a *minyan*. Two peculiarities in Rambam’s exposition of this concept<sup>xx</sup> seem to suggest this. Kesef Mishneh notes that Rambam’s mandate to “join the community in prayer” is borrowed from *Berakhot* 29b-30a, which uses the phrase in an entirely different context. According to that *Gemara*, a person should pray *tefillat ha-derekh* in the plural, including others along with himself in his prayers, thus “joining the community in prayer.” Rambam, however, borrows the phrase to mandate *tefillah* be-*tsibbur*. After borrowing this phrase, Rambam explains, “A person should not pray individually whenever it is possible for him to pray with the *tsibbur*.” Such a qualification is somewhat unusual for Rambam. What is the connection between mentioning others in prayer and *tefillat ha-tsibbur*, and why does Rambam feel the need to restrict the obligation of *tefillat ha-tsibbur* to “whenever it is possible”?

It seems that Rambam views “joining the community in prayer” as a broader attitude, not a specific action of praying with a *minyan*. One who “joins the community in prayer” must see his needs and the needs of the rest of the community as intertwined and inseparable. Thus, even when he separates from the community (such as when he travels, and must recite *tefillat ha-derekh*), he includes the community in his prayers.<sup>xxi</sup> The attitude of *shituf im ha-tsibbur* thus pervades all of one’s prayers, even when *tefillah* be-*tsibbur* is impossible. This explains the inclusion of the qualifier in Rambam: one must always “join the community,” but the primary expression of this attitude is when it is possible for one to join *tefillat ha-tsibbur*. If one rejects this opportunity, he demonstrates that he is uninterested in viewing his relationship with G-d as part of the broader community’s. One who accepts this opportunity, however, demonstrates an entirely different attitude toward his relationship with G-d and his act of prayer, an attitude in which others are included in his prayers; his needs become the community’s, and vice versa. It is this attitude which unites the individual *avodot she-be-leiv* into one *tefillatan shel rabbim*; all the individuals



pray with the common communal needs in mind first.

If this is the case, *tefillah be-tsibbur* is more than the centerpiece of the Jewish community; it is what builds the Jewish community. Individuals can develop very

personal relationships with G-d through *avodah she-be-leiv*, but the challenge of *tefillah be-tsibbur* is to recognize that yearning for G-d is a basic element of the prayer experience and is shared by other members of the community. The ideal

of *shituf im ha-tsibbur* challenges the individual to place others' needs alongside his own, giving the rest of the community a place in his personal communication to G-d. Only this attitude can create a *tefillatan shel rabbim*, and only through

this type of prayer can the individuals build a communal relationship with G-d.

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i. *Mekhilta de-Rabi Shimon bar Yochai* 23:25

ii. In general, in this article, "tefillah" will be taken to refer to *shemoneh esreih*. *Mishnah Berurah* (90:28) cautions against the widespread impression that the primary gain of *tefillah be-tsibbur* is the ability to hear *kaddish*, *kedushah*, and *barekhu*; rather, the primary gain is praying *shemoneh esreih* together with the *tsibbur*. Thus, unless otherwise stated, almost all discussion in this article revolves around *shemoneh esreih*.

iii. *Berachot* 31a

iv. Continuing the same tradition, the *Shulkhan Arukh* (OC 90:9) uses the rare formulation, "yishtadeil adam," "a person should strive [to accomplish *tefillah be-tsibbur*]," avoiding the usual "chayav" which mandates an action.

v. Many *rishonim* have the alternate *girsah* that *tefillah* is heard only *be-tsibbur*, a more direct reference to *tefillah be-tsibbur*.

vi. Commentary to *Rambam*, *Hilkhos Tefillah* 8:1. Actually, *Rabbeinu Manoah's* position is that including others in one's prayer increases one's *kavanah*. This position is advanced to explain the position of *Rambam*, who, as noted below, seems to combine the *halakhah* of *tefillah be-tsibbur* with the advice to include others in one's prayer. *Rabbeinu Manoah's* explanation seems to encompass both *halakhot*.

vii. It is noteworthy that the word "tefillatan," "prayer," appears in the singular. According to *Rabbi Natan*, the masses pray a single prayer entity.

viii. *Hilkhos Tefillah* 8:1

ix. *Shiurim Le-Zeikher Abba Mari*, vol. 2, pp. 37-38

x. *The Gemara* (*Berachot* 26b) asks what the *tefillot* correspond to and gives two answers: that the *tefillot* were established by the *avot*, and that the *tefillot* correspond to the *qorbenot tamid*. These two approaches typify the paradox explored in this article. The *avot* were individuals, and pointing to them as the source of prayer stresses its individual nature; in contrast, the public *qorbenot* seem to paint *tefillah* as an inherently public action.

xi. *Hilkhos Tefillah* 8:4

xii. The converse does not seem to be true; that is, the practice that the congregation members pray individually does not necessarily embrace the minimalist view of *tefillah be-tsibbur*. It seems possible that the prayers, though recited individually, combine to form one entity of communal prayer. This issue depends also on the manner in which the individual prayers combine to form one prayer, which will be discussed later in the article.

xiii. A "Canaanite slave" cannot count toward a *minyan*, but a freed slave can. However, Torah law prohibits freeing a Canaanite slave. Nevertheless, *Rabbi Eliezer* freed his slave so that he could count as the last man of the *quorum*.

xiv. *Rosh* (*Berachot* 7:20) sees the *mitsvah* at issue as *kedushah* and *barekhu*, not *shemoneh esreih be-tsibbur*. If so, this story is irrelevant to our exploration of *tefillah be-tsibbur*.

xv. Admittedly, a simpler reading of the *Peri Megadim* does not

touch on this issue.

xvi. This is especially true of the case of nine people who appear to be ten; after all, it seems likely that if the presence of the *quorum* bolsters the individual prayers' *kavanah*, it is more important that the *tsibbur* looks like a *quorum* to the individual prayers than that it actually be a *quorum*.

xvii. "Heard" references the statement of *Abba Binyamin*, upon which *Tslach* is commenting.

xviii. This perspective finds its strongest support in *Rambam*, who distinguishes so sharply in the form of the two types of *tefillah*: *tefillat ha-yachid* is recited silently, seemingly because of the importance of the thoughts behind the words, while *tefillat ha-tsibbur* is recited aloud by one member of the congregation.

xix. Such an approach also provides another explanation of *Mishnah Berurah's* aforementioned position, that the individual who prays *mussaf* while the *tsibbur* prays *shakharit* is considered to be praying *tefillat ha-tsibbur*. If the basis of *tefillat ha-tsibbur* is merely the yearning to G-d expressed in the act of prayer itself, it can be formed even of different *tefillot*.

xx. In *Hilkhos Tefillah* 8:1

xxi. This may explain why the *Gemara* chose specifically *tefillat ha-derekh* to teach the lesson that one must mention others in his prayers. When one is separated from the *tsibbur*, including others in individual prayer is the only connection one has (in prayer) to the *tsibbur*. It thus becomes the principal expression of *shituf im ha-tsibbur* in this context.

## Rabbi Shimon Shkop's *Imitatio Dei* and the Value of Fun

BY ARYEH SKLAR Of the lesser-known teachers of RIETS' past, Rabbi Shimon Shkop (1860-1939) definitely ranks near the top of the list. That isn't to say that Rabbi Shimon Shkop is less-known. Far from it, as a close colleague of Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan (the "Chofetz Chaim") and Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, the two preeminent authorities of pre-war Europe, his name is oft-mentioned in the circles of Talmudic analytics. His position as the head of the Telze Yeshiva allowed him to craft a curriculum that combined the complex Talmudic approach of Brisk and the "simple" approach of Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin at Volozhin, to create the "Telze approach", producing many Torah greats, including Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman. He headed a very successful yeshiva in Grodno called "Shaar HaTorah", where the famous Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz taught. The very different worlds of Telze and Yeshiva Uni-

versity colliding in Rabbi Shimon Shkop is nothing less than shocking, more so today than before.

It doesn't help that many of his students tried to erase the history of his time at YU. In a Jubilee volume published by his Shaar HaTorah students after Rabbi Shkop returned from America to Grodno to continue as head the yeshiva there, the publication provides a description of Rabbi Shkop's accomplishments, including his time in America in 1928-1929. Conspicuously missing from this is any mention of his time teaching at Yeshiva University. Instead, they write (my translation):

*"In the year 5689 [1928] when the material situation of the yeshiva was extremely stricken, and the yeshiva's income had shriveled, our rabbi took his wandering staff and wandered to America to save the yeshiva from its tangle of debt and to set the yeshiva on its proper basis. This traveling during his old age was literally self-sacri-*

*fice (mesirat nefesh), but our master shlita cast in his life despite that, for this was regarding the life and survival of the yeshiva. The appearance of our rabbi shlita in America had an enormous impact, and everywhere he went they came and greeted him with great reverence and admiration. His many and scattered students, in the hundreds, flocked to him and made their great love and appreciation known to their rabbi. While still 5689 (1929), he returned to Grodno to the joy of his students...*<sup>i</sup>

This is yet more evidence that even in a rabbi's lifetime can his history be rewritten by people from his circle, in order to "protect" the reputation of their greats.

RIETS, for its part, was extremely respectful and cognizant of Rabbi Shkop's standing. As R. Aaron Rakeffet in Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy, describes how Revel wrote a press release describing the importance of Rabbi Shkop's appointment:

*The coming of the Gaon, Rabbi Shimon Shkop to the Yeshiva is not only a matter of great importance to the Yeshiva... but it is an important event for all American Jewry. He will, with the help of God, aid in planting the seeds of Torah in this land, just as he propagated the study of Torah in our old home.*<sup>ii</sup>

The students themselves revered Rabbi Shkop. Rabbi Rakeffet continues:

In the December 30, 1928, issue of the student publication, *Hedenu*, a student described his emotions and thoughts when Rabbi Shkop entered to lecture:

*"Reb Shimon" is walking slowly. An electric current seems to pass through those assembled, and all eyes focus upon Rabbi Shkop. One thought seems to be uppermost in everyone's mind: this elderly man--who possesses keen eyes that move quickly, and a gentle smile on a delicate face that is surrounded by a clean, white beard--is "Reb*



*Shimon.” This is the same “Reb Shimon” of Telshe, Maltsh, Bryensk, and Grodno—whose deeds and accomplishments in each of these stations in his life, have gained for him the respect and love of all. iii*

Although the Yeshiva University website describes his stay as Rosh Yeshiva as lasting a full year, in reality his stay was short-lived,<sup>iv</sup> lasting only from March of 1929 to August of that year. And although the Yeshiva University website states that the reason why he left was due to the urging of the Chofetz Chaim and Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski despite his misgivings, this seems to be inaccurate as well. There, whoever wrote the description, describes his leaving Yeshiva in such a manner:

*Although he wanted to remain, the leading rabbis of Europe, led by the Chofetz Chaim zt”l and Rabbi Chaim Ozer zt”l, felt it imperative for him to return to Grodna and to his yeshiva there. Rabbi Shkop answered their call, albeit with some misgivings.*

However, R. Revel’s invitation to Rabbi Shkop to stay the next year was met with adamant refusal and a clear rationale for it, indicating that Rabbi Shkop never planned to stay longer than he had to:

*When I arrived here [Miami beach], I was given your telegram in which you requested that I continue in the Yeshiva. It surprises me that you still ask that I do so. Haven’t I already told you many times that I cannot fulfill this request. It is my fondest wish that God should help me return to my Yeshiva in Grodno before Rosh Hashanah.... May the good Lord aid you in selecting the proper man to head the Yeshiva.<sup>v</sup>*

Though it’s possible that Rabbi Shkop would have stayed had his colleagues not urged him to return, it seems more obvious that he himself never really wished to stay in America at all, nor did he have “misgivings” for his decision to leave. We see that there may be some rewriting of Rabbi Shkop’s history on the Modern Orthodox side as well, which is definitely an

under-described phenomenon.<sup>vi</sup>

Rabbi Shkop’s willingness to teach at YU demonstrates his general openness to breaking away from the mold in the yeshiva world. One of his most famous writings is the book entitled *Shaarei Yosher*, which contains essays discussing various specific issues in Talmudic law, such as testimony



law. His introduction itself, however, is an extremely interesting and innovative reading of famous passages in the Torah and Talmud to prove his understanding of man’s role in the world.

His thesis, in short, is that man’s purpose is solely to improve the lot of the many. While the idea of aiding the community certainly exists as a Jewish value, the denial of the inherent value of personal worship of God is certainly at odds with the amount of today’s Orthodox focus on the individual’s performance of the commandments. To prove his surprising thesis, he must place preeminence on sources that were not valued as such before. For example, the Talmud in several places<sup>vii</sup> interprets that the Torah command to “walk in [God’s] ways”<sup>viii</sup> means to imitate God by

doing acts of kindness, like He acts. Just as God visited the faint Abraham recovering from circumcision, so too do Jews have an obligation to visit the sick. Many recent authorities have placed great importance on this concept, known in Latin as *imitatio dei*.<sup>ix</sup>

But for Rabbi Shkop, the import of this passage is even beyond a command to worship God by helping others. He writes that the command of *imitatio dei* means “that we, the select of what He made, should constantly hold as our purpose to sanctify our physical and spiritual powers for the good of the many, according to our abilities.”<sup>x</sup> For Rabbi Shkop, to truly be like God, all our actions must be devoted to others, like His are. Further, he understands the concept of holiness as expressed in Leviticus 19:2, “Be holy, for I, God your God, am holy,” in the same vein. Leviticus Rabbah understands “holiness” as “separateness,” yet Nachmanides<sup>xi</sup> interprets the verse as relating the obligation of the Jewish people to stay away from acts of debauchery and becoming what he calls a “*naval be-reshut ha-Torah*” - “despicable person with the permission of the Torah.” Rabbi Shkop asks, “According to this, it would seem the *Midrash* is in-

comprehensible. What relevance does the concept of separation have to being similar to the Holy?” His answer, seen in full, is remarkable:

*And so, it appears to my limited thought that this mitzvah includes the entire foundation and root of the purpose of our lives. All of our work and effort should constantly be sanctified to doing good for the community. We should not use any act, movement, or get benefit or enjoyment that doesn’t have in it some element of helping another. And as understood, all holiness is being set apart for an honorable purpose – which is that a person straightens his path and strives constantly to make his lifestyle dedicated to the community. Then, anything he does even for himself, for the health*

*of his body and soul he also associates to the mitzvah of being holy, for through this he can also do good for the masses. Through the good he does for himself he can do good for the many who rely on him. But if he derives benefit from some kind of permissible thing that isn’t needed for the health of his body and soul, that benefit is in opposition to holiness. For in this he is benefiting himself (for that moment as it seems to him), but no one else.*

Thus, Nachmanides’ category of “*naval be-reshut ha-Torah*” becomes, to Rabbi Shkop, a person who does things that will never have any good for the community. This is indeed quite innovative. Fundamentally, Rabbi Shkop believes that every action one takes must be for the benefit of others. He continues with a caveat. It is humanly impossible to be exactly like God, because, “His Holiness is only for the created and not for Himself,” which humans cannot hope to replicate. Rather, even acts of personal benefit must ultimately allow man to better serve his fellow man, otherwise they are “vanity and ignorable.”

Rabbi Shkop’s conception of the intense Jewish value of caring for the community seems on the face of it to be in line with Modern Orthodox values. Indeed, Rabbi Yitzchak Blau claims that for this same reason, Modern Orthodoxy should generally distance itself from TV and movies.<sup>xii</sup> He writes that “Modern Orthodox Jews pride themselves on their sensitivity to communal needs and on a commitment to benevolence. They sometimes contrast their approach with a Haredi view that tends to prize Torah study above other values.” Therefore, argues Rabbi Blau, if TV can be shown to hinder that commitment to benevolence, it would be a danger to Modern Orthodox values as a whole. Rabbi Blau draws from political scientist and Harvard professor Robert Putnam’s argument for the negative effects of TV on civic engagement in his book, *Bowling Alone*, which can be summarized as follows: 1) It uses the scarce time that could be spent helping others, 2) It has psychological effects that inhibit social participation, and 3) TV promotes materialistic values which are opposed to social engagement.

Though Putnam’s conclusions at face value seem mere correlation, rath-



er than causation, of the majority of TV watchers and their social habits, we can accept them for the sake of argument. Assuming his conclusions are correct, the real question is whether Modern Orthodoxy values communal beneficence so much that any value that entertainment and leisure could have must go by the wayside in pursuit of it. In other words, does fun have value in Modern Orthodoxy, and does it overcome the adverse effects described by Putnam? And how much of Rabbi Shkop's extreme value of community does Modern Orthodoxy possess that would prevent it from ascribing value to leisure and entertainment?

Avi Woolf, in his response to Rabbi Blau, writes:

*I believe that what Rav Blau is complaining about is deeper than the issue of TV – whether watched for value or the pure pleasure of it. I believe Rav Blau inadvertently exposed a very serious lacuna in Modern orthodox thought – the complete lack of intrinsic value attributed to leisure in general, and fun and play in particular.* <sup>xiii</sup>

Mr. Woolf points to Modern Orthodoxy's shying away from something so widespread in the Modern Orthodox experience. However, recently many Modern Orthodox writers have indeed written about it.<sup>xiv</sup> Gil Student, in an essay on his TorahMusings blog entitled, "Is Leisure Kosher?", distinguishes between different kinds of leisure. His first category, derived from Rabbi Norman Lamm's essay entitled, "A Jewish Ethics of Leisure" (in *Faith & Doubt: Studies in Traditional Jewish Thought*) is "constructive leisure," leisure that expands the personality and spirituality of the person enjoying it. Rabbi Student includes in this category leisure for the sake of exercise, which ensures bodily health as well. His second category is "distractive leisure", leisure that rests the mind and body so that one can better serve God and prevent burnout. Thus, value is ascribed to fun, and therefore fun is "allowed" within a Modern Orthodox perspective.

This "move" is necessary from an Orthodox perspective. There are many

sources in the Jewish tradition calling for the sanctification of one's daily life. Rabbi Student points to such sources as the Shulhan Arukh OH 231:1 and Hovot ha-Levavot (Avodah, 4), which bolster the position that even neutral actions can be permitted, so long as they have a religious value to them. Rabbi Student summarizes this in what he calls "leisure le-sheim *Shamayim*, for positive religious purposes." Rabbi Mayer Schiller<sup>xv</sup> asks similarly, "May a 'Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation' be functional Americans?" and adds many more sources to the effect that everything an Orthodox Jew does should be for a religious purpose.<sup>xvi</sup> An interesting Birkei Yosef (231:2) suggests that one declare before he/she performs mundane actions that this is "for the sake of God." The Arukh ha-Shulhan (231:4) considers physical pursuits "animalistic" if not in the service of the religious lifestyle. The Sefer ha-Hinukh (387) actually categorizes having pleasure for its own sake as a transgression against "do not follow after your heart and after your eyes." Therefore, so long as leisure and fun are sanctified for a holy, religious purpose, they can be legitimate actions.

I must admit, I find that these ap-

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***Rabbi Shkop writes that the command of imitatio dei means "that we, the select of what He made, should constantly hold as our purpose to sanctify our physical and spiritual powers for the good of the many, according to our abilities." For Rabbi Shkop, to truly be like God, all our actions must be devoted to others, like His are.***

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proaches attempting to justify the Modern Orthodox lifestyle simply fall short of how leisure is experienced and the motivations for it. My experience in the Modern Orthodox world is that many are simply uninterested in "holiness", in turning their TV watching into a religious experience.

For many young Modern Orthodox Jews, holiness and religiosity don't really exist outside of prayer, or learning, or other acts of religious Judaism. So many do not see the need to create meaning and purpose in entertainment. As Woolf continues in his response to Rabbi Blau:

*A la Rav Blau, Modern Orthodoxy is very much a religion by intellectuals, for intellectuals, with little room for enjoyment or development of other aspects of life such as music, sports and games. There is little place for just "living" outside of the MO "mission".*

Modern Orthodox people want to have space outside of the religious realm, a space that allows for non-religious activities. And the fact is, most people in the world, let alone those in Modern Orthodoxy, are not intellectuals and don't have any desire to be. Therefore, I think a fairer view of the phenomena of TV, movies, and general entertainment in Modern Orthodoxy, is that Modern Orthodox Jews want some space to "live" outside of Judaism, while remaining firmly within Jewish life and religion. To do this, we must accept Woolf's next comment:

*...We need to stop dividing the world into only "good and "bad" things. There are many phenomena in the world that are simply neutral. Furthermore, oftentimes "bad" things can contain "good" elements and vice versa, as any religious defender of secular Zionism can tell you. A sense of proportion is key.*

Movies and entertainment allow a varied perspective from the general Jewish-religious one. There can be much good there, as it can help a person see from a perspective they would never have seen otherwise in their inevitably limited social circle. While there should be recognition to the thinking Jew about the problems pop-culture can present to the religious life, there must also be recognition of what good it contains. Rabbis and teachers should accept the fact that this kind of connection to secular culture will



not be going away in the Modern Orthodox community, that this is a consequence of living in both worlds, and emphasize the good aspects. It just has to be of a "proportional" sort, as Woolf exhorts, and one should not go overboard with permissiveness, recognizing what things are allowed and not allowed at homes and at large. If Rav Shkop requires a communal value to any action, we can certainly find it in entertainment, even if it is not absolute.

There is even an advantage to being well-versed in pop-culture inherent in the Torah itself. It may be that the Torah depends on it. At the turn of the century, Bible academics began to argue that the Torah's creation myth and flood myth were different versions of other Ancient Near East myths, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh. Some of the more serious responses from Orthodox Jewish academics, such as Casutto, were to argue that the Torah is indeed making reference to those ANE myths. But, it was only in order to parody and smartly clash with them in such a way that the readers of the Torah, familiar with those myths, would understand the real fight the Torah ideology represented contrary to their previous myths. This theory relies on the expectation that the Torah's audience would be people very familiar with what was basically "pop-culture",



or the myths and tales of their times. The way to understand the Torah was through that lens. Leaders today, especially, should make use of pop-culture's hold on Modern Orthodoxy as a key to reach youths and adults alike. Some of my best teachers did this, and many of those tie-ins were the most memorable teachings for me.

In summary, Rabbi Shkop sees man's religious role as being like God, ultimate givers to humanity and to our community in particular. Rabbi Blau thinks that

TV and movies inhibit this special Modern Orthodox value. However, I don't think they need conflict with this ideal. Though there are many good reasons for leisure in general as part of religious life, Modern Orthodox life simply includes those who enjoy TV and don't look for the values in doing so. And that is alright. Not everyone is an intellectual, and not everyone cares enough to be. Sometimes, it gives us a better way to interact with the world and with Torah. All in all, a sense of proportion is

key, and Orthodox seriousness about every action must be balanced with the values of entertainment as part of it. Rabbi Hershel Schachter records<sup>xvii</sup> Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's comments in a eulogy for Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes on the strange Talmudic statement, in Avodah Zara 3b, that God spends a quarter of His day "playing with the Leviathan." Rabbi Soloveitchik stated that, in emulating God, we, too, should not take ourselves so seriously all the time. Let us suggest that an extension

of this is that even watching a movie can be an imitation of the divine.

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i. <http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=22056&st=&pgnum=10>

ii. Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet, Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy, (JPS 1972), 119

iii. Ibid., 120

iv. <http://yu.edu/riets/about/mission-history/historic-roshei/shkop/>

v. Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet, Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy, (JPS 1972), 120

vi. For some description of how this was done to the Rav as well in terms of ideological history, see Lawrence Kaplan's "Revisionism and the Rav: The Struggle for the Soul of Modern

Orthodoxy," Judaism 48 (1999): 290-311

vii. Shabbat 133, Sotah 14

viii. Deuteronomy 28:9

ix. See more about Rabbi Soloveitchik's interesting approach here <http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/rav/rav05.htm>

x. Translation by R. Micha Berger at <http://www.aishdas.org/asp/ShaareiYosher.pdf>

xi. On Leviticus 19:2

xii. "Modern Orthodox Arguments Against television," Tradition 44, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 53-71.

xiii. Avi Woolf, "Does Modern Orthodoxy Not Believe in Fun?", September 2011, <http://www.torahmusings.com/2011/09/does-modern-orthodoxy-not-believe-in-fun/>

xiv. I thank Rabbi Uri Cohen for his helpful sources.

xv. Rabbi Mayer Schiller, "Fun and Relaxation Reexamined," Jewish Action, Spring 1991

xvi. He adds in addition to the Shulhan Arukh above, the Tur (OH 231), both of which are quoting Rabbeinu Yonah's comment on Avot 2:12.

xvii. Nefesh HaRav, p. 69, and also see Rabbi Daniel Feldman's "Does God Have a Sense of Humor?" [https://www.ou.org/jewish\\_action/05/2013/does-god-have-a-sense-of-humor/](https://www.ou.org/jewish_action/05/2013/does-god-have-a-sense-of-humor/). I have also seen this in the notes of my grandfather, Rabbi Herbert Bomzer z"l, who attended the Rav's shiurim for an extensive period of time.

## Joining the IDF: An American Religious Zionist's Dilemma

BY DOVI NADEL

*Of the Korahites. A Psalm. A Song.  
The Lord loves the gates of Zion  
His foundation on the holy mountains,  
More than all the dwelling of Jacob.  
Glorious things are spoken of you  
O city of God. Selah.  
I mention Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me;  
Philistia, and Tyre and Cush – each was born there.  
Indeed, it shall be said of Zion  
“Every man was born there.”  
He, the most high will preserve it.  
The Lord will inscribe in the register of peoples  
That each was born there. Selah.  
Singers and dancers alike [will say]:  
“All my roots are in you.”*

(Psalm 87)<sup>i</sup>

Religious Zionism thrived in the small American town of Southfield, Michigan of my youth. The small town's 50-student high-school conducted many of its Judaic lessons in Hebrew. The school's principle was a Yemenite-Israeli educator who spoke an eloquent English – albeit with a heavy Hebrew accent. Many of the school's teachers were

“shlihim-morim” – Israeli teachers who had come to America as emissaries for three years. Two “bahurim” – Israelis who recently completed the army - roamed the hallways as teacher's aids. Israeli flags draped the hallways, pictures of Israel soldiers covered the walls, and *Yom Ha'atsmaut* and *Yom Yerushalayim* were unquestionably days that students eagerly

await throughout the year. I may have been born in Michigan; but my small high school, family, and community clearly ingrained within me and my fellow students the message that, in truth, we were all “born in Zion.” Our passports may have read United States of America, but our hearts, our true “roots” were in the land of Israel.

Returning to America after two years of study in a Hesder Yeshiva in Israel was not an easy decision. I was struck with what I labeled the “Reuven Gad – syndrome.” Was I really going to leave my fellow “brothers” in Israel behind to fight, while I returned to surround myself with textbooks and the safety of a college classroom in America? The trenchant words uttered by Moshe to the tribes of Reuven and Gad upon their request to stay on the west bank of the Jordan rang strong in my mind. “Are your brothers to go war while you stay here (Numbers 32:7)?” Individual needs may have called me to return to America, but my sense of idealism and communal responsibility

called upon me – or potentially even required me – to at least remain a bit longer and serve in the army of “the land of our birth.” How could I have abandoned my brothers? To properly grapple with this question, I decided to reflect more thoroughly - through research. Delving into history, *halakhah*, and philosophy, I sought a more concrete understanding of the overwhelming sense of failed responsibility that overtook me upon my return to America.

The choice and opportunity to join the Israeli Defense Forces was unique – for many reasons. In the annals of Jewish history, millennia had passed since Jews were military men – for their own people. After the failure of Bar Kokhba, Judaism has been defined by two thousand years of Jewish “powerlessness.” In exile, the strength of Israel lay in the immortal words of Zehariah “Not by might nor by power but by my spirit, says the Lord of host” (Zehariah 4:6).

Indeed, at times Jews had served in various military capacities. Jews are



known to have fought under both Cross and Crescent in the great wars that raged between the Christians and Moors in medieval Spain.<sup>ii</sup> Some Jews had willingly joined the “professional ranks” of the Spanish conquistadors. By the 18th century, Jews had joined the armies of the Netherlands and the US, and soon after, they began to join the armies of countries such as France, Germany and Britain. My very own great-grandfather, Mayer Nadel, was forcefully drafted into the Russian army in the 1940’s. My grandfather, Tully Nadel, was drafted into the American army in the sixties where he served for two years in Germany. Indeed, Jews – my own family - may have served in the army, but they never served as Jews in the army. Now, with the onset of the state of Israel, Jews had the unique choice of joining their own army.

The ability to be a “foreign volunteer” to the Israeli Army is unique in contemporary times as well. The Israel Army’s *Mahal* program, an abbreviation for “*Mitnadvei Hutz LaAretz*- Volunteers from outside the Land of Israel” is unique amongst the countries of the world.<sup>iii</sup> In most countries, one cannot serve the respective country’s army unless he/she is a citizen of that country. In Israel, this is not the case. One only needs to be Jewish to serve the country as a foreign volunteer.

Indeed, without *Mahal*, Israel may very well have lost the War of Independence. Over 4,000 foreign soldiers (mostly trained) joined the Israel army in 1948, aiding the fledgling state in its war against its Arab neighbors. Regarding the contributions of the *Mahal* in the War of Independence, Ben Gurion famously remarked, “The participation of... men and women of other nations in our struggle cannot be measured only as additional manpower, but as an exhibition of the solidarity of the Jewish people... without the assistance, the help and the ties with the entire Jewish people, we would have accomplished naught... some of our most advanced services might not have been established were it not for the professionals who came to us from

abroad.”<sup>iv</sup> The foreign volunteers of 1948 acted out of a sense of duty to the state. The quote chosen for the monument erected to commemorate the 123 *Mahal* soldiers who were killed during the War

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***Rav Lichtenstein writes:***  
***“When, as in contemporary Israel, the greatest single Hesed one can perform is to help defend his fellows’ very lives, the implication for yeshiva education should be obvious.”***  
***The sense of responsibility is, perhaps, obvious. The courage to make that choice is, however, another matter entirely.***

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of Independence reflects this sense of duty. The verse upon the monument is taken from the book of Yehoshuah. On the brink of conquering the land, Israel’s new leader, Yehoshuah, reminds Reuven and Gad of the pledge they had made with Moses in Bamidbar. He exhorts to them to “*Leave your wives, children, and livestock remain the land that I assigned to you on this side of the Jordan, but every one of your fighting men shall go across armed before your brother, and you will help them.*”<sup>v</sup> Reuven and Gad respond to their calling and responsibility. They do not allow their brothers to fight alone. The *Mahal* soldiers of 1948 followed suit. Sixty years later, should we – should I - feel the need to listen to the same “calling”?

A brief survey of some of the major halakhik sources regarding Judaism’s definition of war and the requirement it places on each individual sheds light on the significance of the issue at hand. The primary discussion of the topic occurs in Sotah 44b. There, the *Mishnah* presents an explanation of the scriptural verses that – at first glance- seem to outline extremely lenient parameters for exemptions from military service.

The verse in Deuteronomy 20:5-7 reads as follows:

*And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying: who is the man who*

*has built a new house and has not begun living in it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man begin living in it. And who is the man who has planted a vineyard and has not redeemed [its fruit in the fourth year]? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man redeem it. And who is the man who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go and return to his house lest he die in the battle and another man take her.*

The *Mishnah* discusses the actual context of this exemption and limits the application of the above text to “discretionary war.” The text of the *Mishnah* reads as follows:

*To what does the foregoing [verses] apply? To discretionary wars, but in wars commanded by the Torah (milhamot mitsvah) all go forth, even a bridegroom from his chamber and a bride from her canopy. R. Judah says: To what does the foregoing apply? To wars commanded by the Torah (milhamot mitsvah), but in obligatory wars (milhamot hovah) all go forth, even a bridegroom from his chamber and a bride from her canopy.*<sup>vi</sup>

In his extensive article on preventative war, R. Bleich fleshes out all of the potential definitions of discretionary wars and wars of *Mitsvah*.<sup>vii</sup> The following citation of Rambam only adds to the confusion over categories. He writes in his Hilchot Melahim:

*The king may first wage only a Milhemet Mitsvah. What is a milhemet mitsvah? It is the war against the Seven Nations, the war against Amalek and [a war] to deliver Israel from an enemy who has attacked them (she-ba aleihem). Thereafter he may wage a milhemet reshut, which is a war against other people in order to enlarge the borders of Israel and to enhance his greatness and prestige.*<sup>viii</sup>

Rambam appears to add new

categories to the definition of the *mitsvah* such as the war to deliver “from an enemy who has attacked them. The halakhik category of the war’s Israel currently engages in is the source of much debate. While defensive wars clearly seem to fall under Rambam’s category of war as a “*mitsvah*,” other forms of preventative and preemptive wars are not as clear. Granting even the most conservative approach in understanding these sources, the general thrust of the halakha is clear. A Jew’s obligation to defend the state of Israel and its people is all encompassing. If “even a bridegroom from his chamber and a bride from her canopy” must go to defend Israel, what is the responsibility of the healthy twenty year old youth? Even if the category of the war being fought is not an absolute obligation, perhaps we still have the religious responsibility.

The scenario that faces *Mahal* volunteers is- at first glance - much different than that which faces their Israeli brothers. *Mahal* recruits retain the choice to join or not join the Israeli army. In Israel, however, there is still a universal conscription. This being the case, Israel’s army has developed into a paradigmatic people’s army. Joining the army has become a civic duty, or what Stuart Cohen labels, a “civic religion.”<sup>viii</sup> However, the idealism surrounding service in the Israeli army has diminished in recent years. In the past, army service was flaunted as the highest good one could do for Israel, and members of the IDF were viewed as the heroes of Israeli society. Studies have shown that since the 1980’s this aura surrounding the member serving in the Israeli army has diminished. In Stuart Cohen’s words, the “IDF since the mid 1980’s has been de-mythologized men in uniform once considered demigods are now approached as mere mortals.”<sup>ix</sup>

Israel’s army is still very much – out of necessity – a “people’s army” maintaining its rules of universal conscription. However, this change in attitude has moved - even Israel - to transition toward a more “professional army.” Nowadays, it is clearly easier to choose to skirt army service than it has ever been in the past. With this gradual yet evident transition within the structure of the Israeli army, the following



question may be equally relevant to *Mahal* volunteers and to the quasi-voluntary nature given to contemporary Israeli soldier. The question is one that any reflective potential soldier must ask himself - why should one choose to join the army?

Cohen divides the choice into three broad categories: emotional, material, and ideological. On the emotional level, some join the army because they feel that it will help them mature as human beings. The people of this group believe in the army as a form of “finishing school.” The skills learned in the army – skills of discipline, risk taking, and sacrifice – are ones that can then be transferred into general life-skills. This category also entails the belief that in Israel the army serves as “society’s melting pot.” Joining the army is a rite of passage that one must undergo to truly be a full-fledged citizen of Israeli society. Others join the army for material/utilitarian reasons. To get a job, one must be a member of Israeli society. Alternatively, some join the army as a lifetime career choice.

The last category-the ideological – is not mutually exclusive of the first two categories. Here, the altruistic volunteer can be motivated for various ideological reasons. He may believe it’s his national duty, perhaps even a civic privilege, to serve in the army. Alternatively, his desire to join the army may stem from a more religious rationale. It is this last rationale that clearly motivates the Jew contemplating *Mahal*.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein in his famous essay on the Ideology of

Hesder addresses many of the issues that beleaguer the pensive Religious Zionist American. Through the prism of his essay, we can gain many valuable insights into some of the lingering questions related to the choice of joining *Mahal*.

In describing the purpose of military service, Rav Lichtenstein makes the following important statement regarding its necessity. He writes:



*The Yeshivah prescribes military service as a means to an end. That end is enrichment of personal and communal spiritual life, the realization of that great moral and religious vision whose fulfillment is our national destiny; and everything else is wholly subservient. No one responsibly connected with any Yeshivat Hesder advocates military service for its own sake. We avoid even the slightest tinge of militancy, and we are poles removed from Plato’s notion that the discipline of army life is a necessary ingredient of an ideal education. No less than every Jew, the Hesdernik yearns for peace ...<sup>xi</sup>*

In other words, service in the Israeli army is a value because there is a need for it. Ideally, the religious Zionist

desires peace. The army is temporarily the best means to pursue that end.

Much of Rav Lichtenstein’s essay is spent trying to balance the competing values of wanting to devote oneself to a life of Torah while, all the while, feeling the moral need to protect the state of Israel. A core assumption leading to this conflict of interests is the idea that the defense of Israel is a moral imperative. Indeed, Rav Lichtenstein clearly and succinctly states the importance of this values as follows: “The defense of Israel is an ethical and halachik imperative, whether because, as we believe, the birth of the state was a momentous historical event and its preservation of great spiritual significance, or because, even failing that, the physical survival of its three million- plus Jewish inhabitants is at stake.”<sup>xii</sup> The need to

protect the state of Israel is not purely motivated by hashkafic considerations. All Jews can agree that the defense of others Jews is a value – independent of the status of the state.

Lastly, and perhaps most powerfully, Rav Lichtenstein extends the rationale to help out in a defensive war past the realm of mere “protection.” He writes that “military service is often the fullest manifestation of a far broader value: *gemilut hasadim*, an empathetic concern for others and action on their behalf. In essence, Rav Lichtenstein is defining the parameters of a Jew’s responsibility toward the protection of his brothers. One of Shimon Ha-Tzadik’s three foundational principles of the world is *gemilut hesed*, and it is – ultimately –

this value that pulls the Jew to fight for his country and his people. In a powerful statement toward the conclusion of his essay, Rav Lichtenstein writes “when, as in contemporary Israel, the greatest single *Hesed* one can perform is to help defend his fellows’ very lives, the implication for yeshiva education should be obvious.”<sup>xiii</sup>

The sense of responsibility is, perhaps, obvious. The courage to make that choice is, however, another matter entirely. Some of the people closest to me are currently serving in IDF. I chose to return America, but it was not without a sense of guilt. I long to serve the country of “my roots” and to one day merit hearing the same words that Yehoshua uttered to Reuven and Gad upon the completion of their mission. “And [Yehoshuah] said to them ‘You have kept all that Moshe the servant of the Lord commanded you, and have listened to my voice and all that I commanded you, you have not left your brothers.’”<sup>xiv</sup> Until then all I can say to those of us who have courageously chosen to reattach themselves to their roots in Israel by joining *Mahal* is the following. Indeed, your brothers in exile have not left your side either. Know that we think of you during every prayer, during every difficult task, during every moment that we open our textbooks to study. You’ve returned to the place of your birth and all the while, your entire family and community in America is standing by your side, proud and inspired by you, our representatives in Israel.

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i. All translations taken from JPS Tanakh, with slight modifications

ii. For more extensive discussion refer to Schiffman, Lawrence and Wolowelsky, Joel B. (eds.) *War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Pub. House, Inc., 2007)

iii. Information on *Mahal* taken from booklet outlining *Mahal* accomplishments at following link <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfa-archive/1999/pages/focus%20on%20israel-%20machal%20-%20overseas%20volunteers.aspx>

iv. *Ibid.*

v. *Joshuah 1:14-15*

vi. *Sotah 44b*

vii. David Bleich, “Preemptive War in Jewish Law,” in *Tradition*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (SPRING 1983): 3-41

viii. Refer to *Mishneh Torah*, *Hikhot Melakhim 5* for a more extensive discussion of the basic sources.

ix. Stuart Cohen, *The Scroll or the Sword? : Dilemmas of religion and military Service in Israel* (Amsterdam: The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997)

x. *Ibid.*

xi. Aharon Lichtenstien, “Ideology of Hesder,” in Aharon Lichtenstien, *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Learning*. (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Pub. House, 2003)

xii. *Ibid.*

xiii. *Ibid.*

xiv. *Joshuah 22:3*



# Moshe Strikes the Rock: Failed Leadership, or Failed “Followership?”

BY ALEX MAGED

A well-known Native American proverb states: “Never criticize a man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins.” This is straightforward advice, yet it can be notoriously difficult to implement. According to social psychologists, we tend to underestimate the role that people’s circumstances play in shaping their behavior. Stanford researcher Lee Ross called this phenomenon the “fundamental attribution error.”<sup>i</sup> It implies that we often judge the actions of others even before we have considered how we might act if we were placed in a similar situation. As a result, we grant the benefit of the doubt less often than we should.

In this article, I would like to show how easy it is to commit the “fundamental attribution error” when we study the story of the “Waters of Merivah.” In the twentieth chapter of the book of Bamidbar, the Israelites petition Moshe over a lack of water. Hashem commands Moshe to “speak to the rock in their presence, and it will give forth its water, and you shall bring forth water for them” (Num. 20:8). But Moshe calls the people “rebels” (20:10) and “strikes the rock with his staff twice” (21:10). In response, Hashem declares: “*Since you did not have faith in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly to the Land which I have given them*” (21:11).

What exactly did Moshe do wrong at Merivah that caused him to be punished so severely? Scholars have debated this question for centuries.<sup>ii</sup> However, we are going to approach the text from a slightly different perspective. Instead of analyzing

how Moshe should or should not have acted during this particular episode—an important line of inquiry in its own right—let us try to think about how he must have felt.

II.

Our chapter opens with a jarring juxtaposition:

*The entire congregation of the children of Israel arrived at the desert of Zin in the first month, and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there. The congregation had no water; so they assembled against Moshe and Aaron. The people quarrelled with Moshe and Aaron... (Num. 20:1-3).*

If we pause the narrative here and think about this sequence of events on a human level, everything that comes next is suddenly cast in a radically new light. Miriam, Moshe’s sister, has passed away. The description of her death is one of the shortest and most matter-of-fact in all of

To be sure, the people raise a valid concern: without water, they will die. Yet the manner in which they present the issue is almost callous:

*The people quarreled with Moshe, and they said, “If only we had died with the death of our brothers before the Lord” (Num. 20:3).*

The Israelites stress how desperate their situation is by belittling the fates of their “dead brothers.” This sort of sensationalism is inappropriate in its own right, but it is even worse when we remember that the person to whom they are speaking just lost his own sibling. The Torah records about a dozen different complaints that the Israelites presented to Moshe throughout his lifetime. Their rhetoric was often dramatic and offensive. Yet never before and never again did their protests include any talk of “dead brothers.” The single instance of this phrase in the entire Torah occurs right after Miriam’s passing. And the grumbling con-

tinues:

*[The people pressed further]: “Why have you brought the congregation of the Lord to this desert so that we and our livestock should die there(שם)?” (Num. 20:4).*

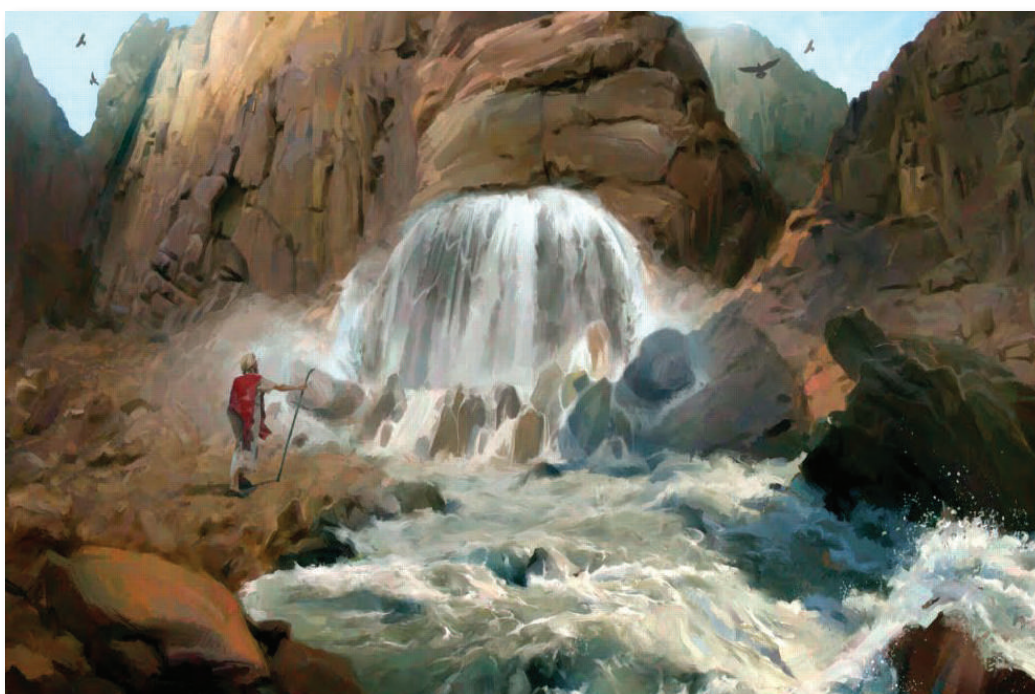
There are at least two problems with this accusation. The first is a logical problem: The Israelites insinuate that Moshe deliberately led them to a place with no water, as if he is not suffering from the very same thirst that they are. The second is a grammatical problem: Instead of asking “Why did you bring us into this desert to die here?” the Israelites ask “Why did you bring us to this desert to die there?” But where is “there”?

In fact, this is the second verse in our narrative which features an unnecessary use of the word “there.” We have already seen the first verse together:

*The entire congregation of the children of Israel arrived at the desert of Zin in the first month, and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died there (שם) and was buried there (שם) (Num. 20:1).*

This verse would have read more smoothly had it simply stated “ותמת ותקבר שם מרים”—“Miriam died and was buried there.” Perhaps the Torah employs an awkward double-phrase—“Miriam died there and was buried there”—in order to ensure that the import of the nation’s forthcoming complaint is not lost on the reader. “Why did you bring us to this desert to die there,” the people challenge—they are “here,” in the camp, but they are pointing “there,” to the gravesite of Miriam. Their implication: “It is your fault that your sister died. Make sure that we are not next.”

By this point, Moshe and Aaron have heard enough. Thus, they “flee to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” (Num. 20:6)—this, incidentally, being the last place they had been with Miriam (Num. 11:5). Once there, they fall on their fac-





es, and God's presence "descends upon them," just as it had when they were with their sister a few chapters earlier (ibid). Hashem then delivers the following instructions:

*Take the staff and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron, and speak to the rock in their presence so that it will give forth its water... (Num. 20:8).*

Moshe knows who Aaron is, of course. Nevertheless, Hashem insists upon identifying him as "your brother." There are only three other times in the Torah where Aaron is referred to by this designation: when his character is introduced to the reader at the burning bush, when he is appointed as High Priest, and when he dies. It is an extremely rare formulation, yet we find it here. Earlier, the Israelites had spoken of "dead brothers." Now Hashem, who understands Moshe's pain, attempts to comfort him by reminding him that not all is lost—after all, there is still "your brother Aaron."

But Moshe is not ready to be comforted. Uncharacteristically, he is angry—a normal stage of grief, according to Swiss-American psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross<sup>iii</sup>—and he gives voice to that anger:

*Moshe and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock, and [Moshe] said to them, "Now listen, you rebels, can we draw water for you from this rock?" (Num. 20:10).*

This is the first time in the Torah that Moshe resorts to name-calling—and what a curious name he chooses. The word "rebels," in Hebrew, is pronounced "morim." But it is written without vowels, and so it also spells the name מרים—Miriam. That, ultimately, is what this whole episode has been about. Externally, Moshe is chastising the people. Yet his inner thoughts never left his sister for a moment.

### III.

Only when we realize how central the memory of Miriam is in this story do we appreciate how deeply tragic a story it is. Miriam, in Hebrew, means "bitter waters," and for Moshe, no waters are bitterer than these "waters of strife" (Num. 20:13). During her lifetime, Miriam had heard Hashem praise Moshe as "the most faithful (אֱמֻנָה) servant in all My house" (Num. 12:7). These were the last words spoken to her in the Torah. Yet only a few verses after her death, Hashem declares to Moshe: "Since you did not have faith (אֱמֻנָה) in Me... therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (Num. 20:12). Under Miriam's watchful eye, baby Moshe was rescued from the waters of the Nile—his very name meant "drawn forth from the water" (Exod. 2:10). It is because Moshe does not want to "draw water forth" (Num. 20:10) for the nation he was chosen to lead that he is ultimately stripped of his duties.

There is a lot to learn from the way this story ends. Despite all of the personal troubles that he was battling, Moshe did not escape punishment for failing to guide his people in its moment of crisis. "Leadership is defined by results," management expert Peter Drucker reminds

us<sup>iv</sup>—and the results of Moshe's leadership in this case might well have been fatal for the thirsting Israelites had Hashem not intervened. Perhaps it is unfair to expect that our leaders sacrifice their private lives in the interest of the collective which they serve. But when the survival of that collective is on the line, there is no alternative. The Torah does not hold back on this point. As much sympathy as we may have for him, a leader who cannot get it together in the toughest of times cannot continue as a leader. There is simply too much at stake.

And yet, it did not have to come to this. As much as Moshe is responsible for mishandling the very difficult situation in which he was placed, the Israelites bear

a share of the responsibility for placing him in that situation to begin with. Had they shown a little more sensitivity, a little more empathy, a little more concern for the welfare of their leader, he might have accompanied them into the Promised Land. But instead of working with Moshe, they chose to work against him.

Slowly, surely, their caustic criticism wore away at him. The people's sense of entitlement and lack of gratitude ended the career of the best leader they ever knew.

### IV.

Ironically, one of the few people who ever took interest in Moshe's personal wellbeing was his sister, Miriam. The very first piece of information we receive about her is that it was she who guarded over Moshe after his mother placed him in a wicker basket to save him from the Egyptians. ותחצב אחתו מרחוק לדעה מה יעשה, the Torah tells us: "She stood from afar to see what would be done to him" (Exod. 2:4). For most of his life, Moshe was surrounded by people who could see no further than the "here and now." They expected him to deliver and got on his case the minute he did not. But Miriam took a step back—ותחצב מרחוק. Miriam took into account מה יעשה לו. She paid attention to "what was happening to him"—to the stresses and pressures facing him—and was always on the lookout for ways to alleviate his burden.

ותחצב מרחוק is more than a description of Miriam's geographical orientation vis-à-vis Moshe. It is an ethical imperative. Public service, the Torah informs us, is not a one-way street. If a community is to thrive, the yoke of concern cannot rest squarely on the shoulders of its leadership. It must be shared by "the followership."<sup>v</sup> Though we often forget it, leaders also have needs. They also have feelings. Our job is to be there for them just as they are for us. Instead of tearing down, we must build up; instead of pointing fingers when things go wrong, we must offer a hand.

Most of all, we must keep in mind the eternal words of Hillel: "אל תדון את חברך עד שתגיע למקומו"—"Do not judge your friend until you have reached his position" (Avot 2:4). Leaders are also our friends, Hillel reminds us—and we should treat them that way.



i. Ross, Lee. "The Intuitive Psychologist and his Shortcomings: Distortions in the Attribution Process," in Berkowitz, Leonard. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* Vol. 10. New York, NY: Academic Press, 1977.

ii. See, for instance, Don Isaac Abarbanel's commentary to this episode, in which he identifies eleven different approaches to our question in the writings of his predecessors. Also recommended is

R. Chanoch Waxman's essay on the topic, "Of Sticks and Stones," available at: [www.vbm-torah.org](http://www.vbm-torah.org).

iii. See Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2003.

iv. See "Five Reasons Leaders Should Strive For Respect, Not The Liking Of Followers," available at: [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com).

v. See Riggio, Ronald E., et al. *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008.



# When Nature Rebels: Insights from Rabbi Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith*

BY ELIANNE NEUMAN Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 present two parallel accounts of the creation of the world and, specifically, mankind. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik addresses this issue in his seminal work, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, which was originally published as an essay in the journal *Tradition* in 1965.<sup>i</sup> In contrast to many modern scholars, who posit that these distinct accounts of creation can be attributed to multiple authorship of the Bible, Rabbi Soloveitchik does not turn to Biblical Criticism to explain the incongruity.<sup>ii</sup> Rather, Rabbi Soloveitchik asserts that “the answer lies not in an alleged dual tradition, but in dual man.”<sup>iii</sup> According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, the Bible contains two accounts of the creation of humanity in order to reflect the fact that there is “a real contradiction in the nature of man. The two accounts deal with two Adams. Two men, two fathers of mankind, two types, two representatives of humanity.”<sup>iv</sup>

***Rabbi Soloveitchik attributes the Bible's parallel accounts of the creation of man not to a dual tradition, but to the duality of mankind. A close reading of the first two chapters of Genesis furthers Rabbi Soloveitchik's thesis, as it yields not only two descriptions of the character of mankind, but also two distinct representations of the natural world itself.***

Genesis Chapter 1 details the creation of the first representation of humanity, whom Rabbi Soloveitchik refers to as Adam the first. According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, the fact that this account states that man was fashioned “in the image of God”<sup>v</sup> indicates that Adam the first is an inherently creative being: just as God created the world, man likewise has a drive to create, to innovate.<sup>vi</sup> In Rabbi Soloveitchik's esti-

mation, God's commandment to Adam the first—to “fill the earth and subdue it”, to take control of nature—is reflective of his innate creativity, of his desire to emulate his Creator by gaining mastery over his environment.<sup>vii</sup> However, Rabbi Soloveitchik notes that Adam the first's mission to “harness and dominate the elemental natural forces and put them at his disposal” is not easily fulfilled.<sup>viii</sup> Challenged by an inhospitable environment, Adam the first cannot take control of nature on his own and is thus compelled to collaborate with his fellow man. Indeed, in order to accomplish his mission, Adam the first must unite with others to form a community of shared interests—they are bound together by their mutual desire to achieve dignity through their mastery over nature.

According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, Genesis Chapter 2 describes a wholly different version of humanity. While Genesis Chapter 1 notes that man was fashioned in the image of God, Chapter 2 teaches that God formed man out of “dust from the ground”, as a humble, contemplative being.<sup>ix</sup> Moreover, while Adam the first is tasked with subduing the earth, God's instructions to Adam the second are far less ambitious: he is to simply “work” and “safeguard” the Garden of Eden.<sup>x</sup> In Rabbi Soloveitchik's assessment, the differences between these accounts reflect two fundamentally distinct representa-

tions of humanity: unlike Adam the first, who is driven to create and innovate, Adam the second is charged with stewardship in order to protect the Garden of Eden and “the living, ‘given’ world into which he has been cast.”<sup>xi</sup> As such, Adam the second does not join in a community of shared interests, of likeminded individuals who wish to gain mastery over nature. Instead, Adam the second endeavours to form a

covenantal faith community, a community of shared experience comprised of three partners: I, thou, and He—man, his fellow man, and God Himself.<sup>xii</sup> Indeed, Rabbi Soloveitchik asserts that God is an essential partner in Adam the second's covenantal faith community, as He is “a comrade and fellow member.”<sup>xiii</sup> Ultimately, God's central role in this community is what distinguishes the covenantal collective from Adam the first's community of shared interests.

Rabbi Soloveitchik attributes the Bible's parallel accounts of the creation of man not to a dual tradition, but to the duality of mankind. The Biblical narrative is reflective of the complexity of the human enterprise—Adam the first is a creative being who is charged with filling the earth and subduing it, whereas the contemplative Adam the second is tasked with working and safeguarding the Garden of Eden. A close reading of the first two chapters of Genesis furthers Rabbi Soloveitchik's thesis, as it yields not only two descriptions of the character of mankind, but also two distinct representations of the natural world itself. Indeed, these two different versions of nature reflect a duality that ultimately shapes man's relationship with his environment.

The first characterization of nature, found in Genesis Chapter 1, is that of a rebellious, unyielding force. While God commands the earth to sprout “fruit trees yielding fruit after its kind”,<sup>xiv</sup> the following verse states that the earth only brought forth “trees yielding fruit”<sup>xv</sup>—not fruit trees yielding fruit. Rashi acknowledges the discrepancy between these two verses and resolves it by asserting that God had originally intended that trees should not

only bear fruit, but that the tree itself should also taste like fruit.<sup>xvi</sup> The earth, however, ignored God's commandment by sprouting trees that simply bore fruit. Rashi notes that the earth's insubordination resulted in its inclusion in Adam's punishment after he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis Chapter 3, as God says to Adam: “accursed is the ground because of you.”<sup>xvii</sup> Though there is nothing in the verses immediately preceding this statement to indicate that the earth was in-

involved in Adam's transgression, Rashi asserts that God's punishment of the earth was certainly justified: nature rebelled against God when it ignored His decree to produce trees that tasted like fruit and that bore

fruit—and so when man was punished for his sin, the earth was also cursed for its earlier disobedience. Rashi's description of nature in Genesis Chapter 1—as a rebellious, revolting force—certainly complements Rabbi Soloveitchik's characterization of Adam the first and the manner in which he interacts with his environment. God, in His infinite wisdom, fashioned Adam the first as a creative being and tasked him with filling and subduing the earth, with taking control of nature, because it is unyielding and in need of a strong hand.

In contradistinction to nature as rebellious force, Genesis Chapter 2 describes it as being in harmony with God and mankind. The same trees characterized in Chapter 1 as being disobedient, were, in Chapter 2, said to coexist in a symbiotic relationship with God and man: “now all of the trees of the field were not yet on the earth...for Hashem God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil.”<sup>xviii</sup> Genesis Chapter 2 subsequently outlines how nature came into being with the help of God and humanity: first God sends rain,<sup>xix</sup> then God plants the Garden of Eden and places man in it,<sup>xx</sup> and finally the trees appear.<sup>xxi</sup> This





peaceful, ordered depiction of nature complements Rabbi Soloveitchik's portrayal of Adam the second, the humble and contemplative man. Indeed, Adam the second not is tasked with subduing the earth because nature, as it is portrayed in Chapter 2, does not seek to disobey the will of its Creator. Rather, Adam the second is charged with stewardship, with working the land and safeguarding it, because the nature that he encounters is peaceful and harmonious. In fact, it could very well be argued that the natural world is itself an integral element of Adam the second's covenantal faith community—I being man, He being God, and Thou being nature itself.

A close examination of the Biblical text reveals two accounts of creation, which reflect not only the duality of mankind, but also the contradiction inherent in the natural world itself. Nature, as it is depicted in Genesis Chapter 1, is rebellious and unyielding, and so God charges the creative, innovative Adam the first with filling and subduing the earth. In contrast, the contemplative Adam the second is tasked with working and safeguarding the Garden of Eden because nature, as it is portrayed in Chapter 2, seeks to form a harmonious partnership with God and mankind. This contradiction inherent in the natural world ultimately influences our

relationship with our environment. On the one hand, we attempt to use our God-given abilities to subdue those elements of nature that threaten our existence, be they disease, natural disasters, or the scarcity of resources. On the other hand, we engage in environmental stewardship, protecting nature from harmful influences and coming to appreciate the world in which we live. These two prevailing attitudes towards the natural world—control versus preservation—are not mutually exclusive, nor are they necessarily in conflict with one another. Rather, they stem from the reality that humankind has the capacity to be both creative and contemplative, and are root-

ed in the fact that the natural world can be both rebellious and harmonious. Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 provide us with a glimpse into this ongoing dialectic, thereby empowering us to embrace the duality of both ourselves and the world in which we live.

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- i. Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York, NY: Three Leaves Press, 2006), xvii.
- ii. Friedman, Richard Elliott. *The Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View Into the Five Books of Moses* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 33-37.
- iii. Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 10.
- iv. *Ibid.*
- v. *Genesis* 1:27.

- vi. Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 12.
- vii. *Genesis* 1:28.
- viii. Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 13.
- ix. *Ibid.* 2:7.
- x. *Ibid.* 2:15.
- xi. Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 21.
- xii. *Ibid.* 41.
- xiii. *Ibid.* 43.

- xiv. *Genesis* 1:11.
- xv. *Ibid.* 1:12.
- xvi. Rashi to *Gen.* 11:11, s.v. *Fruit Tree*, translation mine.
- xvii. *Genesis* 3:17.
- xviii. *Ibid.* 2:5.
- xix. *Ibid.* 2:6.
- xx. *Ibid.* 2:8.
- xxi. *Ibid.* 2:9.



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# Elu Va-elu Divrei Elokim Hayyim and the Question of Multiple Truths<sup>i</sup>

BY JENNIFER VAN AMERONGEN

The *Mishnah* in Masekhet Avot teaches about two types of *Mahloket*. It states, “Every dispute that is [for the sake of] heaven’s name, it is destined to endure. But if it is not [for the sake of] heaven’s name—it is not destined to endure.” The *Mishnah* continues to explain, “What [is an example of a dispute for the sake of] heaven’s name? The dispute of Hillel and Shammai. What [is an example of a dispute not for the sake of] heaven’s name? The dispute of Korach and all of his followers.”<sup>ii iii</sup> Pinchas Kehati, in his explanation of the *Mishnah*, explains that a “dispute which is for the sake of Heaven’s name” is one whose participants are motivated by an honest search for truth and not for the sake of argument and provocation. Such a dispute, he further explains, is destined to endure and produce positive insights and permanent solutions to the issues under investigation.

A well-known sugya in Yevamot describes the prolonged *mahloket* between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. “R. Abba stated in the name of Samuel: For three years there was a dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, the former asserting, ‘The *Halakhah* is in agreement with our views’ and the latter contending, ‘The *Halakhah* is in agreement with our views.’” A resolution was reached when “a bat kol issued, announcing, ‘*elu va-elu divrei Elokim Hayyim*’- ‘[The utterances of] both are the words of the living God, but the *Halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of Beit Hillel.’”<sup>iv v</sup> The ambiguous pronouncement of the bat kol, ‘*elu va-elu divrei Elokim hayyim*,’ has been the subject of much analysis by commentators.

*Elu va-elu divrei Elokim hayyim* is a puzzling concept. If the purpose of *mahloket* is to make decisions on matters of Divine law, how can both sides of a dispute be *divrei Elokim hayyim*? Does this statement imply that both sides of the dispute are correct? Can multiple or contradicting opinions coexist in the system of Divine law? A study of the opinions on “*elu va-elu*” will provide insights on the question of multiple truths in Jewish law.

One way of approaching this complexity is to view the study of the different sides of a *mahloket* as a means to thorough

Talmud Torah. A beraita in Masekhet Hagigah implies that in Torah study there is an inherent importance to the minority view. Rav Elazar Ben Azaria states, “Should a man say: How... shall I learn Torah? Therefore the text says: ‘All of them are given from one Shepherd.’ One God gave them; one leader uttered them from the mouth of the Lord of all creation, blessed be He; for it is written: ‘And God spoke all these words.’”<sup>vi</sup> Rashi, commenting on the word “them,” explains that when

one sees two contradictory opinions in front of him, he should understand that they stem from the same Torah. Similar to the pronouncement of the bat kol of “*elu va-elu*”, this text asserts that all of Torah is derived from one source—God. Rav Elazar Ben Azaria continues to instruct, “You too, make your ear like a mill-hopper [which collects the grains in a mill] and acquire for yourself a perceptive heart to hear the words of those who declare impure and the words of those who pronounce it pure, the words of those who prohibit and the words of those who permit, the words of those who disqualify and the words of those who declare fit.” Here Rav Elazar Ben Azaria instructs one seeking how to properly learn Torah to open his or her mind and study both sides of the *mahloket*, for both sides are Divine. This approach is taken by the author of Netivot Hamishpat and Hida. The author of Netivot Hamishpat writes that although false, Halakhic errors serve an important function.<sup>vii</sup> He compares the search for the ultimate Torah truth to a diver searching for precious stones. The diver, he states, needs to first undergo the process of uncovering the worthless stones before he can reach the capability to discover the nuances between the worthless and precious stones. Therefore, in Torah study, one must fully understand even the incorrect view in order to fully comprehend the correct and true view. Hida takes a similar approach in explaining the significance of the incorrect opinion. Commenting on *elu va’elu*, he compares the true and the false to light

and darkness. He asserts that just as light would be distinguishable without a background of darkness, truth is only distinguishable when contrasted with falsehood. Both commentaries explain that the learning of the false side has inherent worth, in order to fully grasp the correct Torah opinion, and, as Hida closes, “For this entire process there is a heavenly reward.”<sup>viii</sup>

Although that attitude beautifully describes the process of Talmud Torah, it does not seem to explain the significance of the sugya’s striking language nor the Halakhic implications of *elu va-elu divrei Elokim hayyim*. What does it mean to say that both opinions can be true? In contrast

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to the previous opinions which suggested that both sides of a *mahloket* are important because they clarify the correct opinion, Rashi implies that there is the possibility of multiple correct opinions in Halakhic discourse. He first explains that when a debate revolves around the attribution of a doctrine to a particular individual, or a fact, there is only room for one truth. For a conceptual dispute he continues: “However, when two Amoraim enter into a halakhic dispute, each arguing the halakhic merits of his view, each drawing upon comparisons to establish the authenticity of his perspective, there is no absolute truth and falsehood. About such issues one can declare *elu va-elu divrei Elokim hayyim*—both represent the view of the living God.”<sup>ix</sup> Rashi renders both sides of a *mahloket* legitimate and true. This is different from the prior sources that implied that only one opinion can leave victorious, though both essential for the understanding of the cor-

rect view. When it comes time to draw a conclusion for the *Halakhah*, Rashi states that “On some occasions one perspective will prove more authentic, and under other circumstances the other view will appear to be more compelling. The effectiveness of particular rationales shifts as conditions of their application change, even if only subtly.” Rashi says that both sides can be true, but in the end one will be more appropriately fitting for the situation than the other.

There are those who describe the equal status of different opinions in the heavenly realm and explain how these opinions are subject to human interpretation and decision. Ritva quotes the opinion of the Ba’alei ha-Tosafot, who ask how *elu va-elu divrei Elokim hayyim* is possible if one side says assur and one side says patur. They respond that at Har Sinai, when Moshe went to receive the Torah, God showed him every matter was subject to forty-nine assur and forty-nine patur approaches. Moshe asked God how it would be possible to discern the Halakhic conclusion. God responded saying that “scholars of each generation were given the authority to decide among these perspectives in order to establish the normative *Halakhah*.”<sup>x</sup> <sup>xi</sup> All of the halakhic options presented to Moshe by God were correct and license was

given to human scholars to defend their individual opinion. Man’s obligation of applying halakhic principles would be able to account for the potential existence of many valid, yet technically mutually exclusive, solutions to the same problem. Maharshal also acknowledges that the potential for multiple truths is based in Kabbalah. He states, “The Kabbalists explained that the basis for [*elu va-elu divrei Elokim*] is that each individual soul was present at Sinai and received the Torah by means of the forty-nine paths (*tzinorot*). Each perceived the Torah from his own perspective in accordance with his intellectual capacity as well as the stature and unique character of his particular soul.” Every person standing had his unique way of understanding the Torah; therefore, Maharshal says that “this accounts for the discrepancy in perception inasmuch as one concluded that an object was *tamei* in the extreme, another perceived it to be absolutely *tahor*, and yet a



third individual argues the ambivalent state of the object in question. All these are true and sensible views. Thus, the wise men declared that in a debate between true scholars, all positions articulated represent a form of truth.”<sup>xii</sup> Similar to the Ba’alei ha-Tosafot, Maharshah holds that multiple—even contradictory—human interpretations can be true.

The most contemporary view is that of Rav Moshe Feinstein, who explains the concept of *elu va-elu divrei Elokim* and how we can practically come to a conclusion in *Halakhah*. In Masekhet Shabbat there is a Tannaitic dispute as to whether activities regarded as preliminaries to a brit milah can override Shabbat melakha restrictions. In the introduction to his teshuvot, Igrot Moshe, Rav Moshe presents the story of people in Rabbi Eliezer’s town who would cut wood to produce charcoal to make a knife for performing a brit milah on Shabbat.<sup>xiii</sup> In the end, we do not pasken like Rabbi Eliezer, and one might think that all of these people were punished for the extraneous *hilul Shabbat* they committed. However, the end of the narrative it goes on to explain that all of these people lived to old age, and when external decrees were placed on berit milah, this city was exempt. Rav Moshe explains that even if in the end Rabbi Elazar was wrong, they merited because it was still a *Mitzvah* for the townspeople to follow his *pesak*. How is this possible? Rav Moshe clarifies that there is a distinction between *emet kelapei shemaya*—correct in heaven—and *emet*

le-hora’ah—correct for instruction. *Emet kelapei shemaya* means that in *shamayim* there is definitely one correct *pesak* and the others are incorrect. Nonetheless, on Earth

Hillel and Beit Shammai in Eruvin, how is it that although both sides of the dispute were considered *divrei Elokim hayyim*, the prevailing opinion is that of Beit Hil-

ments are genuine and that their efforts are for the sake of Heaven.”<sup>xiv</sup> Such a relationship between the pleaders is visible in the case of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. The *Gemara* continues, “Since, however, both are the ‘words of the living God’ what was it that entitled Beit Hillel to have the *Halakhah* fixed in agreement with their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, studied their own rulings as well as those of Beit Shammai, and were even so [humble] as to mention the actions of Beit Shammai before theirs.”<sup>xv</sup> Beit Hillel merited the victorious opinion because they showed the utmost respect for their opposing opinion. Also, their love for one another is apparent in a different discussion in Yevamot. The *Gemara* explains that although they disagreed on matters of *Halakhah* regarding marriage, Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai nonetheless respected each other’s opinions. As it says, “Although Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagreed, Beit Shammai did not, nevertheless, abstain from marrying women of the families of Beit Hillel, nor did Beit Hillel refrain from



we have the concept of “*lo ba-shamayim hi*” and that man has authority to interpret the Torah. *Emet le-hora’ah* demonstrates that if a learned, God-fearing person comes to a conclusion in *Halakhah* using the correct methodology, even if ultimately the conclusion is wrong in the heavens, it is considered correct on earth for practical purposes.

Returning to the *mahloket* of Beit

lil? The end of the *Mishnah* in Avot states that a dispute is sofo le-hitkayem when it is le-shem *shamayim*. Kehati explains that the criteria for knowing whether or not a *mahloket* is le-shem *shamayim* is the relationship between the pleaders of the argument. He states, “If [they two sides of the dispute] display a unity of purpose and an intense personal attachment toward one another, this is evidence that their state-

marrying those of Beit Shammai. This is to teach you that they showed love and friendship towards one another, thus putting into practice the scriptural text, “Love ye truth and peace.” (Zecharia 8:16)<sup>xvi</sup>

i. This article is heavily based off the article “Elu Va-Elu Divrei Elokim Hayyim: Halakhic Pluralism and Theories of Controversy” by Rabbi Michael Rosensweig which originally appeared in TRADITION 26:3, 1992 and the recording of the Shiur Machshava - Eilu V’Eilu by Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh, which can be found on yutorah.org. The article and shiur gave me a framework for the topic and insights to many of the sources I cited in the article.

ii. M. Avot 5:17

iii. Translation from Sefaria.com

iv. Eruvin 13b

v. Translation from Soncino English Babylonian Talmud

vi. Hagigah 3b

vii. Introduction to Net’ivot haMishpat on Hoshen Mishpat

viii. Petah Einayim LiHida Bava Metzia 59b

ix. Rashi “Ha Kemashmalan,” Ketubot 57a

x. Hiddushei HaRitva Eruvin 13b

xi. A similar narrative is found Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 4:2,

xii. Yam Shel Shlomo Introduction to Bava Kamma

xiii. Shabbat 130a

xiv. M. Avot 5:17

xv. Eruvin 13b

xvi. Yevamot 14b



# “Lovers of Humanity”: Rav Kook, Christianity, and the Ongoing Censorship of His Writings

BY ARYEH SKLAR

In the year 1920, a twelve-page pamphlet was written and distributed in pre-Israel Palestine called *Kol Shofar*.<sup>i</sup> It contained an extended criticism of and invective against Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who was then the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. Some of the criticism was directed toward Rav Kook's support of secular education. Some criticism targeted his positive comments about the *hilonim*, the non-religious (and at times anti-religious) Jews of then-Palestine. One of the more interesting claims of the pamphlet was that Rav Kook was a lover of Christianity. They paraphrased a line from Rav Kook's 1906 essay *Derekh HaTehiyah*, in which he wrote about certain positive attributes of Jesus, such as Jesus' "wonderful personal power, his personal power is great." The pamphlet mocked Rav Kook's statement, applying these characteristics to Rav Kook himself as a founder of a new Christian-like cult.

Betzalel Naor argues that these accusations of "Christophilia" are completely false.<sup>ii</sup> Not only, he argues, does the very line from *Derekh HaTehiyah* that praises Jesus denigrate his lack of intellectual and ethical training, Orot itself is a "sustained intellectual battle... [that] hammers away, piece after piece, at the moral turpitude, hypocrisy, and spiritual inadequacy of the Church."<sup>iii</sup> Thus, Naor argues, since Rav Kook made many statements that denigrate Jesus and the Church, "If anything, 'Christophobia' would more likely be the word to describe Rav Kook's attitude toward Christian civilization."<sup>iv</sup>

That the authors of the *Kol Shofar* pamphlet were shocked at the slightest hint of praise toward Jesus, is not surprising. But from this "battle" over Rav Kook's views, we can clearly see here a complex and perhaps contradictory picture of Rav Kook's stand on the matter. The reason for this is that Rav Kook's full position on Christianity has been systematically and intentionally obscured by the followers of Rav Kook's son, Rav Tzvi

Yehudah Kook. Naor himself points out that the controversy surrounding Rav Kook's writings had such an effect on Rav Kook's son that in 1924, prior to the publishing of Rav Kook's Orot HaTeshuvah, R. Tzvi Yehudah Kook begged his father to be more careful in his writings. "For God's sake," he writes, "be exacting that nothing is issued which is not thoroughly explained."<sup>v</sup>

This background may provide some understanding of the ongoing cen-

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*For Rav Kook, the novel concept that God's providence can use human religious activity and turn it into a tool for perfection of the world allows for even greater acceptance and possibility of truth in other religions.*

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sorship of Rav Kook's writings now being published by the followers of R. Tzvi Yehudah at the aptly named *Mekhon R. Tzvi Yehudah*. The censorship of Rav Kook is more common than previously thought, extensively discussed by Professor Marc Shapiro on SeforimBlog.<sup>vi</sup> He cites several examples where comparing the original manuscripts with the printed version indicates heavy censorship of Rav Kook's more radical ideas. We especially see this in a "leaked" online version of an unedited notebook from Rav Kook's time in Boisk (1896-1904). Because of the "leak" (the motivations of which I have been unable to ascertain), we have gotten a glimpse of the censorship that occurs when Rav Kook's writings are published.<sup>vii</sup>

This relatively new notebook is interesting in its own right. Rav Kook's closest student, Rabbi David Cohen (known as the *Nazir* of Jerusalem) named the notebook in his commentary to Rabbi Judah HaLevi's *Kuzari* as "*Moreh Nevukhim HaHadash*" - "The New Guide for the Perplexed." As one can imagine, it contains extended essays on major points in Rav Kook's worldview that attempt to resolve some of the most vexing problems

in Judaism of the time. Soon after the leak, the Mekhon

Rav Tzvi Yehudah published the "official" version of this book, in *Pinkesei ha-Re'iyah*, vol. 2. Since both the censored and uncensored versions are available, one can clearly see that, again, the censorship is heavy-handed.

Sometimes, one can understand the caution, but sometimes it is quite difficult. Apparently, R. Tzvi Yehudah was disturbed enough by the controversy surrounding his father that he wanted to prevent that from occurring again. Additionally,

as Rav Pesach Wolicki of Yeshivat Yesodei HaTorah pointed out to me, it is true that Rav Kook did not necessarily write many of his notebooks for straight publication, and their haphazard style and random content indicate that they were surely not meant to be published without some editorial process; thus, the censorship could be justified.

But some edits are unclear in their intent, occasionally taking out from one notebook something that already appeared without fanfare elsewhere. As Professor Shapiro notes, there have been many of these "edits" with regard to Rav Kook's view of the ceasing of animal sacrifices, even though we know his views from elsewhere.<sup>viii</sup> Indeed, sometimes the censorship is not just protecting Rav Kook, but even changing the thrust of his thought, or even his view entirely, which is surely a larger offense.

We can understand why, for example, a chapter of this new notebook (Chapter 13 according to the uncensored version)<sup>ix</sup> was removed in the censored version that refers to the future Sanhedrin's ability to reform and reinterpret Scripture according to the needs of the generation. This is something that could be misunderstood as pushing for Reform understanding of Jewish law. But sometimes, the purpose of some censorship seems to be more personal.

For example, Chapter 14 (again, according to the uncensored version)<sup>x</sup> refers to the changing reasons for *mitsvot* in each generation. His argument in that

chapter is that it is important to provide modern reasons for the commandments, in addition to the way it would have been viewed in the time of the Torah. For example, he writes, the reason the Torah commands men not to (Lev. 19:27) "destroy the corners of your beard," was originally because the post-Exodus Jewish man had the freedom to grow a beard, which was considered a symbol of prestige. The Torah wanted to encourage that feeling of prestige. Even though, Rav Kook argues, modern man does not view the beard as prestigious, and it is actually a cleanly-shaven face that is considered nicer, one may not change one iota of detail from the Torah. Further, it is good to have a culture where beards connect us to a time where this was considered holy and prestigious. This seems to be a weak attempt to justify the Torah prohibition in the face of changing times, a time which he admits no longer grants beards this significance. If his point is to show why Jewish men should grow beards today, the best he could come up with seems to remain as solely a connection to the past.

This is only strange in the *Mekhon R. Tzvi Yehudah* version, because that is where his discussion of beards ends.<sup>xi</sup> But in the uncensored version, there is another small paragraph about this. Rav Kook speculates interestingly that the rabbis of the Talmud knew that there would be times when beards would fall out of fashion, and that is the reason they found leniencies to use scissors and other ways to remove the beard. Loopholes, he writes, are sometimes important to maintain both the spirit and letter of the law, and keep us connected with a law that would otherwise not make sense today. Indeed, he makes similar arguments in his massively innovative work about *hetter mekhira*, *Shabbat HaArets*. So why is this censored? It seems that this is less a guarding of Rav Kook, and more a guarding of the bearded lifestyles of the followers of Rav Tzvi Yehudah.

Let us return, then, to the issue of Rav Kook's supposed Christophobia. The subject of Christianity and other religions in general is much-discussed in *Li-Nevukhei ha-Dor*, and was heavily censored as well. This should not come as such a surprise - with the background we saw above and Rav Tzvi Yehudah's reaction to controversies over his father.



In this notebook, Rav Kook argues extensively for a Hegelian-esque view of knowledge and truth. That is, all of history is guided by some divine Spirit that causes all historical movements to move toward a unified truth.<sup>xii</sup> With this, Rav Kook allows for truth within Christianity and Islam, a truth that Jews should not seek to tamper with. Indeed, there is tremendous value in encouraging Christians and Muslims to stay true to their beliefs, because they will be lost without this guiding movement they have become used to. The censorship of these passages robs modern Judaism of a beautiful framework in which to view other religions.

Indeed, finding purpose to other religions started before Rav Kook. Maimonides himself had a controversial view of Christianity and Islam in his Laws of Kings (11:4), which was also censored. Maimonides famously writes that there is a divine purpose for Christianity and Islam. Though “there is no greater stumbling block than Christianity,” and the relentless Christian persecution of Jews has scattered us and nearly destroyed us, still, the world is now a step closer to a messianic movement that allows for a messianic age to occur. God’s plans are inscrutable, he writes, but it seems that through the widespread adoption of Christianity and Islam, the end-of-days state predicted by the prophets such as Zephaniah is that much easier to achieve.

This concept, that God’s providence can use human religious activity and turn it into a tool for perfection of the world, for Rav Kook, allows for even greater acceptance and possibility of truth in other religions. In the censored Chapter 8 of Li-Nevukhei ha-Dor, Rav Kook argues that all religions that allow for the development of higher moral values are hitting on a divine truth that is important and valuable. With this belief in divine providence, he grants the possibility that the leaders who founded those religions could have truly had a low form of prophecy (“divine ideas”), and even actually performed miracles (“perceptible wonders”). Since this may be surprising, I have provided my own translation of this section below.<sup>xiii</sup>

*It is possible that the founders [of those religions] had a divine idea for them to strive to improve the impressionable part of humanity however much they could. For this purpose, it is possible*

*that some perceptible wonders were prepared for them, if they needed to strengthen [their messages], since this is relevant to humanity’s improvement, for the hand of God stretches from the beginning of existence to the end. However, the mis-*



*taken aspects that got mixed into [those religions] is only that which [makes] it impossible for their formula to be the true formula for guidance to perfection’s end, for it is fitting that there be [just] one spiritual center in the world.*

For Rav Kook, Judaism is certainly a correct system since it believes in monotheism along with the belief that there can only be one spiritual authoritative center to guide the world, which for him will create ultimate unity of humanity. As he states in Chapter 7,<sup>xiv</sup>

*Just as it is impossible for the system of an individual state to develop except through a central body that is situated in one place, a king, or a legislature, so too the world cannot reach the perfection of this system unless there was some set center in one place...*

*It makes sense that in apportioning to every nation the field of endeavor that is unique to it,<sup>xv</sup> the field of perfected spirituality of life would fall into the domain of Israel, for they are suited to this through the Torah of God that they have, and because of the fitness of their elevated spirit for things that are very lofty, and from the standpoint of their share in general history, which is their longstanding mission to enlighten the world with knowledge of God even in the darkest and most hateful times, and how much more so in times of light and love.*

Absent this belief that all nations must work together in their unique talents,

with Judaism in Israel focusing on spiritual growth, other religions have made a mistake. Besides for this error, humanity nevertheless improves through religion; the divine progression of religious communities goes so far as to allow even the possibility that their founders performed miracles.

Rav Kook admits that granting truth to other religions is not a common one in Judaism. He states in the censored Chapter 14a:<sup>xvi</sup>

*There are other people who think that a person can only properly have perfect faith in the Moses’ true Torah so long as one also believes that other faiths are all “false and foolish”, and that there is nothing positive in holding fast to them. But it’s not true. However, there are ideas that the Jewish nation are accustomed to which cause much of the masses to think this. This view is indeed useful in that it sometimes strengthens Jewish faith in the hearts of fools, for they cannot understand the lofty value and the holiness of our holy Torah without also thinking of other faiths as mistaken and completely useless. But, there is also much evil that comes from this view if it is not corrected. For, the contempt that is imprinted deep in the heart of the masses for other faiths, also causes people to be secular, wicked people who also consider pure Jewish faith the same in this regard, and they say, “Both ways are equal, this is a faith and that is a faith.”*

Thus, not only is it a false notion, but it damages the Jewish religion to believe that other religions have nothing redeeming about them, or are not on the path of truth. Rav Kook was evidently concerned with the implications that such a belief holds when one of our own leaves our path. When such a person is taught that all other religions are false, and then later comes to the belief that his own religion is false, Judaism lose him to atheism and pure secularism, instead of perhaps a lower level of religious Judaism, or some other religious outlook.<sup>xvii</sup>

Be that as it may, Rav Kook has to contend with the overwhelming textual precedent for the belief that the Torah view has exclusive access to the truth. For example, why is idolatry not also to be viewed as

reaching toward the truth, and therefore held in such a positive light? Obviously, such an approach is rebutted by the many verses describing the forbiddenness of idolatry and idol-worship, the majority of the few things that are called a toevah - abomination - in the Torah, generally relate to idolatry.

However, Rav Kook makes a distinction:<sup>xviii</sup>

*From the standpoint of it being an impediment, where idolatry impedes the collective good of God’s light from coming to the world, in that respect all types of idolatry are equally bad... However, there is another side as well, which is that the basis of idolatry comes from a crass aspect, for it is impossible for them to elevate themselves to a greater level, of the purity of mind required to recognize the glory of the one God, Master of all creation, blessed be He... within that, not all idolatries are the same. For sometimes there are nations whose ethics lift them up, to the extent that despite the fact that they are idolaters, they are standing*



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on the proper level through morality, with [good] character traits, and respect, and the civil ones and their ways of idol worship are not so disgusting and filled with abomination as others are. Therefore, one cannot assume that all idolatrous nations are of one viewpoint and one way.

Behold, even within idolatry, there are sparks of morality. From the perspective of their fear [of their gods], they separate themselves from things that are very evil, every nation according to its ideas, and they bring themselves close to good deeds within human society nevertheless. And the accustoming to good deeds, and the distancing from evil, acts to purify man's soul. And coming generations, even from these idolaters themselves, are already more prepared for the true light. For through the light of the good character traits and good deeds of the worthy religions that are found among the idolaters, guide the religious, bring them to recognize how distant they stand from the great light that is the knowledge of the glory of the one God, and they will cause themselves to convert the people to a clear language, all of them (Genesis 4:26) "to call in the name of God."

The Torah's approach describes the type of idolatry that is completely immoral. But Rav Kook argues that that doesn't negate the possibility of an idolatrous nation that is quite moral, which is not something to denigrate. In this, he joins the camp of Meiri, who stated that

the Talmudic stand on non-Jews was only insofar as those non-Jews described were crass and evil people.<sup>xix</sup> He finds support for the concept of individuals of other nations seeing the light in their limited way from the famous line of Tanna D'bei Eliyahu: "I call heaven and earth to witness that whether man or woman, whether ser-

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***But with these comments...  
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movements of the world.***

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vant or maidservant, whether gentile or Jew, the Holy Spirit rests upon a person according to his deed."<sup>xx</sup>

Yet, what of Judaism's many halakhic prohibitions that separate Jews from non-Jews? Jews are forbidden from drinking their wine, eating their food, and are generally asked to keep far away from them in many aspects. If their religion is valuable, shouldn't there be interaction and an exchange of ideas? This, too, is discussed by Rav Kook in a fascinating way:<sup>xxi</sup>

*...One should not decide that an entire religion is mistaken, to release those who hold fast to it, to humiliate them, except as much as is appropriate to arouse in ourselves of [knowledge of]*

*the great Good and the holy inheritance that improves us, who "separated us from those who have strayed and gave us the Torah of truth, and implanted eternal life within us."*

*The guarding [from], and the distancing, that is appropriate for every Jew especially, to distance himself from getting close to the ways of other religions, in their customs, and their religious ethics, should always be weighed in the same way as the chaste distancing from his fellow's wife, which shouldn't come from jealousy and meanness, rather from purity of the soul, and holiness in one's traits and actions. Because, just like active closeness and signs of love are nice and beautiful to beautify and improve family life, so is the opposite by a foreign man who can sully family life and its purity. With our distancing ourselves from that foreign woman, we are lovers of humanity, who strive for its welfare.*

Meaning, the purpose of Jews keeping a distance from other religions is a two-way street. Judaism believes it is the correct way for the Jewish people, but also believes that non-Jews should not take on Jewish ideals, which he believes could disturb the non-Jew's national unity and moral development. He compares this relationship with non-Jews to a relationship with a friend's wife. Jews should recognize that their "wife", i.e. religion, is an important relationship that Jews should not wish to disturb. This is a significant

move - Jews are not only concerned for their own relationship to God as part of Judaism; Jews should be reluctant to disturb others' religious and moral growth as well. Jews keep a distance from non-Jews because Jews love them so, as "lovers of humanity."

All of these ideas were removed from the Mekhon Rav Tzvi Yehudah version. But with these comments (and this author limited this discussion to just a few paragraphs from the book), one must conclude that Rav Kook is not "Christophilic," nor "Christophobic," but rather a lover of all humanity and the movements of the world. Rav Kook creates a significant and meaningful framework in which to look at other religions, which allows for basic respect and esteem of others. Without this relatively recent "leak" of Rav Kook's unedited ideas, one would rightly conclude like Betzalel Naor's position that Rav Kook should be considered through his published comments as Christophobic. The Jewish public deserves to be aware of these expansive and tolerant perspectives, especially today when intolerance is so rampant.

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*Aryeh Sklar is a Revel graduate student in Jewish philosophy, and is a staff writer for Kol Hamevaser.*

i. See Betzalel Naor, *Orot* (New Jersey: Aronson, 1993), 14-44, 50-51

ii. Betzalel Naor, *Orot* (New Jersey: Aronson, 1993), 51

iii. *ibid.*

iv. *ibid.*

v. *ibid.*, 60

vi. See <http://seforim.blogspot.com/2010/10/marc-b-shapiro-new-writings-from-r-kook.html>, <http://seforim.blogspot.com/2011/08/new-writings-from-r-kook-and-assorted.html>, and <http://seforim.blogspot.com/2010/04/marc-shapiro-r-kook-on-sacrifices-other.html>

vii. Available here <https://kavvanah.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/kook-nevuchai.pdf>. Also available in print form for around a year (2014) through Yediot Aharonot, based on the Bar Ilan doctorate of R. Shachar Rachmeni. References to pages will be from the online version.

viii. See <http://seforim.blogspot.com/2010/04/marc-shapiro-r-kook-on-sacrifices-other.html>

ix. Page 57.

x. Page 69

xi. See page 65 of the Mekhon Rav Tzvi Yehudah version

xii. See page 4, for example, through which he uses this argument to allow for an Aristotelian eternal world as long as one includes this divine progression of the world's development.

xiii. Page 31

xiv. Page 27

xv. This concept of special areas of each nation to focus on, and the Jews having spirituality as theirs, may have been inspired by the Volkgeist of Johann Gottfried von Herder.

xvi. Page 71. The "a" here is my translation for how it was written in the notebook as "14-one". He repeated chapter numbers, perhaps as a statement that he was rearranging topics, or perhaps that he didn't like the original chapter and was replacing it.

xvii. See also Chapter 12, which focuses on the problem of viewing Judaism like other religions where belief is more important than action. By viewing them as the same, some Jews see actions

as external expressions of internal beliefs, which inevitably create the incorrect sense (to Rav Kook) that thought is more important than action in Judaism, like it is in other religions. This allows context for people to stop performing the mitsvot, as they view them as less important.

xviii. Page 74

xix. He was well-aware of Meiri's position on non-Jews, and indeed uses it in halakhic arguments for *hetter mehira* in *Shabbat ha-Aretz*. See also, for example, *Iggerot ha-Raaya* 1:89, where he states explicitly that the law "principally follows the Meiri, that all nations that are bound to proper conduct between people are considered foreign residents (*gerim toshavim*) with regards to all duties towards man."

xx. Tanna D'bei Eliyahu 9

xxi. Page 75



# Evolution Of A Revolution: A Review of *Joshua* by Rabbi Michael Hattin

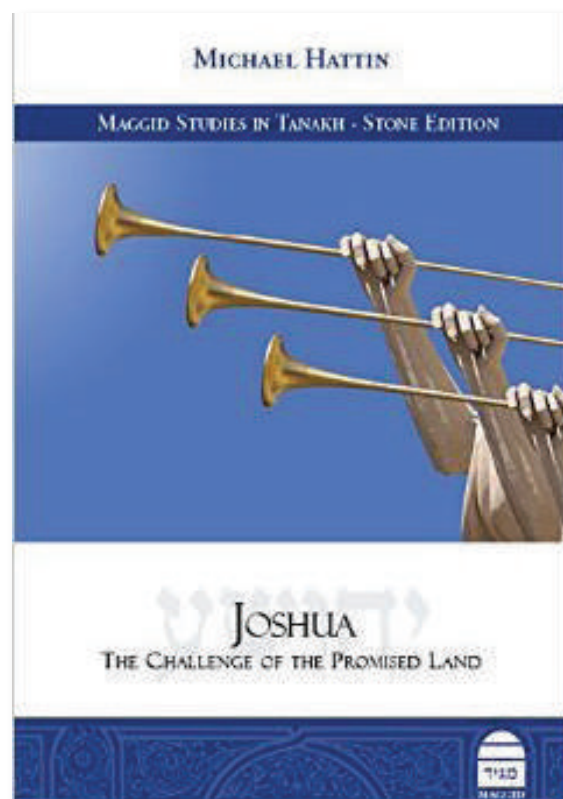
By J.J. KIMCHE

Considering the sheer antiquity of the *Tanakh* as we have it, coupled with the phenomenal amount of scholarly ink shed over the millennia in various analytical, homiletic and exegetical endeavours that comprise our magnificent textual heritage, one could perhaps be forgiven for assuming that we have intellectually plateaued, that no more tremendous revelations – in either analysis or methodology – remain concealed in the field of Orthodox Biblical study. Extraordinarily, and in an admirably unobtrusive manner, there has occurred a veritable renaissance, perhaps a revolution, in the field of Tanach learning in the past decade or more. Emanating almost exclusively from the mighty confluence of Yeshivat Har Etzion and Herzog College, (Both located in Alon Shevut, Israel) an astounding plethora of scholars have been produced an ocean of books, articles and lecture series', inexhaustibly revealing, evaluating, and delighting in hitherto undiscovered vistas in our Book of Books, much to the delight of their growing faithful.

While a thorough analysis of the intellectual underpinnings and philosophical implications of this renaissance is far beyond the scope of this essay, a brief overview is in order. This new intellectual movement straddles – with striking dexterity - an awkward boundary; on the one hand it remains unabashedly orthodox, unswervingly subscribing to and advocating for ancient Jewish beliefs of both the Divinity and relevance of the Bible and her prophets; yet on the other hand engaging intelligently with all the aspects of modern academic study that most Orthodox thinkers historically recoiled from. Fascinatingly, one could find in a characteristic passage, (say, by Harav Yaakov Medan or his protégé Harav Amnon Bazak) a position put forth by Rashi facing a counter-argument from

Ramban, A *Midrash* Tankhuma butting heads with a historical note from Josephus, geographical evidence countered by archaeological findings, Rav Kook sparring with Professor Cassuto, philological theories colliding with psycho-analytical hypotheses; all these contending forces marshalled and phalanxed by the author, to be directed into the academic fray to substantiate an overarching theory of one sort or another.

The fundamental Modus Operandi of much of this new movement's methodology can be condensed into a single, laconic principle: "Ha*Tanakh* Mepharesh Et Atsmo" – that to a certain extent, when analyzed in a sufficiently keen, sensitive and knowledgeable manner, the *Tanakh* – viewed not as a loose confederacy of disparate texts but rather a cohesive,



internally consistent oeuvre - is largely self-explaining and self-commentating. Thus all techniques of modern literary analysis (linguistic and thematic parallels, analysis of character and plot development, to name but a few) are employed,

albeit gingerly, to facilitate a deeper understanding of our precious texts. This faith in both the importance and validity of excavating virgin layers of meaning and inspiration in the Bible by harnessing all available source material from both *Hazal* and the academic world has welded a formidable alloy, a genre at once genuinely revolutionary and counter-revolutionary; works of fierce and fearless independence coupled with an indissoluble attachment, loyalty and respect toward the Jewish tradition have risen up and given birth to, almost im-

maculately, an intellectual universe of unbridled vibrancy and tenacity, one in which serious questions are given due comprehensive treatment.

In this vein, and as part of this new avalanche of writings, we have before us 'Joshua: The Challenge Of The Promised Land' (Maggid books, Jerusalem, 2014) by Rabbi Michael Hattin, (perhaps a tad predictably) a graduate of Yeshivat Har Etzion as well as a teacher of *Tanakh* at the Pardes Institute, Jerusalem. The book constitutes a conscious attempt to stake a claim in this revolution of learning and writing, and to a large extent this is successful. He (R' Hattin) falls very much in line with his illustrious predecessors by presenting a work that is – apart from articulate, intelligent, concise, sweeping and ambitious – positively bristling with crisp, creative Peshatim based on rigorous analysis and careful adjudication of the extensive assortment of sources culled to weigh in on any given issue. He skilfully divides the book chronologically, discusses all manner of issues which arise in the plain reading of the text (such as the transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua, the various preparations for the Israelites' war of conquest in Canaan, the repercussions, dividing the land between

the tribes, etc.) and deliberates upon - with a sizeable helping of *Midrash* and Radak, among others - the pertinent philosophical, theological and ideological undercurrents, unabashedly utilising the most

modern methods of literary analysis to demonstrate his point. A justificatory line in the book's introduction asserts that "Modern literary analysis has searched for underlying structure, characterization and plot, tonal qualities and cadence... to ignore it is to overlook an important dimension of biblical exegesis." Utilizing these tools, topics such as the precarious and

tempestuous love triangle between God, His land and His people, divergent models of leadership, the appropriate place of miracles, prophets and angels in the Torah's worldview, the almost dangerous sanctity of the Holy Land, among others, are dissected with the precision of a surgeon and the sophisticated poise of a seasoned Mehanekh.

Rabbi Hattin's most important and enduring contribution here is his ability to compellingly contextualise. In consonance with the worldview in which his intellectual moorings are grounded, he advances a convincing case for treating many of the events recorded in the Biblical book of Joshua not in isolation but rather as part of a broader linear continuum; mirroring, reflecting and thereby providing a wide-angle lens through which to assess several events in the humash. Hence, under analysis, Joshua's sending of the spies intentionally parallels the disastrous events of Moses' spies in Parshat Shelach, providing the reader with important similarities and differences to be cognizant of and glean lessons from, pointing out, for example, that "Joshua wisely chooses a different course of action, tightly shrouding the mission in secrecy... it is Joshua alone who is privy to

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their account” (Page 24). Operating under this model, the splitting of the Jordan is likewise paralleled to the splitting of the sea, and the reinstitution of circumcision and *Korban Pesach* after a national forty-year abstention is subject to characteristically systematic examination, emblematic of the rejuvenation of the national symbiosis between the Jewish Nation and God, a relationship tragically ruptured by the faithlessness of those involved with the episode of Moses’ Spies. To quote directly, “... as a conceptual idea, circumcision implies a national identity and its corollary an autonomous existence in a homeland... their bodies marked with the seal of God’s covenant and minds seared with its eternal promise, they venture forth to secure the land...” (Page 91). Tangentially, this compare-and-contrast method has the added advantage of serving as a wonderfully strident, if implicit, riposte to perhaps the most pervasive and insidious axiom currently in vogue in countless academic circles: that the books of the Bible are a haphazard collection of incongruent manuscripts crudely shoehorned into a master-text masquerading as a faithful historical account. By presenting events in the book of Joshua as a seamless continuation of, indeed a form of commentary on, the preceding works of the Pentateuch, Rabbi Hattin makes a strong case for viewing the Biblical corpus as a unified whole, as a work constructed with self-evident intentionality and painstaking literary care.

There are, however, certain

flaws in this work that ought to be aired out and ruminated upon. To preempt certain potential critiques, it is crucial to state categorically that R’ Hattin’s book is absolutely not an exhaustive, scholarly tome, replete with myriad footnotes and sources, and nor does it attempt to be. The style is decidedly brisk and concise, with an emphasis on a single core idea in each chapter, succinctly elucidated and refrigerated for later use. For its relative brevity – a mere 267 pages long – this constellation of compact, interdependent essays punches far above its textual weight, yet it is precisely this audience-expanding concision that limits the book’s usefulness for those who prefer a more thorough, multi-angled approach to sources. This is clearly a deliberate editorial decision, and while this could hardly be construed as a failing, it remains a point to be duly noted.

However, there was one minor weakness present in this book deserving of brief attention and discussion. The author (in a couple of isolated instances), could readily be indicted of the literary equivalent of ‘shooting the arrow and proceeding to draw the target around where it happens to land’. On occasion it appeared that R’ Hattin abandoned the pursuit of rigorous analytical interpretation in favour of utilizing a passage or a character as a mouthpiece to express his own point. At times, he freely seems to superimpose implausible motives and thoughts on an array of

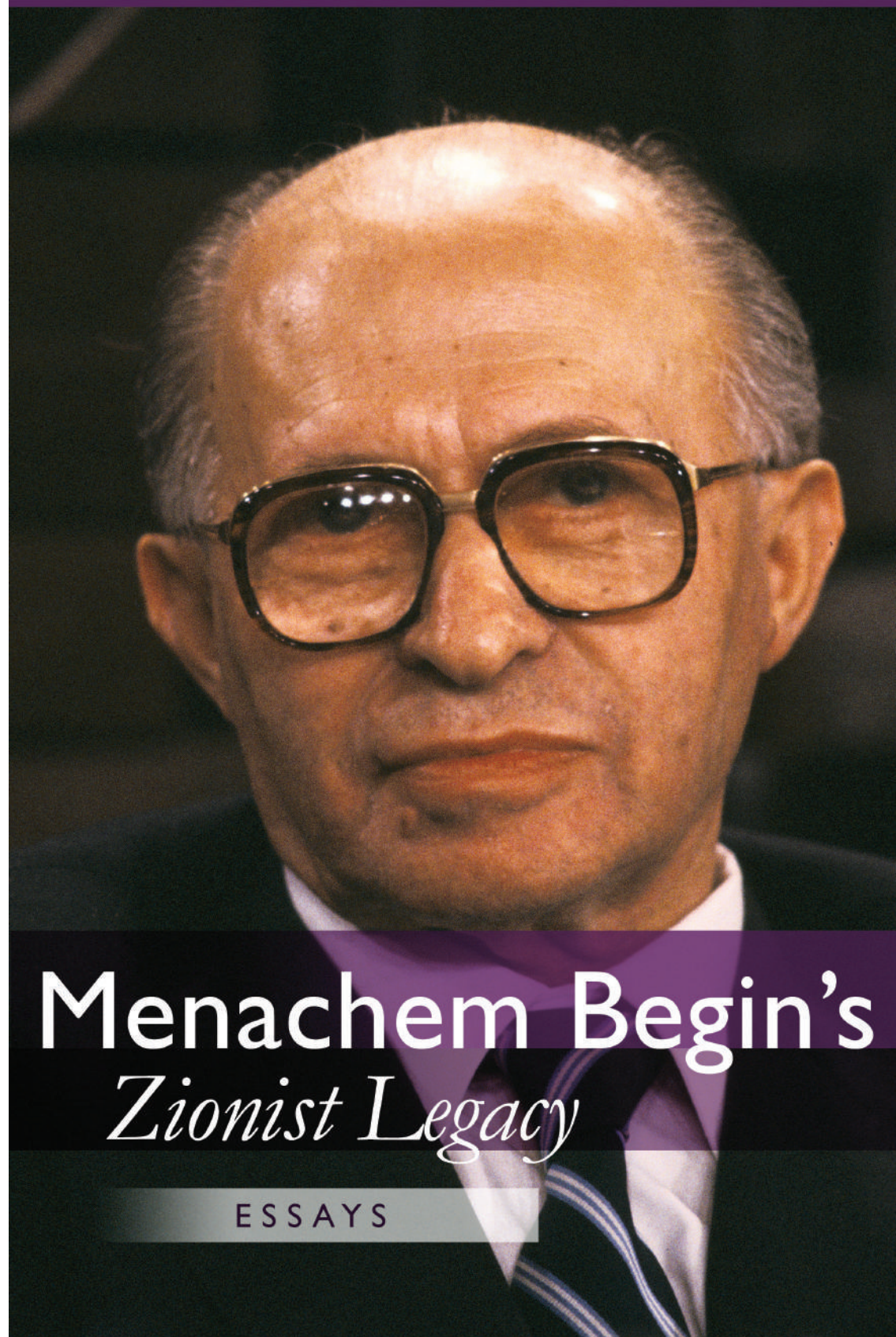
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*Rabbi Hattin’s achievement is remarkable: he has revitalised (perhaps even resurrected) an understudied and underappreciated part of the Tanakh, adding his lucid, scholarly and impassioned penmanship towards this crescendo of scholarly productivity, illuminating a path toward a greater understanding of our most sacred texts.*

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# Menachem Begin’s *Zionist Legacy*

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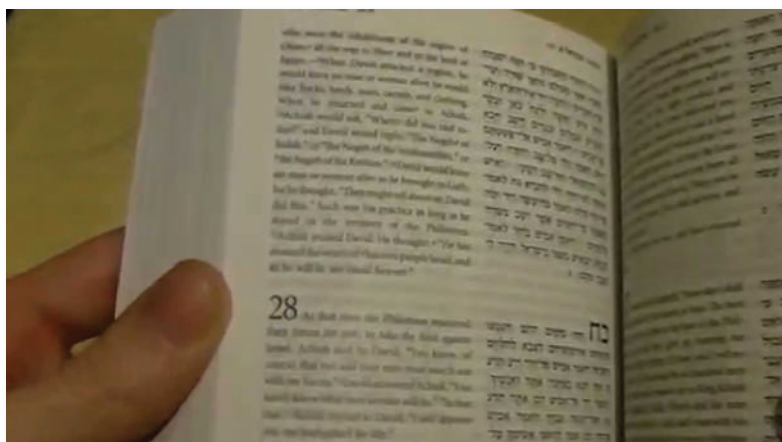
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Hillel Halkin, Meir Soloveichik, Ruth Wisse



characters and situations. Take Rahab. A harlot in Jericho, it was in her 'home of ill repute' that Joshua's two scouts find refuge upon arrival. Surprisingly, she proceeds to shield them from the city's authorities, spin a web of deceit on their behalf, and proclaims her knowledge both of the events surrounding the Exodus and Israel's subsequently victorious battles, culminating her soliloquy in an unexpectedly lyrical proclamation of allegiance to the God of Israel (Joshua, Ch. 2). In what seems to be a departure from Peshat, R' Hattin dismisses the traditional Rahab (presumably a weathered stalwart of Jericho's burgeoning pornocratic underworld, wholly unperturbed by the notion of wholesale sedition) in favour of a portrait of what appears to be an archaic Martin Luther King, someone who foresees an ethically superior system of societal hierarchy (in Rahab's case, that of the Israelite nation), and resolves to dedicate their resources to its actualisation. To assert, as does R' Hattin, (Pages 27-37) that Rahab's shifting loyalties was a manifestation of her identification with a higher plane of virtue is difficult to accept on a peshat level.. Far more likely is that Rahab was backing - according to her perception - the stronger horse, that she genuinely believed the Israelite God to be more powerful than any boss in her local pantheon. Considering her occupation, fidelity could hardly be her most practiced attribute; hence the impulse to betray her city (of which she was scarcely a respectable affiliate) to save her family would not have kept her up at night.

A similar example of a strained reading unsubstantiated readings occurs in the analysis of a terse and puzzling episode (Joshua, Ch. 5) of the Angel of God who appears to Joshua in his military encampments just before the Israelites enter Jericho, identifies himself, brusquely instructs Joshua to "Remove your shoes, for the land you are standing upon is Holy" and instantly evaporates, ending the narrative. There are perhaps many ways to understand this mystifying passage, perhaps most plausibly through the prism of introducing Joshua (and the reader) to the concept of Kedushat Eretz Yisrael. Incompre-

hensibly, R' Hattin extend the text much further, choosing to explicate the terse instructions of the Angel as an exhortation aimed at Joshua that he and his army must not imbue these necessary wars with wanton cruelty, but rather "...must never lose sight of the land's sanctity, of man's inherent worth, of a vision of a better world..." (P. 105). This theory, seems antithetical to the text and to the thematic import of the book. Would it be likely that on the eve of a campaign of Divinely mandated



genocide of nauseating proportions, God would send an angel to laconically and cryptically hint at platitudes of the 'inherent worth' of human life? Could there be a more futile endeavour? It appears that in the two aforementioned cases - Rahab and the Angel - R' Hattin's honourably sensitive moral antennae appear to have unfortunately hijacked and overridden his customary fealty toward the pursuit of sober, rigorous and well-grounded textual analysis. Having said all this, it is important to reiterate that, fortuitously, these instances are relatively rare and isolated in an otherwise unimpeded voyage of meticulous scholarly excellence.

To be sure, for anyone studying the book of Joshua, from the novice to the specialist, there lurks an elephant in the room. Once simply cannot enter the room of Joshua without encountering this beast, nor exit satisfactorily without finding a method of either circumventing or neutralizing the elephantine question of the morality of Joshua's lifelong endeavour, namely the Israelites' wars of conquest. One may exhaust both intellect and patience with talk of leadership, transition, holiness and division of Land, but sooner or later every student must confront the self-evident, all-encompassing moral question: How could God, ostensibly the

ultimate source of Goodness and mercy, have commanded the Israelites, in a manner most emphatic and unambiguous, to mercilessly wipe out every man, woman and child of the seven indigenous nations of Canaan? Indeed, the text spares us none of the gory details, relishing (sometimes poetically!) the pitiless obliteration of entire civilisations. R' Hattin attacks this question with commendable lack of ethical circumlocution; without recourse to moral or cultural relativism, he confronts, admirably, the question in its naked form. Whilst not managing to entirely exculpate the actions of the conquering Israelite nation, he certainly goes a long way in charting a course for reconciling the text with correct moral sensibilities. To extravagantly condense his methodology R' Hattin adopts a comprehensive two-pronged approach (Pages 165-183), first highlighting the Torah's injunction to offer peace terms to any city before laying siege to it (cit-

ing Ramban who extends this command even to Canaanite cities), and complements this by once again contextualising (convincingly asserting, "One cannot read the book of Joshua in splendid isolation and expect to comprehend its message while remaining oblivious to the larger framework that is provided by the humash". Page 169). Thus, R' Hattin underscores both the importance of the Israelites' mission (the spread of ethical monotheism) as well as the need to utterly uproot the abominable Canaanite culture in order for this message of ultimate moral goodness be able to take root. Whilst not entirely exonerating wholesale butchery, in spelling out the above case in a compelling and articulate manner, he goes further to assuage the conscience of the modern, enlightened reader of Joshua than could almost any other commentator, thus limning an eminently reasonable course for further discussion on this crucial topic. ,

The book of Joshua is anomalous in the biblical canon as it chronicles a markedly smooth and successful period in History. All the battles are (eventually) won, the land is entered and divided correct-

ly, Joshua's iron grip on his leadership position is unswerving and unassailable. In a declaration both unprecedented and unequalled the *Pasuk* declares: "And Israel served God all the days of Joshua..." (Joshua 24:31). Being thus deprived of the multi-faceted characters, leadership contests, mutinous fratricide, narrowly avoided disasters or feverishly pitched stories of love, betrayal, prophecy and power that so characterise most biblical works, it is almost a wonder that anyone could sew together enough interesting material to make a book on Joshua a truly rewarding and riveting read. In this light, Rabbi Hattin's achievement is remarkable: he has revitalised (perhaps even resurrected) an understudied and underappreciated part of the *Tanakh*, adding his lucid, scholarly and impassioned penmanship towards this crescendo of scholarly productivity, illuminating a path toward a greater understanding of our most sacred texts.

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