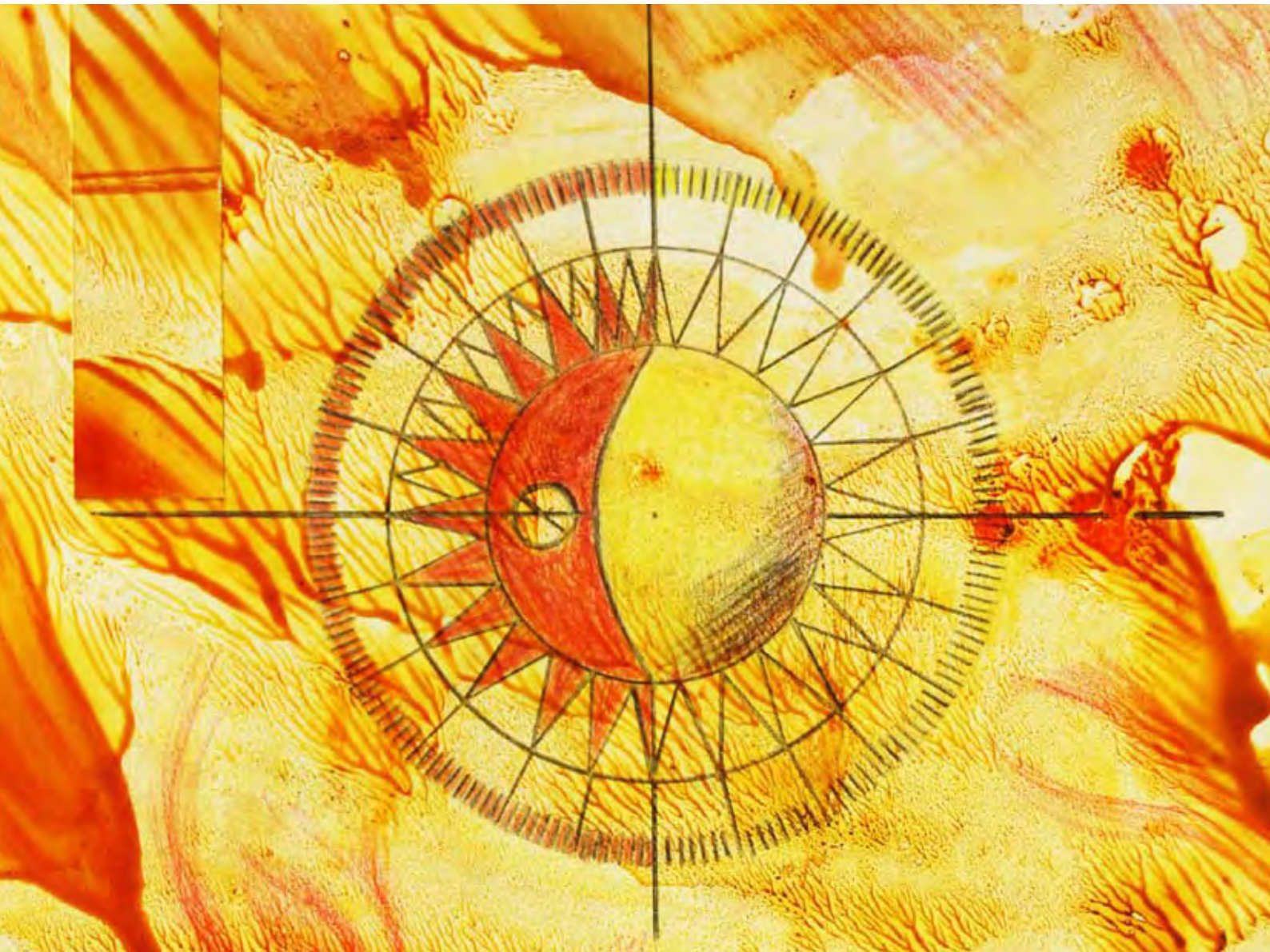


# DEGEL

תורה וחכמת ישראל מקהילת עלי ציון  
TORAH AND JEWISH STUDIES FROM ALEI TZION

תשרי תשע"א  
TISHREI 5771



VOLUME 3 ISSUE 1



# שנה טובה ומתוקה

RABBI DANIEL AND NA'AMAH ROSELAAR  
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# DEGEL

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## Notes from the editor

**T**his edition of *Degel* is dedicated with love and gratitude to the memory of Marc Weinberg ז"ר. I am grateful to the Chief Rabbi for permission to reprint the beautiful and moving hesped he delivered at the funeral just a few weeks ago. Marc Weinberg was a founder of Alei Tzion, a friend, mentor and inspiration to many members of the Kehilla, and to numerous others as well. Alei Tzion owes Marc Weinberg a very great debt; we hope that we can discharge that debt by living up to the highest hopes he had for us, as a Kehilla and as individuals. May his memory be for a blessing.

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*Marc Weinberg was a founder of Alei Tzion, a friend, mentor and inspiration to many members of the Kehilla.*

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By good fortune the last edition of *Degel* went to press just in time for Rabbi Roselaar to contribute a message to the community just hours after the Kehilla voted to offer him the position of Rav. Since then, the Rav has arrived and we have had the opportunity to be inspired by his drashot and learn in his shiurim. This first edition of *Degel* since he became our spiritual leader contains examples of both modes of expression. His hesped for his rebbe, Rav Amital ז"ר, introduces a teshuva on one aspect of the delicate issues that arise for a religious person with less observant parents.

The other authors and their contributions continue to reflect the broad approach *Degel* has taken over the past

two years. Pieces range from parshanut and halakha to Jewish history and culture. I was keen to show in early issues that Alei Tzion was not just *Degel's* host community, but was able to sustain it intellectually. That has been done, and while we always had some 'guest' writers, I hope the number will expand. This should never be at the expense of home talent, but to make this publication a real forum of scholarly exchange, in Anglo-Jewry and beyond. I am delighted that Rabbi Harvey Belovski of Golders Green Synagogue has continued our tradition of producing original translations of significant works by contributing a piece by the Shem Mi'Shemuel on the symbolism of the shofar.

Rafi Ganz impressed all those who heard him speak between Shabbat Minha and Maariv on a number of occasions when we were without a rabbi. His article on whether we are all able to achieve greatness in Torah study is a reminder of the depth and rigour his analysis always displays. This edition combines old favourites and new hands. MD Spitzer's essay on whether tsaraat is infectious is a fine example of Torah U'Madda, with references both to scientific and medical publications and to a broad range of Rabbinic literature. Film studies is now an important academic discipline. Ben Vos has made a weighty contribution based on a thorough review of the evidence on the portrayal of Jews in war films. If art is a reflection of the society that produces it, his findings are not encouraging.

Eli Lopian has weighted into the academic debate on the role of women as leaders in Hasidut, especially during its early years. He presents a historical account that reminds us again that the Hasidic world, which today represents the height of traditionalism, has radical roots. Edward Zinkin's close reading of the Shemona Esrei brings together theology and literary sensitivity to



present a thought-provoking case. For the first time, the cover features a piece of original art by a member of the community, yet another outstanding contribution Yolanda Rosalki has made to Alei Tzion.

All publications thrive on controversy. If that controversy is artificially generated or premeditated it can leave a sour taste after the initial thrill has passed. But, as we know, mahloket leshem shamayim endures. I did not anticipate that Joseph Sueke's article in the last issue on learning from wicked teachers would provoke any response other than approbation. I was wrong. Within a matter of hours Samuel Lebens had sent me

his response, both to Sueke and to Jeremy Jacobs' references to the achievements of Tribe in his short message. I felt it was right to give both Sueke and the United Synagogue right of reply, and this edition ends with their exchange.

I close, as ever, with thanks to authors, the editorial, design and sponsorship team, the people who kindly inserted greetings and advertisements and the Kehilla for its continued enthusiasm and support.

Ketiva vehatima tova!

- BEN ELTON

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## *Hesped for Marc Weinberg ז"ר*

CHIEF RABBI LORD SACKS

*This hesped was delivered at the funeral in Modiin on 1 July 2010*

**H**ashem Natan, Hashem Lekakh, yehi shem Hashem mevorakh. There are times when we have said all that can be said, when we have accepted in faith all that we can accept in faith, and yet we are left with a raw cry of pain.

Ribono shel olam did it have to be like this?

So young a man, so long a struggle, so short a life.

And we are left holding on, as it were, to Hashem's hand unable to stem the flood of tears.

Marc was a neshama tahora, such a pure soul. He loved Torah, he lived Torah, Torah was the very air he breathed.

He loved people. He understood the meaning of vayar ki tov. He saw the good in people and brought out the best in people.

He loved Erets Yisrael. For him, his and Natalie's aliyah was something utterly ruhni, spiritual not just physical. He would look out of the windows of his house and say, even in those last weeks, esa enai el heharim me'ayin yavo ezri.

He was such a loving son to Syma and Henry, such a loving husband to Natalie and such a loving father to Yona and Ma'ayan. He gave and he received so much love and that was the very texture of his life.

Whatever he did he was a leader. Whether in Jewish student life in Britain or as mazkir to Bnei Akiva or as one of the inspirations of the revival of the London School of Jewish Studies, whether as a founder of the first Dati Tsioni minyan in London, Alei Tzion, whether as the leader of a group of British olim or as leader of the project that occupied his last years and now will surely be his

living memorial a new bet Knesset here in Modiin. Whatever Marc did, he led.

Vayifen ko vakho vayzar ki ein ish. If he saw something was lacking or something was wrong he would not complain. He would not wait for others to act. He would say, Let me be among the first to put things right, and he brought others with him. They were inspired by his vision, his faith, his moral courage, his passion and compassion. They were drawn to him and he drew out the best in them. He made you feel the world could be a better place.



And when two and a half years ago this devastating illness struck, he fought long and hard beyond all normal limits of courage and strength until finally for all his resilience of spirit, his body could hold out no longer.

It was a terrible struggle not just for Marc, but those who loved him and were so close to him. For Natalie, Yona and Ma'ayan, for Syma and Henry, and for Yudit and Jonny and the Weil family, Syma's mother Hettie, and Henry's mother Sadie, and his very very wide circle of friends here in Israel and in Britain – there were thousands, thousands who kept in touch. I never knew somebody who had so many admirers and friends and they include our own children, who were utterly devastated by the news.

The truth is that wherever he went in his life he created an ever widening circle of influence. He was one of those people not only good in themselves, but a source of goodness in others. They followed Marc's illness day by day They davened for him every single day. And they like us are today bereaved and bereft.

Yet in all of this there is a strange kind of comfort. It is signalled in a strange passage in Beha'alotekha. The people are complaining as usual, and for once in his life Moshe Rabbenu lacks the strength to carry on. It is a crisis in his life like no other.

And Hakodesh Borukh Hu says, Gather seventy elders 've'atsalti min haruah asher alekha vesamti alehem', 'and I will take of the spirit which is on you and will place it on them.' This is a very odd thing. What were the seventy elders supposed to do? Moshe Rabbenu had other leaders and an established system of delegation in place. The seventy elders they could not help him out of the specific crisis of finding meat for the people in the midst of the midbar. In fact we don't find they did anything at all.

Yet that moment marked a change in Moshe Rabbenu's life. From a man who was suffering breakdown and spiritual crisis, immediately thereafter, when he faces a new crisis – Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp and Joshua says, 'My master, Moses, shut them up', Moshe says, 'Are you anxious on my behalf? Would that all God's people were prophets'

When his own brother and sister turned against him, the text says 'Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than any man on earth.' He faces both crises with calm and generosity of spirit. We see, in short, a man transformed from agonising spiritual crisis to peace of mind and serenity. Something had happened to change

Moshe Rabbenu's life and the lives of those around him. What was it?

I believe it was the simple fact that ve'atsalti min haruah asher alekha. It was that Moshe Rabbenu was given a glimpse - and it is very rare for anyone to be given such a glimpse - of the influence he had on those around him. He saw how his spirit rested on them, he saw how they were able to see through his eyes, hear through his ears, be lifted to the heights by his spirit. That was enough. And though he never ceased to struggle, thereafter he could live content, knowing that others were different because of him. Perhaps that is as much of a reward as any of us have this side of heaven.

In the last years of his life Marc was given that rare gift. He saw, he heard, he knew, he felt, just how many hundreds and thousands of people were different because of him. And though he never ceased to struggle, somehow at the deepest level of his spirit he was able to live content and die content.

Hashem natan, Hashem lakakh, yehi shem Hashem mevorakh. God lent us Marc for all too short a time, but in that time he lived a life of such vision and responsibility that it became indelible.

He received and gave so much love to Natalie and his children, to Syma and Henry, and Debra and Aviad and everyone around him that we know in our bones that kasheh kamavet ahavah, or as the poet Dylan Thomas paraphrased those words:

*Though lovers are lost  
Love is not  
And death shall have no dominion*

And now Hakodesh Boruch Hu is holding Marc in his zero'ot olam, His everlasting arms, ve'atsalti min haruah, and He has left us with his spirit and his memory and those we will never lose and never cease to thank God for, even in the midst of our tears and our grief.

May Hashem comfort his beloved family and friends. May He give strength to Natalie. May He bless and look after Yona and Ma'ayan and be with them every inch of the way. May Marc live on in them and in us, and may his soul be bound in the bonds of everlasting life.

Tehi nishmato tserura bitsror hahayim.

*Lord Sacks is Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth.*

# *Hesped for Harav Yehuda Amital ז"ר*

RABBI DANIEL ROSELAAR

*This hesped was delivered on 18 July 2010 at a memorial meeting held under the auspices of the Friends of Yeshivat Har Etzion.*

Although it is almost a part of my daily routine to deliver hespedim, on this occasion it is difficult for me to know exactly how to pay tribute to Harav Amital in a way that properly befits his personality and his status. On the one hand he was my Rosh Yeshiva and on the other hand he was also an Adam gadol beYisrael.

To commence with just a few biographical comments: Rav Amital was a Holocaust survivor. He rarely talked about his experiences during those years, though they shaped much of his subsequent mission in life. On one notable occasion he was hiding in a house as it was being searched by the Nazis. They entered every room in the house, save where he was concealed.

He was a passionate Zionist. He was already in Israel at the time of hakamat hamedina and they wanted to make him a commanding officer in the IDF because he had already served in the Hagana and presumably knew how to handle a rifle. He declined because he felt that he did not have the necessary skills. He subsequently noted that the person who was appointed in his stead knew even less about the military than he did.

He was also the loveable-looking Rosh Yeshiva who taught us Orah Hayim – not just in the halakhic sense, but also in the sense of how we should live our lives. He was immensely human. I recall him agitatedly pacing the Bet Midrash in the days leading up to the first Gulf War; recall him driving his Volvo through the new barrier at the old Shin Gimmel entrance to Alon Shevut on the day after it was installed. And I recall visiting him in his sukkah and hearing his story about how on erev yom tov he had dropped his mehudar and

expensive etrog, and had to go out at the last minute and buy another one – for NIS 5!

Then there is also Rav Amital's singing. Not only Vetaher Libenu but also Om Ani Homa on Sukkot, Ode LaKel after a mishmar, Od Maala and his hakaftot on Simhat Torah, and his davenning at the Kotel on Hoshana Rabba.

The Gemara (Megilla 31a) states in the name of R. Yohanan: 'Wherever one finds the greatness of the Almighty one also finds His humility and there are proofs of this in the Torah, in the Nevi'im and in the Ketuvim'. It would be apikorsut to compare a mere mortal to Hakadosh Barukh Hu but I want to eulogise Rav Amital by portraying him as a Rosh Yeshiva who was able to combine greatness with humility and to suggest that this personality manifested itself in the realms of Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim.

In terms of Torah, Rav Amital was a distinguished talmid haham who had been close to several gedolim of a previous generation. He was a strong adherent of tradition who recognised that whilst changing circumstances sometimes needed to be accommodated religiously, he did not buy into new humrot and modes of practice that had never been observed by the gedolim of yesteryear. He was at home with a whole range of sources: as comfortable with R. Hayim Brisker as he was with the Kotsker Rebbe; with R. Hayim Ozer's Ahiezer as he was with the Maharal; with Rav Kook as he was with the Gra. And there was the memorable occasion when his trump card in a shiur klali was a postcard from the Rogatchover!

He repeatedly reminded us that 'ein patentim', there are no shortcuts in learning and he stressed the importance and primacy of Gemara study as the only way to become a true talmid haham. In Avodat Hashem he was





emphatic that adopting humrot wasn't a shortcut to closeness with Hakadosh Barukh Hu.

Rav Amital was an architect of greatness in the way that he founded and built Yeshivat Har Etzion. And he was the epitome of humility

when he appointed Harav Lichtenstein to join him at the helm. In fact, he was willing to do far more than that and would have happily allowed Rav Lichtenstein to lead with him following. I don't doubt for a moment that he realised that in a certain sense he would be eclipsed by Rav Lichtenstein. But he was a man of emet. His vision was for the success of the yeshiva, not for his own personal success.

Like so many others, I was personally and very significantly affected by that partnership. I learnt so much from it: that the ultimate value of Torah is raised when it is shared; that there does not need to be uniformity in derekh halimud or in derekh ha'avoda; and about the genuine respect that talmidei hahamim can and should have for each other. He always regarded the yeshiva as bigger than himself, and that is why he was able to allow the appointment of new Roshei Yeshiva to succeed him and why he was able to be comfortable with people very different from himself replacing him.

In terms of Nevi'im, Rav Amital was also a public leader. There is no need to discuss his politics – he had no expectations that everyone would agree with or endorse his thinking. Part of his gadlut was that he tolerated and even encouraged different views and he never expected his talmidim to campaign or even vote for him. Again, he was an architect of greatness. He founded Meimad and briefly sat in the Knesset but again, he was happy for others to take over from him. And in this respect, as a public leader, we again see both his greatness and his humility. He was perfectly comfortable in the corridors of power, sitting with presidents and premiers. But he was equally comfortable amongst the ordinary folk. At home in Givat Mordekhai he wasn't anyone special, and that suited him just fine.

I recall how he was a very enthusiastic supporter of the Russian Aliya. Not only did the yeshiva have programmes for the new olim, but he himself taught basic Judaism every day to a new oleh. Furthermore, it

was his humility that allowed him to change direction in the way that he did from time to time. He was not indecisive, rather he had an ability to believe that perhaps he had been wrong the first time, that there was another way of looking at things, that maybe the situation or requirements had changed. And he paid a price for all of this in that he was ostracised somewhat by the Religious Zionist community because his passionate Zionism was different to theirs.

And finally, the Ketuvim. Out of all the parts of Tanakh the Ketuvim are most closely linked with tefilla. Nobody who ever learnt at Gush can separate Rav Amital from the notion of tefilla and we all have memories of his davenning on the yamim noraim. I have often thought that there are three types of people who have access to the Queen. There are the liveried servants at Buckingham Palace – they serve her and perhaps in exceptional circumstances can call on her assistance, but they are hardly close to her. Then there are her advisors and the senior politicians – they enjoy a somewhat closer relationship but still they must be careful exactly what they say. And then there are her few close friends who can be at ease with her.

The first group corresponds to some professional hazzanim, dressed in their robes and singing with their choirs, but not necessarily close to the Almighty. Then there are the learned baalei tefilla who are more at ease with the scriptural and rabbinic references in the tefillot and piyutim. And finally there was Rav Amital who simply spoke to the Almighty as if they were on intimate terms. As I have said, to a certain degree Rav Amital allowed himself to be eclipsed by Rav Lichtenstein in terms of lomdut. Be that as it may, I do not think anyone ever came to Gush on Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur to hear the sikhote. They came to hear Rav Amital lead the davenning and to listen to him petitioning Hakadosh Barukh Hu.

The Mishna at the end of the second perek of Bava Metsia rules that if one finds lost articles belonging to his father and to his teacher, those belonging to his teacher take precedence for while his father brought him into this world, his teacher has given him access to the world to come. I am one of many who was privileged to sit at Rav Amital's feet and to drink from his Torah and from his wisdom. So much of my approach to life and my religious worldview, as well as my career as a rabbi, is shaped by his hinukh. I am proud and privileged to have learnt so much from him.

Yehi Zikhro Barukh

# *May a baal teshuva benefit from hillul Shabbat in his parents' home?*

RABBI DANIEL ROSELAAR

From time to time even observant people who are well-versed in the halakhot of Shabbat err and inadvertently break Shabbat (commit hillul Shabbat). This can certainly happen to a person who is in the process of becoming observant and is not yet fully conversant with all the relevant halakhot. Additionally, an observant person can sometimes find himself in a situation where the people around him are not observing Shabbat. On occasion this can be as a

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## *When can benefit be derived from melakha that has been done on Shabbat by a fellow Jew?*

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result of ignorance about the pertinent halakhot and in other instances it can be as a result of a lack of interest in the observance of Shabbat. Such situations are of particular concern to baalei teshuva whose relatives are not Shabbat observant, though they can also occur when a person is a guest in someone else's home, or also if they are hosting non-observant guests for Shabbat. The purpose of this summary is to examine the halakhic implications of such situations, paying particular attention to the question of when can benefit be derived from melakha that has been done on Shabbat by a fellow Jew.

### **The views of the Tannaim**

The Talmud cites three Tannaitic views that address the regulations surrounding food that has been cooked on Shabbat by a Jew.<sup>i</sup> R. Meir is of the opinion that if the food was cooked unintentionally it may be eaten, whereas if it was cooked intentionally it may not be

eaten.<sup>ii</sup> R. Yehuda maintains that in the former case it may be consumed only after the conclusion of Shabbat, while in the latter case it may never be consumed.

R. Yohanan Hasandlar rules that even when the food was cooked unintentionally it may not be eaten until after Shabbat and even then, only by people other than the person who cooked it. When food was cooked intentionally it may not be eaten under any circumstances.<sup>iii</sup> While R. Yohanan Hasandlar's opinion is of theoretical interest there is no need to address it in the context of these notes as it is not of practical halakhic relevance.

In the same passage the Talmud records that when the Amora Rav issued rulings for his immediate students he did so in accordance with the more lenient opinion of R. Meir, but when he taught publicly he did so in accordance with the stricter view of R. Yehuda because of the uneducated folk who were present. As we will see, the Rishonim are divided about whether the halakhah should follow R. Meir or R. Yehuda and thus it is necessary to pay attention to the exact meaning of their comments.

### **The views of the Rishonim**

Rashi clarifies that when R. Meir rules that food that was unintentionally cooked may be eaten, he means that it may be eaten on Shabbat by anyone, including the person who cooked the food. R. Meir holds that since the transgression was unintended no limitations whatsoever are imposed on the consumption of the food. When the food has been cooked on Shabbat deliberately, and R. Meir rules that the food may not be consumed, his intention is merely to limit its consumption until after the conclusion of Shabbat.<sup>iv</sup>

Rashi explains that R. Yehuda takes a different view. When Shabbat was broken accidentally, although the transgression was unintentional, hillul Shabbat occurred nevertheless. Therefore the food may not be eaten until after Shabbat. When the food was deliberately cooked on Shabbat, it may never be eaten by the person who cooked it, but after Shabbat other people may eat it.<sup>v</sup>

Rashi understands (as does Ramban) that the prohibition on eating the food for the duration of Shabbat lasts until enough time has elapsed for the food to be cooked without transgressing Shabbat. Thus an egg that was hard-boiled on Shabbat could not be eaten until about fifteen minutes after the end of Shabbat, whilst a turkey that was roasted on Shabbat could not be eaten until three or four hours have elapsed. However, Rambam and other Rishonim disagree with this extension to the restriction. They rule that in cases where the food cannot be eaten until Motsei Shabbat, it may be consumed as soon as Shabbat terminates.<sup>vi</sup>

## Melakha performed by a Jew and by a non-Jew

Rambam maintains that this extension only applies in instances of amira lenokhri – where a gentile has been wrongly instructed to do melakha on Shabbat. Amira lenokhri is a Rabbinic prohibition and the delaying mechanism was introduced to discourage infringements of the law. Prohibiting a Jew from deriving benefit from the melakha until a period of time has elapsed after Shabbat means that he gains little or nothing from instructing the gentile to do melakha and is thus less likely to do so. Rambam assumes that a Jew is less likely to break Shabbat himself, or to ask another Jew to do so, than he is to ask a gentile to do so on his behalf. Therefore in the case of a Jew cooking on Shabbat there is no need for the additional disincentive brought by the extended delay before the food can be eaten, and it does not apply.<sup>vii</sup>

This principle is expanded by R. Tsvi Pesah Frank who addresses the question of a Jew who is not Shabbat observant and who breaks Shabbat for the benefit of another Jew.<sup>viii</sup> In such a case, (based on comments of the Peri Megadim) R. Frank rules that the requirement to wait for a period of time after Motsei Shabbat also applies. Dayan Yitshak Weiss adopts this view and rules that if a bus driver is Jewish, a Jew may not board his bus on a Saturday night until such a time that the bus driver could have begun his shift without breaking Shabbat.

Otherwise the ‘observant’ Jew will have benefitted from the hillul Shabbat performed by another Jew and will be encouraging the transgression to continue.<sup>ix</sup>

## Practical halakha

As we have seen, Rav taught the opinions of both R. Meir and R. Yehuda, depending on the context in which he was communicating the halakha. In terms of which view is regarded as normative and authoritative there is a fairly balanced dispute amongst the Rishonim. The Tur records that the opinion of the Geonim is in accordance with the stricter view of R. Yehuda.<sup>x</sup> They are joined by others including Rambam, Rif, Ramban, Ran and Rashba.<sup>xi</sup> The Baalei Hatosafot adopt the more lenient view of R. Meir.<sup>xii</sup> Other Rishonim who agree with the Baalei Hatosafot include Sefer Hatemura, Orkhot Hayim and Ra’avad.<sup>xiii</sup>

Characteristically, the Shulhan Arukh follows in the footsteps of Rambam and Rif and rules in accordance with R. Yehuda.<sup>xiv</sup> Consequently, a baal teshuva who is spending Shabbat in his parents’ home would not be permitted to derive any benefit from their melakha for the duration of Shabbat. This would apply even if it was inadvertent and even if they were trying their hardest to accommodate his religious requirements and to conform to the rules of Shabbat observance. However, there are a number of additional factors that need to be considered before a conclusive ruling can be reached.



*R Tsvi Pesah Frank*

## Limiting factors

First, Mishna Berura notes that if there is a dispute about whether or not something is actually prohibited on Shabbat then the results of that melakha are permitted.<sup>xv</sup> This is because such a dispute creates a doubt that melakha is being performed at all, and since the prohibition against benefitting from the fruits of melakha performed on Shabbat is Rabbinic the principle of safek derabbanan lekula can be applied. For example, a dispute exists about whether it is permitted on Shabbat to reheat liquids that had previously been cooked but subsequently cooled down. Though normative halakha is prohibitive in this regard, there are Rishonim who are permissive.<sup>xvi</sup>

Accordingly, if a person heats up soup or a liquidy cholent, mistakenly thinking that anything may be reheated on Shabbat, providing that it had previously been fully cooked, there is no reason to prohibit the hot soup. Though the Shulhan Arukh rules that even if a melakha is done by mistake benefit may not be derived until after Shabbat, this is a case where Shabbat might not have been broken at all. Further examples include a case where clothes or table utensils have been selected in what is considered a prohibited manner. Since there are authorities who maintain that the rules of borer do not apply to such items there may be no prohibition in benefitting from the results of such selections, again because a doubt has been created in a Rabbinic prohibition.<sup>xvii</sup>

Secondly, Mishna Berurah notes that even though the Shulhan Arukh has ruled in accordance with R. Yehuda, in a case where the melakha in question is prohibited Rabbinically rather than Biblically, the Vilna Gaon maintains that R. Yehuda concurs with the lenient ruling of R. Meir.<sup>xviii</sup> In such a case benefit may be derived, even on Shabbat, if the infringement was done unintentionally or unknowingly.<sup>xix</sup> For example, if a person did not know the details of borer and mistakenly selected the unwanted debris from some foodstuffs using a fork rather than a utensil specially designed for the purpose, the remaining food would not be prohibited.

Thirdly, Mishna Berura comments that a number of Rishonim rule in accordance with the lenient opinion of R. Meir and the Vilna Gaon concurs with this position.<sup>xx</sup> Consequently he concludes that in extenuating circumstances, if the infringement was unintentional, this opinion may be relied upon. Clearly it is not always

easy to define what should be classed as extenuating circumstances and one person's assessment may differ significantly from another's. Nonetheless it seems reasonable to suggest that the case of a baal teshuva's parents who are making efforts to create an atmosphere in which their son or daughter can spend Shabbat in their home should be regarded as an extenuating situation – not just for the convenience of the observant person, but also in order to endorse the genuine efforts being made by the parents.<sup>xxi</sup>

A further consideration that is sometimes relevant is the result of the melakha. Haye Adam opines that if the subject of the melakha has not undergone a physical change then the lenient view of R. Meir may be followed if the transgression was done inadvertently.<sup>xxii</sup> As an example he suggests that if something was carried from one place to another in the absence of an eruv that item may be used or consumed, provided that the infringement was unintentional.<sup>xxiii</sup>

However, this position is disputed by R. Moshe Feinstein.<sup>xxiv</sup> He notes that the source for the leniency of the Haye Adam is comments made by the Rashba, which he contends relate to the view of R. Yohanan Hasandlar, and not the dispute between R. Meir and R. Yehuda, which is at the heart of our discussion.<sup>xxv</sup> Rather, R. Feinstein suggests that the Rashba intended to limit the very extensive restrictions implied in the ruling of R. Yohanan Hasandlar, who holds that if one did a melakha deliberately on Shabbat its results are universally and permanently prohibited. According to R. Moshe Feinstein, Rashba says that it does not apply in instances where the subject of the melakha has not undergone any actual change. This understanding is accepted by Shemirat Shabbat Kehilkhata.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Finally, although we have established that in many, and perhaps most, instances where melakha was intentionally done on Shabbat even people other than the transgressor may not derive benefit from that melakha, some consideration needs to be given to the definition of benefit from melakha. While active benefit is clearly prohibited, there is a concept of passive benefit. Rema rules that even though a non-Jew may generally not do melakha for a Jew on Shabbat, if he turned on a light for the sake of a Jew the Jew need not leave the room and may continue to do those things that he could have done without the light being turned on.<sup>xxvii</sup> At least in some instances this principle may be extended so that even if a Jew deliberately turns on a light on Shabbat those sitting in the room need not leave

even though they may be deriving some peripheral benefit from the light.<sup>xxviii</sup>

## Conclusions

In general care must be taken not to derive benefit on Shabbat from melakha that has been done by a fellow Jew, and particularly if that melakha was done deliberately. However, there are instances when it is appropriate to apply a lenient approach, especially if the melakha was done inadvertently. It is my opinion that a factor that must be taken into consideration is the long-term effect of either a permissive or restrictive application of the halakha. In some instances a lenient attitude may create a hillul Hashem by leading people to believe that the restrictions of Shabbat are not so serious and that nothing is lost when Shabbat is desecrated.

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*In cases where there is a goal of encouraging and promoting Shabbat observance it will sometimes be appropriate to apply a lenient ruling so that someone who has inadvertently broken Shabbat will not be discouraged from trying to observe, or facilitating others to observe, Shabbat in the future.*

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On the other hand, in cases where there is a goal of encouraging and promoting Shabbat observance it will sometimes be appropriate to apply a lenient ruling so that someone who has inadvertently broken Shabbat will not be discouraged from trying to observe, or facilitating others to observe, Shabbat in the future. There is no halakhic value in applying heterim to enable people to socialise with their non-observant friends on Shabbat.<sup>xxix</sup> But it seems appropriate that efforts should be made where possible to enable baalei teshuva and others with less-observant parents to spend Shabbatot with their families in a manner that does not compromise their halakhic standards or integrity.

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<sup>i</sup> Hullin 15a. (There are also parallel sugyot in Shabbat 38a, Betsa 17b, Ketubot 33b, Gittin 53b, Terumot 2:3). According to most authorities these regulations, known as Maaseh Shabbat, are Rabbinic enactments. However there are some Aharonim who maintain that they are Biblically based.

<sup>ii</sup> ‘Unintentionally’ (shogeg) usually means that the person doing the melakha is either unaware that what he is doing is prohibited, or he is unaware that it is Shabbat.

<sup>iii</sup> Though this passage in the Talmud addresses the melakha of cooking, the Tur (and subsequently the Shulhan Arukh) takes the view that the principles under discussion apply equally to all the other melakhot as well. However the Tur does cite the dissenting view of the Baal Hateruma that the discussion is limited to the melakha of cooking since the pursuant benefit is marginal as the food could, conceivably, have been eaten uncooked.

<sup>iv</sup> This is in order that no benefit is derived from the desecration of Shabbat that has taken place.

<sup>v</sup> The intention is that the person who actually cooked the food is penalised beyond the requirement that he not get any benefit from his actions. Regarding the notion that a person who deliberately cooked food on Shabbat may never eat that food, Magen Avraham on Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayim 318 writes that Rashba implies that the utensils used to cook the food are also prohibited to that individual since they have absorbed prohibited food. Though this suggestion is cited by Mishna Berura not all Aharonim agree that this is an accurate understanding of the Rashba. R. Ovadia Yosef (Livyat Hen 42) demonstrates at some length, citing both Ashkenazi and Sefardi authorities, that the utensils are in fact not prohibited. However, he does recommend that if possible they should be immersed in boiling water to render them fit for use.

<sup>vi</sup> Rambam Hilkhhot Shabbat 6:23.

<sup>vii</sup> See Rambam Hilkhhot Shabbat 6:8.

<sup>viii</sup> Responsa Har Tsvi Orah Hayim 1:183



<sup>ix</sup> See Minhat Yitshak 9:39

<sup>x</sup> Orah Hayim 318.

<sup>xi</sup> Rambam Hilkhoh Shabbat 6:23; all three at the beginning of the third perek of masekhet Shabbat; Rashba Teshuvot 1:175.

<sup>xii</sup> Hulin 15a dibbur hamathil 'mori lehu'.

<sup>xiii</sup> Sefer Hatemura, Perek Kirah 231; Orkhot Hayim 76; Ra'avad cited in the Hiddushei HaRashba Shabbat 151a.

<sup>xiv</sup> Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayim 318:1. R. Yosef Caro follows Rambam entirely and rules that in instances where the food may be consumed on Motsei Shabbat there is no requirement to wait for the period of time that it would have taken to cook that food.

<sup>xv</sup> Seif Kattan 2. I did however hear from MV"R Harav Aharon Lichtenstein that it is necessary to take into consideration how radical or mainstream the permitting opinion is. Just because one obscure Rishon posits that something is permitted on Shabbat does not necessarily mean that the subject can now be defined as a real mahloket haposkim.

<sup>xvi</sup> See Orah Hayim 253 & 318 – Tur, Bet Yosef, Shulhan Arukh and associated commentaries.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ohr Same'ah on Rambam Hilkhoh Shabbat 8:11.

<sup>xviii</sup> Seif Kattan 3.

<sup>xix</sup> This is also the view of the Haye Adam Hilkhoh Shabbat 9:11.

<sup>xx</sup> Seif Kattan 7.

<sup>xxi</sup> Recognising also that if their efforts are discredited they will be less inclined to be accommodating in the future.

<sup>xxii</sup> Hilkhoh Shabbat 9:11, cited also in the Biur Halakha.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Accordingly, one may suggest that that even those who emphatically do not accept the validity of a particular eruv may nevertheless benefit from something that has been carried through the streets by someone who does accept the validity of that eruv. This is because omer muttar – i.e. mistakenly believing that something is permitted – is categorised as inadvertent desecration of Shabbat. (See also Yalkut Yosef Shabbat vol. 3.17 who notes that relying on a ruling from an competent rabbinical authority is classed as an inadvertent infringement of Shabbat if the ruling is in fact mistaken.)

<sup>xxiv</sup> Igrot Moshe Orah Hayim 2:77.

<sup>xxv</sup> Beginning of nineteenth perek of Masekhet Shabbat.

<sup>xxvi</sup> 19:56. However, based on the view of R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, the author of that work rules that if

keys have been carried through the street on Shabbat one may nevertheless enter a building that has been opened with those keys on the grounds that even if the keys (which themselves have undergone no intrinsic change) are subject to certain restrictions, those restrictions cannot be applied to the next stage in the process, i.e. entering the building.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Orah Hayim 276:1.

<sup>xxviii</sup> A verbal ruling of Harav YY Neuwirth that baalei teshuva in their parents' home need not leave the room if a light is switched on because of the principle of derakheha darkhei noam.

<sup>xxix</sup> Some situations need be assessed with halakhic sensitivity. For example an observant student in non-observant university accommodation. Is it better to apply leniencies that allow him to spend Shabbat in the dorms without major upheaval or is it better to apply rulings that will compel him to spend Shabbatot in more religious environment?

# *Discovering the Shem Mi'Shemuel of Sochaczew: Rosh Hashana and the tension between submission and self-expression*

RABBI HARVEY BELOVSKI

**R**abbi Shemuel Bornstein (1856-1926), known by the title of his magnum opus, *Shem Mi'Shemuel*, was one of the exceptional original thinkers of pre-Holocaust Polish Hassidut. Scion of a dynasty of important Hassidic leaders, he was the Hassidic Rebbe, Rosh Hayeshiva and Rabbi of Sochaczew, a small town some 40 miles west of Warsaw.<sup>i</sup> His father and primary teacher was Rabbi Avraham Bornstein (d. 1910), the first Rebbe of Sochaczew and a world-renowned posek, whose responsa, published by Rabbi Shemuel under the title *Avnei Nezer*, are considered to be authoritative. *Shem Mi'Shemuel*'s thoughts were strongly guided by his father's philosophical teachings, which he cites hundreds of times throughout his work.

*Shem Mi'Shemuel*'s thoughts were also heavily influenced by the ideas of his illustrious maternal grandfather, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Morgenstern of

Shabbat 'tisch'. His son and biographer Rabbi Aharon Yisrael Bornstein records that his father would write out the discourse for publication in the week following its debut.<sup>ii</sup> Although they were collated and edited by the author, they were not published until after his death. The fruits of his labours are nine volumes of ideas arranged according to the weekly parshiot and festivals, mostly from the years 5670-5684 (1909-1923). They combine the rarefied world of nineteenth-century

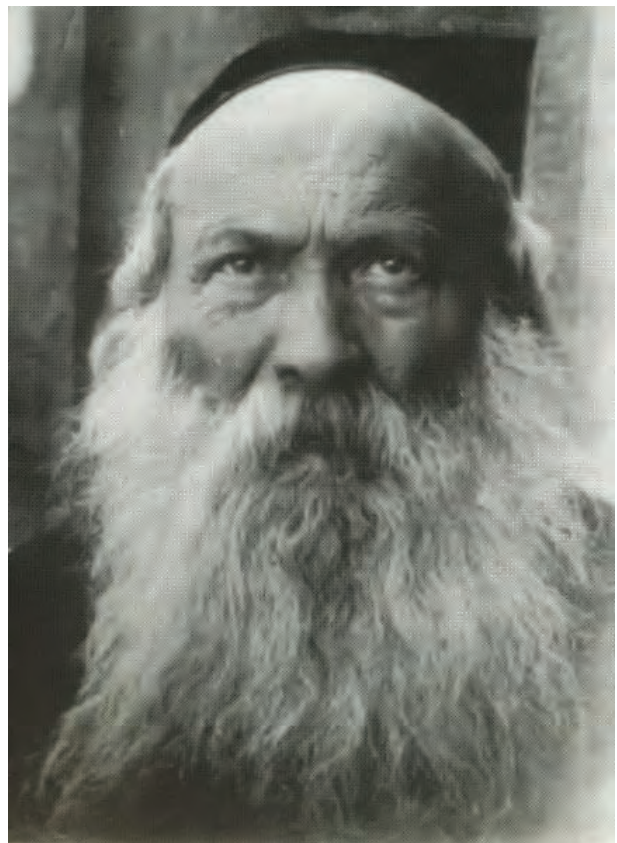
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*Shem Mi'Shemuel, was one of the exceptional original thinkers of pre-Holocaust Polish Hassidut.*

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Kock (the 'Kotsker' Rebbe, d. 1859), and by those of his grandfather's friend and teacher, Rabbi Simha Bunim Bonhart of Przysucha (d. 1827), both of whom the author cites frequently. More distant influences on *Shem Mi'Shemuel* include Rabbi Yitshak Luria (the 'Ari', d. 1572), and the Maharal of Prague (d. 1609).

In classic Hassidic style, *Shem Mi'Shemuel*'s ideas were delivered in Yiddish to his followers as discourses at the



*Shem Mi'Shemuel*

intellectual Hassidut with a modern approach to the human condition and contain a unique blend of scholarly analysis and inspirational homiletics, as well as profound psychological insights into the complex motivations of Biblical characters. In so doing, he sheds new light on familiar Biblical narratives, to which he contributes multifaceted and sophisticated interpretations. But rather than leaving these ideas in the realm of the abstract, he uses them to elucidate tensions commonly experienced by those engaged in the pursuit of meaningful spirituality. In the tradition of the Rambam and the Maharal, he adopts a non-literal approach to interpreting Agadata, and displays impressive mastery of the relationship between Midrashic and esoteric sources, which he frequently uses to explain the interface between conscious and subconscious motivations.

However, the most prominent theme of Shem Mi'Shemuel's writing, one which effectively characterises the entire work, is the author's preoccupation with harmonising conflicting sources. Shem Mi'Shemuel attempts to demonstrate that despite appearances to the contrary, rabbinical sources that diverge about the meaning of narrative passages, the sequence of Biblical events or the motivation of key characters, do not actually disagree. Instead, in a phrase he uses innumerable times: 'these and those are the words of the living God: one (sage) offers one view, another (sage) offers another view, *but they are not disagreeing*.' Indeed, when Shem Mi'Shemuel encounters Midrashim that offer contradictory readings of Biblical narratives, disagreements between classical mediaeval thinkers, or even conflicts between exoteric and esoteric texts, he invariably reinterprets the sources to eliminate substantive disagreement. He always attempts to reduce what appears to be a disagreement about the details or order of a narrative to the realm of

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emphasis, rather than substance. In some particularly intractable cases, this requires Shem Mi'Shemuel to postulate entirely new thought-structures in order to achieve the desired harmonisation, sometimes stretching the limits of plausibility to do so. Two brief examples may serve to clarify Shem Mi'Shemuel's methodology.

The Midrashic sages disagree as to Esav's motive in embracing his brother Ya'akov.<sup>iii</sup> One opinion is that Esav's embrace was genuine; the other suggests that Esav intended to 'bite' his brother.<sup>iv</sup> Shem Mi'Shemuel harmonises these views by asserting that Esav had resolved not to kill his brother physically, and in that regard, the embrace was genuine.<sup>v</sup> However, Esav now intended to spiritually pollute his brother, so in that regard, he 'came to bite him'. By ramifying Esav's motivation, Shem Mi'Shemuel allows the Midrashic opinions to co-exist and thereby succeeds in eliminating any disagreement.

It is well-known that Rashi and Ramban disagree about the order of events in the second half of Shemot: according to Rashi, God only issued the instruction to build the Mishkan after God had forgiven the Jewish people for the Golden Calf.<sup>vi</sup> According to Ramban, Moshe received the instruction before the episode of the Golden Calf, although he may not have communicated it to the people until later.<sup>vii</sup> This disagreement is important, because it indicates a profound conflict among classical sources as to the primary purpose of the Mishkan. Shem Mi'Shemuel is unable to tolerate the possibility that Rashi and Ramban actually disagree and, ingeniously, manages to harmonise them.<sup>viii</sup> However, to achieve his harmonisation, he needs to devise the notion of a 'spiritual Mishkan', something previously unknown.

## A sample discourse

I have selected a piece on a Rosh Hashana theme from the Mo'adim volume of Shem Mi'Shemuel, which is presented here in (free) translation with my annotations. It offers a sense of Shem Mi'Shemuel's structured approach to interpreting texts and the ideas that lie behind them, as well as representing his preoccupation with harmonisation. It also exposes his understanding of the tension that exists within religious life between submission to the Divine will and the need for creativity and self-expression. It touches on two other areas that characterise his work: his interest in demonstrating that exoteric and esoteric sources are concerned with the same issues (another type of harmonisation), and his conviction that virtually every

Jewish philosophical concept can be identified within the thought-framework of Shabbat.

Shem Mi'Shemuel, Mo'adim: Discourse delivered on first night Rosh Hashana 5679.<sup>ixx</sup>

*A commentary appears below the translation. As usual, notes giving references to sources can be found at the end of the article, with the original Hebrew text.*

- I. The Mishna says: 'on Rosh Hashana, all those who walk the earth pass before God like Benei Maron', on which the Gemara asks: 'what does 'like Benei Maron' mean? Here it is rendered 'like lambs'; Resh Lakish says: 'like the heights of the House of Maron'; Rav Yehuda quotes Shemuel as saying: 'like the troops of the House of David'.<sup>1</sup> We should understand the nature of their disagreement.<sup>xi</sup>
- II. One may explain as follows.<sup>2</sup> The Mishnaic sages disagree whether the shofar blown on Rosh Hashana should be straight or twisted.<sup>xii</sup> One sage asserts that the more one straightens one's view, the better; the other sage holds that the more one conquers (twists) one's view, the better. In the Yerushalmi the second view is phrased as follows: 'that they should subjugate their hearts in prayer'.<sup>xiii</sup> This means that one should be willing to subjugate one's views and perceptions to the view of the Torah, and not consider one's own view at all.<sup>3</sup> There is no difference whether one's opinion accords with the Divine will, or, even, God forbid, the opposite.<sup>4</sup> ... Accordingly, the sage who states

that the more one straightens one's view the better, must also explain the way he understands it to refer to the opposite of subjugation and the conquering of one's view – which is the expansion of one's own views.<sup>5</sup> This means that all of one's deeds should not be performed by rote, but rather with full intention, deliberation and consideration.<sup>6</sup>

- III. This may explain the meaning of the shofar blasts: tekia, and shevarim or terua. Tekia is a straight blast, which teaches 'the more one straightens one's view, the better' – that refers to self-expression. Shevarim or terua which teach about submission and broken-heartedness, refer to the idea that 'the more one conquers one's view, the better', meaning that one should subjugate one's view, and not take it into account at all.<sup>7</sup>
- IV. We can find support for this view from the opinion of the Tikkunei Zohar: 'tekia in the mind; shevarim in the heart'.<sup>xiv</sup> This can be explained as follows: 'tekia in the mind' means self-expression; 'shevarim in the heart' means that one should subjugate one's heart to God.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Understanding the three-way Talmudic disagreement as to the meaning of the obscure phrase 'like Benei Maron' is the central theme of Shem Mi'Shemuel's (SMS) essay.

<sup>2</sup> SMS now turns his attention to a different disagreement, one about the type of shofar on Rosh Hashana. It is common for SMS to digress extensively (he devotes a large part of this discourse to the shofar) before eventually returning to his original theme. He applies the ideas gleaned from the digression to tackle the disagreement about the meaning of 'like Benei Maron'.

<sup>3</sup> One of the key objectives of the Hassidic approach is to subjugate one's own agenda to the will of God.

<sup>4</sup> It makes no difference whether or not one's personal view accords with that of God, the Divine will is always superior.

<sup>5</sup> By this, SMS means 'self-expression', which will be used in the translation henceforth.

<sup>6</sup> In a classic formulation, SMS has turned the dispute about the shofar into a conceptual disagreement about the optimum approach to religious life. I assume that SMS means that the expansion of one's own perspective equates to allowing religious passion to penetrate every aspect of religious life, thereby excluding rote practice. SMS here explores the tension between two aspects of religious experience – subjugation to the Divine will may achieve compliance at the expense of spontaneity, whereas self-expression carries the risk of non-conformity.

<sup>7</sup> Broken sounds. It is typical of SMS to find room in Jewish thought and practice for opposing opinions – here he sees both ideas expressed within the blowing of the shofar. As such, he allows both to be 'true', presumably reducing the disagreement to one of emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> SMS adduces more than simple support from the Tikkunim for his understanding of the shofar blasts. He is also keen to show that the ideas in the esoteric texts can be reconciled with those expressed in the Talmud and other central 'revealed' works.

V. Based on this, one can explain why one must blow a straight blast (*tekia*) before and after the *terua*.<sup>xv 9</sup> We have established that the straight blast indicates self-expression. This has two manifestations. There is a type of self-expression that prompts one to weigh up carefully all of one's actions. However, there is a higher form of self-expression, which is called the 'extension of one's ideals'.<sup>10</sup> This means that one's ideals subjugate one's character traits, encompassing them and controlling them until the mind and character become one...

VI. Accordingly, we understand the requirement to blow a straight blast before and after the *terua*, which teaches about the broken heart, submission and subjugation of one's views. If this subjugation does not originate in thought, it is not as praiseworthy. Indeed, the rabbis elucidate the importance of subjugation of thought by praising people who call out to God for salvation when they are 'naked of thought and make themselves like animals'.<sup>xvi</sup> Rashi explains this to refer to those who are of crushed spirit.<sup>xvii 11</sup> Submission and subjugation of *this* sort are praiseworthy. About this it is written: 'Happy is the people that knows the *terua*'.<sup>xviii</sup> They are happy when the *terua* results from thought. This is the meaning of the 'straight blast before' the *terua*.<sup>12</sup> Yet even this is not the ultimate objective, which is actually to advance from this state of mind to the 'extension of one's ideals'. This accords with the rabbis' comment: 'in the merit of "and Moshe hid his face, for he was afraid to gaze", "he gazed upon the form of God"'.<sup>xxix</sup>

This is the 'straight blast afterwards', which indicates the extension of one's ideals, enabling them to encompass and influence one's character.<sup>xx</sup>  
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VII. What emerges from this is that the two themes: a) the straight and twisted *shofarot* and b) *tekia* and *terua* – teach the same idea. One of each pair teaches subjugation of one's view.<sup>14</sup> The other teaches self-expression and the extension of one's ideals.<sup>15</sup>

VIII. In the same vein, it is possible to explain the Midrashic assertion that the *shofar* recalls two ideas: to recall the Akeida-binding of Yitshak and the *shofarot* of the Sinaitic Revelation.<sup>xxi</sup> The Akeida was the ultimate subjugation of the views of Avraham and Yitshak, for despite the fact that they understood the deeper meaning of offerings and realised that human sacrifice is wrong; they bent their ears and subjugated their views to the will of God. This is the theme represented by the twisted *shofar* and the *terua*. At Sinai, by contrast, the people attained self-expression and the extension of their ideals; they reached such heights of knowledge and awareness that their innate character traits were replaced and the evil inclination was removed from their hearts. Again, this is expressed in the

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<sup>9</sup> The Torah refers only to *terua* and *tekia*; our *shevarim* is a variation of the Biblical *terua*. Henceforth, SMS refers only to *terua*.

<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to capture the author's meaning in a single English phrase, but I think that he means the conscious ability to allow one's ideals to impact on every aspect of one's being.

<sup>11</sup> Although a more usual reading of the Gemara would assume that the reference is to those who have no thoughts, perhaps because they are so crushed of spirit, SMS interprets the source to refer to those who have deliberately subjugated their thoughts to God.

<sup>12</sup> Again, SMS uses the verse from Tehillim to support his suggestion that conscious subjugation of one's thoughts is praiseworthy.

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<sup>13</sup> The Talmud asserts that Moshe's fear of gazing upon God at the Burning Bush gave him the merit to perceive God face-to-face later in life. SMS uses this to show that submission and subjugation ultimately lead to powerful self-expression. SMS has harmonised the two views of religious life; rather than seeing them as conflicting models, he has cast them as part of a process of spiritual growth, through an innovative reinterpretation of the meaning of the sequence of *shofar* blasts. The first *tekia* represents simple self-expression (of the type that enables one to act with full awareness and avoid rote behaviour). The *terua* represents the deliberate subjugation to the Divine will. In turn, the final *tekia* symbolises the capacity to grow from subjugation to the more mature form of self-expression – the extension of one's ideals over every aspect of one's religious life.

<sup>14</sup> The twisted *shofar* and the *terua*.

<sup>15</sup> The straight *shofar* and the *tekia*.



idea that one should blow a straight blast before and after the *terua*.<sup>16</sup>

- IX. This may be why the halakha prefers twisted shofarot for Rosh Hashana.<sup>xxii</sup> It is possible to sound both *tekia* and *terua* blasts: indeed, we have seen that both are 'needed'.<sup>17</sup> However, it is not possible to make a shofar both straight and twisted, for a straight shofar is not twisted and a twisted shofar is not straight! Given that we must choose, the preference is for twisted shofarot, since the twisted shofar is conceptually similar to the *terua*, which is the only blast mentioned explicitly in the Torah in the context of Rosh Hashana.<sup>xxiii</sup> Furthermore, through the twisted shofar one comes to the straight shofar, which is parallel to the *tekia* following the *terua*, which is the ultimate objective. This is similar to the idea that Moshe merited to gaze upon the Divine because he hid his face at the Burning Bush. Straight shofarot, on the other hand, will not lead to twisted shofarot, since it is possible to be in a state of complete awareness of one's views without subjugation and submission. Rather, subjugation and submission that originate in thought bring one to the extension of one's ideals. Consequently, the halakha prefers twisted shofarot.<sup>18</sup>
- X. One may suggest that these ideas are paralleled in the 'remember' and 'observe' aspects of Shabbat.<sup>19</sup>

The holy Zohar says that the 'observe' aspect of Shabbat is related to the attribute of 'night'. 'Night' refers to a lack of clarity of the intellect and thought, corresponding to subjugating one's view to the view of God. This underlies the requirement to abstain from creativity on Shabbat, activities in which Man's originality are invested. This explains why one should behave on Shabbat as though 'all your creativity is completed'.<sup>xxiv</sup> This is not restricted to work with one's plough or spade, but even includes spiritual matters. One should renounce all of one's own thoughts and subjugate them to a Torah perspective. This is what my late father reported in the name of the first Rebbe of Gur, who taught that this Shabbat restriction includes even heavenly matters.<sup>xxv</sup> The 'remember' aspect of Shabbat, by contrast, corresponds to the attribute of 'day', which suggests that the intellect shines brilliantly and vividly, which is self-expression and the extension of one's ideals...<sup>20</sup>

- XI. According to this understanding, one may also explain the Talmudic disagreement over the meaning of the phrase *like Benei Maron*.<sup>21</sup> The verse says: 'The One who creates their hearts together, who understands all their deeds'.<sup>xxvi</sup> The sages explain this to mean that the Creator sees their hearts at once and understands all their deeds.<sup>xxvii</sup> However, it seems that the phrase 'He sees their hearts together' refers to the extent to which the

<sup>16</sup> SMS refers to the progress from the subjugation of one's own self-expression (*akeida*) to the more ideal mode of extension of one's ideals (revelation).

<sup>17</sup> It is possible to blow *tekia* and *terua* sounds in sequence, as we do on Rosh Hashana, and thereby express both concepts. As such, one does not need to choose between the two.

<sup>18</sup> Faced with the choice between straight and twisted shofarot, SMS assumes that the halakha will prefer a model that allows one to reach the ideal state through a process of religious development – i.e. allowing subjugation to evolve into self-expression appeals to SMS, provided that it originates in conscious sublimation of one's own thoughts.

<sup>19</sup> Respectively: the positive and prohibitive aspects of Shabbat observance. SMS often applies concepts derived from his main discourse to aspects of Shabbat. This second digression is typical of SMS, who seems to see

Shabbat as a prism through which almost every aspect of Jewish thought can be viewed.

<sup>20</sup> Shabbat, then, combines the religious modes of subjugation and self-expression, again in sequence: the evening of Shabbat expresses subjugation of one's thoughts, which leads to the advanced self-expression of Shabbat day.

<sup>21</sup> Armed with the ideas gleaned from his detailed study of the shofar, SMS finally returns to his original theme of the meaning of the Mishnaic phrase 'like Benei Maron'.

<sup>22</sup> The Talmud considers the possibility that the verse conveys the idea that God made everyone think alike, but rejects this reading in favour of an interpretation that suggests that while God judges the people of the world 'at once' – i.e. at the same time, He examines each person according to his or her deeds. However, SMS gives this reading his own gloss, which follows.

heart is subjugated to God, whereas the phrase 'He understands all their deeds' is the extent to which their deeds have been performed with deliberation. There is judgement on Rosh Hashana regarding all of this: to evaluate how the year has passed, both with reference to the submission and subjugation of one's views to the Will of God, as well as with reference to self-expression and the extension of one's ideals. This evaluation is possible only for the 'One who knows secrets' (God). Even an angel cannot really know one's thoughts; only the 'One who fashions everything'. This explains the disagreement about the meaning of the phrase 'like Benei Maron'. The first opinion that 'like Benei Maron' means that the people pass before God 'like lambs', refers to subjugation of one's views and submission; 'like sheep', which are naturally submissive and follow the shepherd. The view of Resh Lakish is that 'like Benei Maron' means that the people are compared with 'the heights of the House of Maron' – there the route is narrow and

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*There is judgement on Rosh Hashana regarding all of this: to evaluate how the year has passed, both with reference to the submission and subjugation of one's views to the Will of God, as well as with reference to self-expression and the extension of one's ideals.*

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two people cannot travel one beside the other. This suggests individual self-expression, as the sages say people's opinions are not identical<sup>xxviii</sup> ... The view of Shemuel is that 'like Benei Maron' means that the people resemble 'the troops of the House of David', whom Rashi identifies as exemplifying mastery and control.<sup>xxix</sup> This refers to the extent that one's ideals have extended over one's character traits. This is a form of sovereignty, in which one's thoughts control one's character traits about this the verse says: 'one who rules his spirit captures the city.'<sup>xxx</sup> Each of the three opinions about the meaning of the

phrase 'like Benei Maron' is the word of the living God: one sage expresses one view; the other expresses a different view.<sup>23</sup> This is in the same vein as the discussion about the twisted and straight shofarot – straight shofarot include self-expression and extension of one's ideals, and one blows a straight blast before and one afterwards.<sup>24</sup>

## Concluding remarks

This fascinating and rather complex discourse reveals Shem Mi'Shemuel as a creative thinker who is capable of weaving together a rich tapestry of psychological, inspirational and interpretive themes to fashion a coherent and novel discourse. I hope that the reader will find the original well worth the time and effort needed to decipher it!

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<sup>23</sup> SMS applies the three-stage structure he developed in his discussion of twisted and straight shofarot to the Talmudic disagreement about the meaning of the phrase 'like Benei Maron': i) *like lambs* equates to subjugation; ii) *heights of the House of Maron* equates to simple self-expression; iii) *troops of the House of David* equates to the extension of one's thoughts over one's character traits. In so doing, he can posit that there is no disagreement between the anonymous first opinion, Resh Lakish and Shemuel – each merely highlights one aspect of the arena of Divine scrutiny that occurs at Rosh Hashana. On that day, every human being is evaluated in each of these three areas, and, as such, 'like Benei Maron' carries all three meanings. As SMS asserts – each one of the rabbis offers his perspective on an aspect of the annual Divine scrutiny, but each is the 'word of the living God' in that there is no essential disagreement.

<sup>24</sup> SMS's conclusion is somewhat enigmatic. I suggest that he means to compare the structured approach that he used to interpret the twisted and straight shofarot / the sequence of shofar blasts with his conclusion about the lack of conflict between the Talmudic interpretations of the phrase *like Benei Maron*. He demonstrated a progression, in which the first tekia represents self-expression, to be followed by a terua, indicating submission, which enables one to achieve the ultimate state of extension of one's ideals, represented by the final tekia. Likewise: SMS's harmonisation of the three interpretations of the phrase 'like Benei Maron' indicates that each of these three modes of religious experience is evaluated on Rosh Hashana.

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<sup>i</sup> For more information about Rabbi Shemuel and Sochaczew, see a translated excerpt of the 'Pinkas Sochaczew' here:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/sochaczew/so628.html>

. For an account of my 2007 trip to Sochaczew with Dr.

Daniel Finfer, see here: <http://www.cross-currents.com/archives/2007/10/14/a-visit-to-sochaczew/>, with photographs here:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/rabbibelovski/VisitToSochaczew#>. For a translation of Rabbi Aharon Yisrael

Bornstein's account of the post-war rediscovery of the graves of Rabbis Avraham and Shemuel, see here:

<http://belovski.blogspot.com/2007/10/more-about-graves-in-sochaczew.html>. (All links accessed June 2010)

<sup>ii</sup> Bornstein, Rabbi Aharon Yisrael, Mar'eh ha-Deshe, Jerusalem, 2004, 211-212

<sup>iii</sup> Bereshit 33:4

<sup>iv</sup> Bereshit Rabba 88:9

<sup>v</sup> Shem Mi'Shemuel Bereshit volume 1, 33

<sup>vi</sup> Rashi to Shemot 31:18 and 33:11

<sup>vii</sup> Ramban to Shemot 33:7

<sup>viii</sup> Shem Mi'Shemuel Shemot volume 2, 73-75

<sup>ix</sup> The Hebrew text of the discourse follows. It has been slightly edited, as indicated by the ellipses. I have

retained the original Hebrew paragraph divisions, which are followed in the English translation. I have labelled them for ease of comparison between the original text and my translation.

I במשנה (ר"ה ט"ז). בר"ה כל באי עולם עוברין לפני כבני מרון, ובגמ' (שם י"ח). מאי כבני מרון הכא תרגימו כבני אמרנא, ר"ל אמר כמעלות בית מרון, רב יהודה אמר שמואל כחילות של בית דוד. ויש להבין במאי פליגי:

II ונראה לפרש, דהנה בשופר של ר"ה איפליג תנאי (ר"ה כ"ו ע"ב) אי בפשוטין אי בכפופין, מר סבר כמה דפשיט אינש דעת' טפי מעלי, ומ"ס כמה דכייף אינש דעת' טפי מעלי. ובירושלמי (פ"ג ה"ד) הלשון כדי שיכופו לבם בתפילה, והפירוש לבטל דעתו וחכמתו לדעת התורה ולא יתחשב עם דעתו כלל, ואחת היא אם דעתו מסכמת או אפי' ח"ו להיפוך... ולפי זה מאן דאמר כמה דפשיט אינש דעת' טפי מעלי, צריכין לפרש נמי בסגנון זה, שהוא היפוך הביטול וכפיפת הדעת, והיינו התרחבות הדעת, והפירוש שיעשה כל מעשיו לא כמצות אנשים מלומדה, אלא בדעת שלימה ובשיקול הדעת וחשבון:

III ויש לומר שזה עצמו הוא ענין תקיעה ושברים או תרועה, שתקיעה היא קול פשוט מורה כמה דפשיט אינש דעת', והיינו התרחבות הדעת, ושברים או תרועה שמורה על לב נשבר והכנעה, מורה כמה דכייף אינש דעת', היינו שמבטל את דעתו ואינו מתחשב עמה כלל כנ"ל:

IV ומסתייעים דברינו מדברי תקה"ז (מ"ט). תקיעה במוחא שברים בליבא, ולפי דברינו יתפרש שפיר תקיעה במוחא היא התרחבות הדעת, ושברים בליבא שיכפפו לבם למקום:

V ולפי האמור יש לפרש הא דפשוטה לפני' ופשוטה לאחר' דהנה הא דפשוטה מורה על התרחבות הדעת כנ"ל, ענין זה הוא בשני אופנים, יש התרחבות הדעת ששוקלת את כל מעשיו בדעת שלימה כנ"ל, ויש עוד אופן אחר נעלה מזה ונקרא התפשטות הדעת, והיינו שהדעת מתפשטת על המדות ומקיפה אותם ומושלט עליהם עד שנעשו השכל והמדות דבר אחד, שלא יתאוו ולא יכעסו וכדומה רק מה שהשכל מחייב, וזהו עיקר פירוש של דעת מלשון קישור, שהמדות קשורין בשכל ...

VI ולפי"ז יובן ענין פשוטה לפני' ופשוטה לאחר', דתרועה שמורה על לב נשבר והכנעה וביטול הדעת. אם איננה באה מחמת הדעת אין בה כ"כ שבח, אלא כאמרם ז"ל (חולין ה' ע"ב) אלו בני"א שהם ערומים בדעת ומשימים עצמן כבהמה, דפירש"י דכאי רוח, בהכנעה וביטול כזה יש שבה ורבותא, וע"ז כתיב (תהלים פ"ט ט"ז) אשרי העם יודעי תרועה, שהתרועה תבוא מתוך הדעת, וזהו ענין פשוטה לפני'. אך גם זה איננו התכלית אלא לבוא מזה להתפשטות הדעת, והוא כענין מה שאמרו (ברכות ז'). בזכות ויסתר משה פניו כי ירא להביט זכה לותמונת ה' יביט, והיא הפשוטה לאחר' שמורה על התפשטות הדעת ומקפת ומושלטת על המדות כנ"ל:

וממוצא הדברים שענין כפופין ופשוטין וענין תקיעה ותרועה שניהם מורין על ענין אחד, זו לביטול הדעת וזו להתרחבות והתפשטות הדעת:

ועל דרך זה יש לפרש מה דאיתא במדרשים דשני ענינים נכללים בשופר, כדי להזכיר עקידת יצחק, ולהזכיר שופרות של מ"ת. דענין העקידה היתה ביטול הדעת, שהרי ידעו סוד הקרבן וידעו שאין אדם ראוי להקריבו קרבן, ומ"מ כפופ אצנן וביטול דעתם לדעת המקום, זהו ענין דבכפופין וענין תרועה. אבל ענין מ"ת ה' התרחבות והתפשטות הדעת, שידעו והשיגו עד למעלה ראש עד שנעתקו מדותיהם ונעקר יצה"ר מלבם, וזהו ענין דפשוטין וענין תקיעה שלפני' ושל אחרי'.

ויש לפרש הא דהלכתא בכפופין, דהנה תקיעה ותרועה אפשר לעשות תרויהו כי תרויהו צריכי כנ"ל, אך פשוטין וכפופין אי אפשר לעשות תרויהו, דאם הוא פשוט אינו כפוף ואי כפוף אינו פשוט, ע"כ עושין בכפופין דהוא דומה לענין תרועה המפורשת בקרא, ועוד דמחמת הכפופין באין לפשוטין דהיא התקיעה לאחר' שזוהי התכלית כנ"ל, וכענין בזכות ויסתר וגו' זכה לותמונת ה' יביט, אבל אין פשוטין מביאין לכפופין, שיכול להיות בדעת שלימה בלתי ביטול והכנעה, אבל ביטול והכנעה הבאה ע"י הדעת היא מביאה להתפשטות הדעת כנ"ל, וע"כ הלכתא בכפופין:

וי"ל שדוגמתם בשבת הוא זכור ושמור, ובזוה"ק שמור הוא מדת לילה, וענין לילה מורה על בלתי הארת השכל והדעת, והיינו לבטל את דעתו לדעת המקום, וזהו ענין שביתה ממלאכה שדעתו של אדם משוקעת בה, וזהו הענין שיהי' כאילו כל מלאכתך עשוי', ואין הפירוש דוקא מחרשתו וקדומו אלא אפי' ברוחניות, להבטל מכל דעותיו לדעת התורה, וכענין שהגיד כ"ק אבי אדמו"ר זצלה"ה בשם כ"ק אדמו"ר הרי"ם זצלה"ה מגור שהפירוש אפי' בעיני שמים נמי, עכ"ל, ובדאי הפירוש כמו שכתבנו. אך מדת זכור היא ביממא, רומז שיהא השכל מאיר וזך, וזוהי התרחבות הדעת והתפשטות הדעת: ...

ולפי האמור יש לפרש נמי הפלוגתא בפירושא דכבני מרון. דהנה כתיב היוצר יחד לבם המבין אל כל מעשיהם, ופירשו ז"ל (ר"ה י"ח.) היוצר רואה יחד לבם ומבין אל כל מעשיהם, ונראה דרואה יחד לבם היינו כמה ה' הלב כפוף למקום, ומבין אל כל מעשיהם היינו כמה היו מעשיהם בשיקול הדעת כנ"ל. ועל כל אלה הדין בר"ה איך עברה השנה, הן בהכנעה וביטול דעתם לדעת המקום, והן בהתרחבות הדעת והתפשטות הדעת, וזה יתכן רק להיודע תעלומות, ואפי' מלאך אינו יודע אלא יוצר כל, וע"כ מר אמר כבני אימרנא, זהו ביטול הדעת והכנעה כצאן שיש להם טבע ההכנעה ונמשכין אחר הרועה. ומר אמר כמעלות בית מרון, הדרך קצרה ואין שנים יכולין לילך זה בצד זה, וזה רמז על הדעת של בנ"א כאמרם ז"ל (תנחומא פ' פינחס סי' י') אין דעתן של בנ"א שוות... ומר דאמר כחיילות של בית דוד דפירש"י לשון מרות ואדנות, היינו כמה היתה התפשטות הדעת על המדות, שזהו ענין ממשלה שדעתו מושלת על מדותיו

VII וכן"ל, שע"ז נאמר ומושל ברוחו מלוכד עיר, ואידי ואידי דא"ח, ומר אמר חדא, ומר אמר חדא, הם על דרך כפופין ופשוטין, דפשוטין כוללת התרחבות הדעת והתפשטות הדעת, ופשוטה לפני' ופשוטה לאחר' כנ"ל:

<sup>x</sup> Friday evening 6 September 1918

<sup>xi</sup> Rosh Hashana 16a; 18a

<sup>xii</sup> Rosh Hashana 26b

<sup>xiii</sup> Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana 3:4

<sup>xiv</sup> Tikkunei Zohar 49a

<sup>xv</sup> C.f. Rosh Hashana 33b

<sup>xvi</sup> Hullin 5b

IX <sup>xvii</sup> Rashi ad loc., s.v. 'she-hen arumim be-da'at'

<sup>xviii</sup> Tehillim 89:16

<sup>xix</sup> Shemot 3:6; Bamidbar 12:8

<sup>xx</sup> Berakhot 7a

<sup>xxi</sup> C.f. Midrash Tanhuma Vayera 23; I have not yet found an explicit Midrashic reference to this idea, although it does appear in later literature, such as Seder ha-Yom of Rabbi Moshe ben Yehuda ibn Makhir (late 16<sup>th</sup> century)

<sup>xxii</sup> C.f. Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayim 586:1

X <sup>xxiii</sup> C.f. Vayikra 23:24 and Bamidbar 29:1

<sup>xxiv</sup> C.f. Mekhilta Hahodesh 7

<sup>xxv</sup> Rabbi Yitshak Meir Alter of Gur

<sup>xxvi</sup> Tehillim 33:15

<sup>xxvii</sup> Rosh Hashana 18a

<sup>xxviii</sup> Midrash Tanhuma, Pinhas 10

<sup>xxix</sup> C.f. Rosh Hashana 18a, s.v. 'kehayalot shel bei david'

<sup>xxx</sup> Mishlei 16:32

# Is tsaraat infectious? A unified theory of tsaraat

MD SPITZER

**T**saraat is mentioned in the Torah (Vayikra 13-14) as a condition affecting the skin, clothing or buildings. The extensive laws governing people or objects affected by tsaraat appear in the Mishna (mainly in Masekhet Negaim) and various places in the Gemara, and are codified by the Rambam in Hilkhot Tumat Tsaraat. Of these laws, perhaps the most famous is that people with tsaraat are expelled from society and forced to live outside inhabited areas:

He shall sit alone, outside the camp shall be his dwelling (Vayikra 13:46).

This law has led to suggestions that tsaraat is a contagious disease, and that the laws governing tsaraat are intended to protect members of society from becoming infected. This essay will examine sources which argue for and against this view, and attempt to resolve the controversy.<sup>i</sup>

## Symptoms of tsaraat

Tsaraat affecting the skin can manifest by the appearance of a white patch on the skin, or a bald patch on the head or where the beard grows, which is surrounded by healthy hair. These patches require an additional factor to be pronounced as tsaraat: either that two white or fine yellow hairs grow in the patch, or that the patch widens, or that an area of healthy skin appears within the abnormal skin. The particular laws that apply depend on the size, shade, location and type of the tsaraat.<sup>ii</sup>

## Leprosy? Psoriasis? Mould?

Over the centuries, many have translated tsaraat as 'leprosy'. 'Leprosie' appears in the first English edition of the Bible (published 1382); one and a half thousand years earlier the Septuagint (Greek) translation rendered

'nega tsaraat' as 'aphe lepras', a plague of leprosy, and the Vulgate (Latin) translation is 'plaga lepra'.<sup>iii</sup>

The disease now known as leprosy is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae*. Found mainly in the tropics, it is estimated that it affects 2.5 million people worldwide. Depigmented patches occur on the skin, and nerves stop functioning. The disease can be highly destructive, causing deformity of the face and loss of the fingers and toes. Leprosy is contagious, thought to be spread by inhalation of bacteria emitted from a carrier; however, prolonged close contact with a carrier is necessary. Since the development of antibiotics leprosy is now treatable, though treatment takes many months.<sup>iv</sup>

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## *It is clear that tsaraat is not leprosy.*

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From this description alone it is clear that tsaraat is not leprosy: in fact, their only common feature is light patches appearing on the skin. Leprosy is not associated with coloured hairs or baldness, and it takes months or years to cure with antibiotics, whereas tsaraat can heal spontaneously in days.

In the medical and scientific literature, there has been much discussion over whether tsaraat can be identified as a modern disease. Various suggestions include the diseases vitiligo, syphilis, scabies and neurodermatitis. Yet another suggestion is that tsaraat is psoriasis, which even sounds similar! (However, 'psoriasis' is derived from the Greek 'psora' – 'itch', and we do not find sources which suggest that tsaraat was itchy.)<sup>v</sup> As recently as 2003, an article in the journal *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* suggested that tsaraat be



translated as ‘mould’ on the basis that certain moulds can infect both buildings and humans, causing significant symptoms.<sup>vi</sup> (This is, at least, an attempt to explain how tsaraat can also affect clothing and buildings, which the other suggestions do not.)

However, it is not necessary to identify one disease with all the characteristics of tsaraat: as the Rambam writes, tsaraat can be viewed as a group of diseases.<sup>vii</sup> In any case, as it is difficult to identify a skin disease consistent with tsaraat, perhaps the best approach (that taken by the Artscroll Humash) is not to translate it at all.<sup>viii</sup>

## Selected laws of tsaraat affecting people

A person with suspected tsaraat is instructed to present himself to be examined by a kohen. If the kohen finds that his skin changes are consistent with tsaraat, the individual is pronounced tamei (ritually impure) and will make other people or items tamei if he comes into contact with them. He must also leave the town, if it was walled from the time of Yehoshua Bin Nun.<sup>ix</sup>

After a week he is again examined by the kohen. If the requisite signs of tsaraat are present, he must then grow his hair, wear torn clothes, not wash, not greet people and warn them not to come into contact with him. If after the week’s seclusion the signs have remained constant, he is secluded for another week. If the tsaraat has shrunk, it is considered healed.

When tsaraat resolves, the person must undergo a process of purification. Depending on the severity of tsaraat, this includes some or all of the following: going to the mikva, shaving his bodily hair, and bringing offerings.

Importantly, these laws only apply in certain circumstances, some of which will be discussed below.

## Tsaraat as a punishment

It is well-known that tsaraat is viewed as a punishment for lashon hara (malicious talk or gossip); indeed, lashon hara is the only sin mentioned by the Rambam in connection with tsaraat.<sup>x</sup> However, the Gemara states that tsaraat also comes as a punishment for six other sins:

Rav Yohanan said: Tsaraat comes as a result of seven matters: lashon hara, bloodshed, false oaths, sexual immorality, haughtiness, theft and miserliness. (Erakhin 16a)<sup>xi</sup>

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## *That tsaraat is a Divine punishment implies that it is not an infectious condition.*

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That tsaraat is a Divine punishment implies that it is not an infectious condition; only those who deserve tsaraat for their sins will contract it, and innocents will remain unaffected.

## The case that tsaraat is not an infectious disease

In an essay at the end of his commentary to Tazria, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch argues in the strongest terms against ‘the absolute folly of the erroneous idea of “the tendency of the Laws of Moses to be rules and regulations to be enforced for health and sanitary purposes’’. We have already seen the statement in the Gemara that tsaraat is brought upon people to punish them for their sins. Rav Hirsch provides several other proofs that the laws of seclusion applying to someone with tsaraat are not to prevent infection, and are therefore no evidence that tsaraat is infectious. Among these proofs are:

- I. There is a surprising law that one whose entire body is covered in tsaraat is not subject to the laws of tsaraat.<sup>xii</sup>
- II. One who develops signs consistent with tsaraat is instructed to immediately present himself to a kohen for examination. However if this happens on a festival, he waits until Yom Tov has finished.<sup>xiii</sup> Yom Tov in Jerusalem would provide the ideal conditions for spread of infection; if the laws were to prevent contagion, the person should be isolated immediately!
- III. Similarly, a hatan is not examined by a kohen until after the week of sheva brakhot.<sup>xiv</sup> Why are we not afraid that the guests will contract tsaraat?
- IV. If it is doubtful whether the person has tsaraat or not, the halakha is that the kohen’s ruling should be lenient.<sup>xv</sup> If tsaraat were infectious, we should err on the side of caution.
- V. Although one with tsaraat is banished from town, we have already mentioned that this only applies to towns which were walled from the time of Yehoshua Bin Nun. If the laws of the Torah were

sanitary regulations, he should be removed from all inhabited areas!

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky in *Emet LeYaakov* brings additional proofs:

VI. For the laws to apply, the pronouncement of tsaraat must come from a kohen – even if it is identified as tsaraat by an expert non-kohen.<sup>xvi</sup> However an infectious disease should be isolated as soon as it is known to be present. It would be reckless to do nothing until a kohen arrived.

VII. Certain types of tsaraat depend on the presence of hairs in the affected area. If these hairs are removed, tsaraat cannot be pronounced. If tsaraat were infectious, it would be absurd to give the person the opportunity to avoid isolation merely by removing some hairs.

It is difficult to explain these (and other) laws of tsaraat if we contend that the laws of the tsaraat are aimed at preventing spread of a contagious disease.<sup>xvii</sup>

## The case that tsaraat is an infectious disease

So far we have seen a number of proofs which strongly suggest that tsaraat is not an infectious disease. It is therefore most surprising to find that many Rishonim write plainly that tsaraat was actually infectious.

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### *Many Rishonim write plainly that tsaraat was infectious.*

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As we have previously mentioned, the Torah states that someone with tsaraat is banished from civilisation: He shall live alone, outside the camp shall be his dwelling (Vayikra 13:46). Why is he banished? Hizkuni writes: ‘Because this illness spreads to people in contact with him’.

This explanation is also given by other Rishonim: Rabbeinu Yosef Bekhor Shor, the Tur (in his long commentary on the Torah) and the Baalei Hatosfot (in the commentaries on the Torah entitled *Da’at Zekenim* and *Hadar Zekenim*).

This view is also found in the writings of Rabbenu Bahye. Part of the purification ceremony involves the use of two birds, one of which is slaughtered and the

other set free. The Torah writes: *He shall send the live bird over the open field* (14:7). Why ‘over the open field’? Rabbenu Bachye explains: ‘This is because tsaraat is a contagious illness; therefore it should be sent to an uninhabited place, so that the tsaraat should not infect anything’.

The Rambam writes explicitly in *Moreh Nevukhim* (3:47) that tsaraat is infectious. In his *Mishneh Torah* he does not write this explicitly, but it is implied: he writes that tsaraat of clothing and buildings is not a natural occurrence, but a miracle occurring to prevent lashon hara being spoken.<sup>xviii</sup> He does not mention tsaraat of people, which implies that he holds that tsaraat of people is a natural occurrence. The same inference can also be drawn from the Ramban’s commentary on the Torah.<sup>xix</sup> Other Rishonim to write that tsaraat is infectious include the Ralbag and Abarbanel.<sup>xx</sup>

So we have no fewer than eight Rishonim who write explicitly that tsaraat is infectious. More recently too, in the late nineteenth century, Rabbi Meir Simha Hakohen of Dvinsk wrote that tsaraat was infectious:

The kohen’s involvement with tsaraat is dangerous, and he requires an extraordinary amount of Divine protection in order that he be saved from infection.<sup>xxi</sup>

The idea that tsaraat is infectious appears also in the Malbim’s commentary to Ki Teitsei (24:8). This makes the startling suggestion that Moshe bought his wife Tsippora from a slave dealer, thus posing a risk of introducing tsaraat (which was endemic among African slaves) to the Jewish people! It is important to note, however, that this part of the Malbim’s commentary was not written by him – the original commentary was lost, and it was later completed by anonymous others.<sup>xxii</sup>

There are several other proofs that tsaraat was infectious. One example is the following Midrash which discusses how far one must keep distant from tsaraat:

Rav Yohanan says: it is forbidden to pass within four amot of the east side of someone with tsaraat. Resh Lakish says: Even a hundred amot. And they do not argue: four amot is when there is no wind, whereas a hundred amot is when there is wind. Rabbi Meir did not eat an egg from the street of someone with tsaraat. Rav Ami and Rav Ashi did not enter the street of someone with tsaraat. When Resh Lakish saw someone with tsaraat in the east, he would throw stones at him and say, ‘go away, do not contaminate us’, as Rav Hiya taught: He should sit alone.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Furthermore, the Gemara in Horayot 10a states that tsaraat can be acquired through no fault of one's own, for example (as Rashi explains) through a fall, injury or burn. This implies that tsaraat is a physical condition, unrelated to having sinned.

## *There are several proofs that tsaraat was infectious*

Additionally, the Mishna (Negaim 7:1) states that a baby can be born with tsaraat, and another Mishna (Nidda 43b) states that a day-old child can have tsaraat. This implies that tsaraat is infectious, for surely it is not possible that an innocent child be punished for having sinned. Rav Hirsch admits that this appears to contradict his argument that tsaraat is not infectious. He therefore offers a thought-provoking explanation of tsaraat in babies:

Just as tsaraat on a garment or house is a warning admonition to its owner, so (and more deeply piercing) is tsaraat on their innocent little child. It is the most terrible warning to the parents to examine themselves and consider what picture of life their social behaviour will serve as an example to their children. The tsaraat tells them: "for your child's sake, better yourselves, become good". Tsaraat on their innocent child is a much more effective warning from God than if it had come on their own bodies.<sup>xxiv</sup>

This interesting explanation notwithstanding, the other sources which imply that tsaraat was indeed infectious, remain unresolved.

That tsaraat was a physical disease which behaved on natural medical lines is also suggested by the pesukim and midrashim which state that non-Jewish kings such as Paro and Naaman were afflicted with tsaraat.<sup>xxv</sup>

We are thus presented with a problem. We have numerous sources which suggest that tsaraat was not infectious. How do all the Rishonim who write that tsaraat was infectious, reconcile their views with these statements?

## **A suggested resolution**

There may be a way to resolve matters. We can suggest that indeed, *tsaraat was infectious but not all infectious people are subject to the laws of the Torah regarding tsaraat*. In other words, if someone has tsaraat, people

would steer clear of him even without the Torah's instructions, because he is infectious! But there are some infectious people upon whom the Torah additionally places the laws of tsaraat: those of tuma and isolation. The laws of the Torah are nothing to do with sanitation or preventing spread of infection.



R. Akiva Eiger

Now we can examine the sources we brought to prove that tsaraat was not contagious – for example, that the laws of tsaraat do not apply if one's entire body was covered in tsaraat. We assumed that this implied that tsaraat was not infectious. However, we can now understand why a person entirely covered with tsaraat was not tamei. His tsaraat may in fact have been infectious; but here, the Torah had mercy on someone so horribly afflicted and therefore did not make him tamei. People would still have kept away from him – but at least he did not have the strict laws of tuma to add to his misery.

So too the hatan who is not examined until after his sheva brakhot. He is infectious and no one would attend his wedding, but at least he did not have the added difficulty of contending with the laws of being tamei.

The same approach can be applied to resolve the other sources which Rav Hirsch and others brought to prove that the laws of the Torah are not sanitary rules to prevent the spread of infection.<sup>xxvi</sup>

## **A question on the Ran in Nedarim**

This solution also provides an answer to a difficulty with the Ran's commentary to Nedarim.

In Parashat Shemot we are told of the episode when Moshe killed an Egyptian who was fighting with a Jew, and had to flee Egypt. Later in his life, God appeared to him and told him 'Go! Return to Egypt, for the people who are trying to kill you have died.'<sup>xxvii</sup> Although they are not named in the Torah, there is a tradition in the Gemara that the men who were trying to kill Moshe were the infamous Datan and Aviram, who later became leaders of Korah's rebellion. If so, when God told Moshe

they had ‘died’, He could not have meant they had literally died, but rather that they had become powerless to harm Moshe: something had happened which had made them lose influence with Paro.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The Gemara teaches that four types of people are to an extent considered ‘dead’ even while they are alive: a pauper, someone with tsaraat, a blind person and someone with no children. So Datan and Aviram, who are referred to in the Torah as ‘dead’, must have experienced one of these four misfortunes. Resh Lakish in the Gemara states that out of these four possibilities, the ‘death’ that Datan and Aviram experienced, was that they became poor.<sup>xxix</sup>

The Ran asks how Resh Lakish worked out that Datan and Aviram became poor, and not that they contracted tsaraat (or became blind, or were childless).<sup>xxx</sup> In answer, the Ran proves that they did not contract tsaraat in Egypt, for a pasuk later in the Torah states that during Korah’s rebellion, they were ‘in the midst of Israel’.<sup>xxxi</sup> If they had contracted tsaraat, they could not be ‘in the midst of Israel’ – because they would have been banished from the camp. It is therefore clear, says the Ran, that they did not have tsaraat.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Rabbi Akiva Eiger in his Gilyon Hashas refers to a question asked by the eighteenth century authority Rabbi Yeshaya Pik of Breslau, in the name of his friend Rabbi S. Skotch. There is a Mishna in Negaim which states that tsaraat which was contracted before the giving of the Torah did not cause impurity after the Torah was given.<sup>xxxiii</sup> If this was so, the Ran’s proof collapses. It could well be that Datan and Aviram *did* contract tsaraat in Egypt. The pasuk which states that later they were ‘in the midst of Israel’ could refer to a time after the Torah was given, when the tsaraat they contracted previously would not have affected them. They would not have been considered impure and would not have been banished – so they could very well have been ‘in the midst of Israel’!

## A defence of the Ran

Our suggestion on the infectious nature of tsaraat can offer an answer to this question, however. If Datan and Aviram had tsaraat in Egypt, indeed they would *not* have been ‘in the midst of Israel’, but not due to being tamei – for as we have quoted, tsaraat contracted before the giving of the Torah would not have made them impure after the Torah was given. No, the reason they could not have been ‘in the midst of Israel’ would have been because despite not being tamei, *they were*

*nevertheless infectious*. No one would have wanted to go near them! So if they had been suffering from tsaraat the

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## *The laws of tuma do not apply because of infection, but are independent of infection.*

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Torah could not have referred to them as being ‘in the midst of Israel’ even if the laws of tuma and banishment did not apply to them! The fact that the Torah says they were “in the midst of Israel”, means that they did not have tsaraat; the Ran’s proof therefore still stands.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

## A problem with our suggestion

We now return to the main argument which – based on statements in the Gemara and writings of Rishonim – suggested that tsaraat is always infectious, but does not always involve the imposition of the extra laws, such as impurity. The laws of tuma do not apply because of infection, but are independent of infection.

However there remains a significant difficulty: when those Rishonim write that tsaraat was infectious, many of them write that the *reason* for the laws of tsaraat is to combat contagion. For example, we have seen the Hizkuni who wrote that someone with tsaraat is banished, ‘*because this illness spreads to people in contact with him*’ (13:46). We have also seen the explanation of Rabbeinu Bahye that one of the birds in the purification ceremony is set free ‘*over the open field because Tsaraat is a contagious illness, therefore it should be sent to an uninhabited place, so that the tsaraat should not infect anything.*’ (14:7).

Rather than proving that the laws are *independent* of the fact that tsaraat is infectious, these sources imply the opposite – that the *reason* for the laws of tuma associated with tsaraat is to prevent contagion. Our solution – which aimed at explaining these Rishonim – seems to be contradicted by the Rishonim themselves!

## Reasons for the mitsvot according to Rabbi Hayim Soloveitchik

Although the Torah does not generally set out reasons for mitsvot, many Rishonim suggest reasons. Perhaps most famously, the Sefer Hahinukh suggests an explanation for almost every mitstva. However, we

should not infer that we perform mitzvot *because* of the reasons attributed to them.

This applies not only to mitzvot which appear to have a commemorative function, such as eating matsa, but even to mitzvot which seem to be designed to regulate society, such as the prohibitions on murder and theft – we follow them because they are Divine, not because they are logical. Rabbi Hayim Soloveitchik is quoted as having given the following explanation: We have a tradition that the Torah preceded the world.<sup>xxxv</sup> It therefore follows that nature obeys the rules of Torah. For example, it is wrong to say that *murder is forbidden because it causes death*; rather, *murder causes death because it is forbidden by the Torah*. The reasons for mitzvot given by Rishonim are not intended to provide justifications for the mitzvot; rather, they give us a broader perspective of the mitzva and how it fits in to the rest of the Torah. Reasons for mitzvot – ‘taamei hamitsvot’ – are not actually reasons, but are ‘tastes’ – ‘taamim’ – of the mitzvot, allowing us some insight into them.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

According to this explanation, the laws of tsaraat existed before tsaraat itself. It is therefore wrong to say that the laws of tuma associated with tsaraat exist because tsaraat is infectious; in fact, tsaraat was infectious *because* of the laws governing it!

## The function of peshat

The problem remains of reconciling this with the words of the Rishonim who state clearly that the laws of tuma concerning tsaraat were a response to its infectious nature. An answer lies in a better understanding of the method of ‘peshat’, explaining the text of the Torah according to its plain and simple meaning. The Rishonim we have quoted as giving a rational explanation for the laws of tsaraat (Ibn Ezra, Behor Shor, Hizkuni, Ramban, Tur and others) generally follow this method of explaining the simple and straightforward meaning of the Torah’s text. In fact, Rabbeinu Bahye prefaces his explanation of tsaraat with the words ‘al derekh hapeshat’ - ‘according to the method of peshat’.

Those who explain the peshat intend to elucidate the simple meaning of the text of the Written Torah. It is not the role of explanations of peshat to give the deeper meaning of the text, or to teach halakha. That function is part of ‘drash’, the explanations transmitted through the Oral Torah, which are an equally valid meaning of the text. Peshat and drash bring two different

dimensions to the explanation of the text, and sometimes they contradict each other, but that does not make either less true. Importantly, we should not necessarily expect peshat explanations of tsaraat to accord with the halakha and practical details of tsaraat taught in the Oral Torah.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

It may be true that while tsaraat is infectious, the laws of impurity and isolation are wholly independent, and therefore only apply to some people with tsaraat. Nevertheless, the peshat – the plain meaning of the text

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*The Torah does not apply laws in reaction to facts of nature – the laws of the Torah stand independent of science.*

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– could still imply that the laws of tsaraat are a response to its infectious nature. This is what those Rishonim may be responding to.

## Conclusion

We have examined various sources which suggest that tsaraat either was or was not infectious. To resolve these, we suggested that all people with the signs of tsaraat were likely to be infectious, but that the laws of isolation and impurity only apply to some of these people.

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*It is not the role of peshat to give the deeper meaning of the text, or to teach halakha.*

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This approach does not concord with every explanation of tsaraat found in the commentators, but it is an attempt to justify those who write that tsaraat was contagious. As we have seen, Rav Hirsch, amongst others, argues strongly that tsaraat was not contagious. Our suggestion tries to justify those who differ with Rav Hirsch on that particular point, but the underlying direction of both Rav Hirsch’s argument and our suggestion is the same: the Torah’s laws are not sanitary regulations to prevent the spread of infection. To make the laws of the Torah dependent on physical reality could mislead us into thinking that we can depart from



the Torah as scientific knowledge improves. If pork is forbidden because it was considered unhealthy, why should we continue to avoid it now that we can eat it without any physical ill effect?

But this approach is quite wrong. As we have seen, the Torah does not apply laws in reaction to facts of nature – the laws of the Torah stand independent of science. They do not follow the world, they precede it. If we apply this approach to tsaraat we can resolve some difficult questions, and avoid the misguided view which has the potential to lead us away from the Torah and its eternal mitsvot.

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<sup>i</sup> We will concentrate mainly on tsaraat affecting people, as most of the discussion centres on these laws. Moreover, both Rambam (Hilkhhot Tumat Tsaraat 16:10) and Ramban (Tazria 13:47) write that tsaraat of clothing or people was a supernatural occurrence, with no natural basis.

<sup>ii</sup> A useful summary of the laws appears in the Tiferet Yisrael's introduction to Negaim, entitled *Mareh Kohen*. NB The authorities generally agree that the laws of tsaraat do not apply today – see for example the end of *Mareh Kohen*

<sup>iii</sup> Steinberg A (2003) 'Skin', *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics*, (Jerusalem 2003)

<sup>iv</sup> RG Finch, P Moss, DJ Jeffries, J Anderson (2002) 'Infectious diseases, tropical medicine and sexually transmitted disease', *Clinical Medicine* 5<sup>th</sup> edition, PJ Kumar and ML Clark (eds) (Edinburgh 2002)

<sup>v</sup> Steinberg loc cit

<sup>vi</sup> Heller RM, Heller TW, Sassoon JM (2003) Mold: 'Tsara'at, Leviticus and the history of a confusion'. *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 46(4):588-91

<sup>vii</sup> Rambam – Mishneh Torah Hilkhhot Tumat Tsaraat 16:10

<sup>viii</sup> It is interesting that Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan in his *Living Torah*, usually noted for original translations (see for example Shemot 16:31), nevertheless translates tsaraat as leprosy

<sup>ix</sup> Keilim 1:7

<sup>x</sup> Rambam loc cit

<sup>xi</sup> Other sources mention additional sins, for example prostitution (Midrash Tanhuma, Tazria 11), relations with a Nidda (Tanhuma, Metsora 1) and deriving benefit from objects belonging to the Bet Hamikdash (Vayikra Rabba 17:3)

<sup>xii</sup> Tazria 13:12-13; Negaim 8:3

<sup>xiii</sup> Negaim 3:2

<sup>xiv</sup> Negaim loc cit

<sup>xv</sup> Negaim 5:1

<sup>xvi</sup> Negaim 3:1

<sup>xvii</sup> See also Rabbi Y Nachshoni's *Hagot Beparshiyot Hatorah*, Tazria

<sup>xviii</sup> Hilkhhot Tumat Tsaraat 16:10

<sup>xix</sup> Ramban 13:47

<sup>xx</sup> Abarbanel 13:1. The Ralbag is quoted by Abarbanel.

<sup>xxi</sup> Meshekh Hokhma 13:2

<sup>xxii</sup> See publisher's note on the Malbim's commentary, Devarim 22:22. Interestingly, in his commentary to Ki Teitsei, the Meshekh Hokhma adopted the Malbim's style and methodology to complete the Malbim's commentary to Ki Teitsei, illustrating both that he was fully versed in the Malbim's writings, and the high esteem in which he held the Malbim's work.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Vayikra Rabba 16:3

<sup>xxiv</sup> Adapted from Isaac Levy's translation (London 1962), 366

<sup>xxv</sup> Shemot Rabba, quoted in Rashi Shemot 2:23; 2 Melakhim 5:1

<sup>xxvi</sup> A related approach is taken in the commentary Nahal Eshkol to the medieval Sefer Haeshkol (Laws of Moed Katan and Aveilut, 156) and more recently by Rabbi Shimon Schwab of New York, in his Maayan Bet Hashoeva. They state that there are two types of tsaraat: natural infectious tsaraat (which carried no impurity, but those affected were isolated by society) and miraculous tsaraat (which was not infectious but made one impure). The different suggestion made in the present essay is to unite these different types of tsaraat into one tsaraat – which was infectious and caused banishment by society, but did not always come with impurity and banishment by Torah law.

The Gemara in Erakhin, which states that tsaraat was a Divine punishment for certain sins can be interpreted as meaning that this was *generally* the case, but it does not necessarily preclude someone contracting tsaraat even if they had not sinned.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Shemot 4:19

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<sup>xxviii</sup> Nedarim 64b. Dayan Yehezkel Abramsky pointed out that this tradition is supported by the pasuk itself, which reads 'for the people who *want* your life have died'. The word 'want' is not in the past tense ('the people who *wanted* your life') but in the present tense – suggesting that they still wanted Moshe's life, i.e. that they were still alive. (Quoted in Peninim Mishulhon Gavoha, Shemot 4:20.)

<sup>xxix</sup> Nedarim loc cit

<sup>xxx</sup> Ran, Nedarim 7b

<sup>xxxi</sup> Devarim 11:6

<sup>xxxii</sup> For some reason, the Ran does not entertain the possibility that their saraat had healed. (Although he does quote the Midrash that all ailments were healed at the giving of the Torah, he brings another Midrash which states that the ailments returned after the sin of the golden calf.)

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Negaim 7:1

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Other answers to this question are offered by many Aharonim, including Rabbi Yeshaya Pik himself, Hatam Sofer (Teshuvot Orakh Hayim Siman 141), Mitspeh Eistan and Maharats Chajes (printed at the back of Gemara Nedarim). See also Shalmei Nedarim, and Kli Hemdah and Pardes Yosef on Parashat Shemot.

<sup>xxxv</sup> For example, Pesachim 54a. See also Zohar Teruma 161a 'Istakel bah beoraitah uvarah alma' – "He looked into the Torah and created the world"

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Rabbi Hayim Soloveitchik quoted in Pninim Mishulhan Gavoha, Bamidbar 35:16. See also Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik in Bet Halevi Parashat Bo, and Rabbi Hayim Friedlander in Sifte Hayim, Moadim Vol 3, 188.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> The relationship between peshat and drash has been examined at length by many commentators. As it is not the primary focus of this essay, only a brief summary has been given in the text. For extensive elaboration on the role of peshat in the explanation of the Written Torah, see the work 'Peshuto shel Mikra' by Rabbi Yehuda Copperman (founder and dean of Mithlalah Jerusalem College for Women), or the same author's Introductory Chapters to the Mesheh Hokhma. Put simply, Rabbi Copperman argues (especially in the former work) that the meaning of the text of the Written Torah can only really be understood after knowing the Oral Torah drash explanation. Furthermore, it would not be legitimate to read it according to its pshat, without the permission of the Oral Torah itself, which states that 'a verse does not depart from its peshat' (e.g.

Yevamot 24a). According to sources quoted by R Copperman, the principal meaning of the text is the one transmitted through the Oral Torah, but peshat does contribute and add extra facets to the Oral Torah's explanation. It follows that peshat does not have to be restricted to the halakhic consensus.



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# *The Making of Gedolim: do we all have an equal capacity for Torah greatness?*

RAFI GANZ

## **Equality of opportunity?**

There is a school of thought prevalent in the Yeshiva world that holds that part of the uniqueness of the Torah is its potential to provide all those intensely dedicated to its study the opportunity to master it, as suggested by the Psalm ‘the testimony of God is trustworthy, making the simple one wise’. Taken to its extreme conclusion, this leads to a more general belief that all Jews have a latent potential within them to excel in Torah study and even to become a leading Torah figure of the generation (Gadol Hador), irrelevant of natural abilities and intelligence.

Such thinking can be seen extensively in a book popular in Yeshivot called *Sheifot* (meaning ‘ambitions’), by R. Yitzchak HersHKovitz.<sup>i</sup> The book repeatedly claims that the ‘majority’ of gedolim were not of exceptional talent, but achieved what they did as a result of effort and spiritual dedication which merited them Divine assistance. R HersHKovitz brings many stories attempting to prove that many of those who went on to become the great Torah scholars of their generation had average or poor abilities when they were younger. Such people are purported to include Rav Shimon Shkop and the Hafets Hayim amongst many others.<sup>ii</sup> The book further argues that every person can achieve this greatness and indeed should have this ambition; a typical example of this is a quotation from Rav Shach:

‘Everyone can ascend to become one of the Gedolei Hatorah, everything depends on dedication and nothing else.’<sup>iii</sup>

Before proceeding further, it is important to emphasise that this discussion is not concerned with the fundamental importance for each person to study Torah to his best ability, which in the words of the Mishna is a mitsva ‘equivalent to all’.<sup>iv</sup> As the Rambam writes:

‘Every Jew is obliged in studying Torah, whether he is poor or rich, whether he is healthy or suffering...even if he has a wife and children he is obliged to set aside a time to

learn in the morning and evening, as it says, “You shall meditate on it day and night”.<sup>v</sup>

## **Implications**

Before discussing some of the traditional sources on this matter, I would like to address a number of the implications of this view, which highlight the significance of the topic. First and foremost, were we to assume that everyone has the ability to attain greatness in Torah, it would follow that those who do not succeed have fallen short of their potential. In terms of motivating pupils, this argument has interesting ramifications. If students believe that they can succeed through maximising efforts, many will be encouraged to increase their intensity and dedication. However, if a correlation between effort and success is not experienced by the dedicated students, they are likely to become dismayed at not seeing miraculous results, and the wide gap between their lofty aspirations

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*Were we to assume that everyone has the ability to attain greatness in Torah, it would follow that those who do not succeed have fallen short of their potential.*

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and the reality of their achievements may cause many to become disenchanted (see Tiferet Yisrael below). On the other hand, if there is unanimity in the traditional sources that this Divine assistance has been assured to those who try their utmost, then the preaching of this concept to students is easily justified and could be implemented with confidence. However, the potential dangers of promising dividends which are not forthcoming, as well as the moral imperative of not misrepresenting Divine promises,

underscore the necessity of a careful analysis of the topic, which I will not even begin to exhaust in this article.

The second implication of this approach is that it distinguishes Torah study from other areas of academic endeavour by adding the element of Divine assistance to be received by the student proportionate to the degree of effort exerted, thus adding a mystical quality to the study. According to R. Hershkowitz,

‘The Torah is not like other types of wisdom which are mastered by those with inborn intelligence, rather it is the Godly wisdom which is given as a gift to man according to his spiritual preparations.’<sup>vi</sup>

In an environment where attaining complete knowledge of Torah is considered the primary goal of every child, the appeal of this mystical quality, which creates a dimension of fairness and equal opportunity is clear. The unfortunate consequence of these ideas is a society where success is defined more through *level* of Torah scholarship rather than efforts (see Rabbenu Yona below), while other areas of achievement are left for those who did not reach their full potential in Torah study.

Therefore, the question I wish to analyse is whether each individual has the potential to master Torah to the highest level through guaranteed Divine assistance. As mentioned above, this has far reaching ramifications for the expectations of students. This factor also separates this discussion from what may be considered a comparable debate in the scientific world, that regarding the relative importance of nature and nurture in producing exceptional talent. However, a parallel with the nature/nurture debate still exists. In both cases we must reckon with the psychological implications of creating an environment in which it is assumed that with effort one can achieve anything. In conclusion to a debate on this point Ellen Winner, Professor of Psychology writes:

‘It would be great if hard work was sufficient to become a Picasso or Einstein but effort does not open all doors. If parents believed Howe (who claimed, “with sufficient energy and dedication on the parents’ part, it is possible that it may not be all that difficult to produce a child prodigy”), they would push their children. Those few whose children have innate talent would be rewarded. The rest would fail, blaming themselves, or worse, their children.’<sup>vii</sup>

A similar point is made by the Tiferet Yisrael (R. Israel Lipschitz, 1782-1860) regarding praying in expectation of specific outcomes.

‘A person should select a clean and easy trade so that it has greater chance of success. But he should not believe that endeavour on its own will generate success as it will depend on other [unpredictable] natural factors. Therefore he should act righteously and pray to God to remove the natural obstacles which hinder his success... But he should not think that through prayer God will change the whole natural order... for aside from the fact that such a person is considered one “who relies on his prayer”, which causes “his sins to be remembered”, such thoughts present a danger. When the person sees that despite all his efforts in prayer his request is not fulfilled, he may God forbid lose belief in the idea of Divine intervention. Therefore the Tanna has informed us that everything is in accordance with Mazal [factors relating to nature and nurture in his view], which means to say that even prayer and endeavour cannot force a positive outcome for they are limited as to whether, and by how much, they can help.’<sup>viii</sup>

Although the Teferet Yisrael is here discussing livelihood, he goes on to apply the idea to every aspect of life, including Torah study. This forms part of his broader understanding of the balance between, and effects of, effort, nature and Divine intervention.

A final word of caution on the subject is that it is a common error to point to the fact that significant diligence is prominent among outstanding Torah personalities in an attempt to prove total causation. These results would only show that effort is necessary, not that it

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*It is a common error to point to the fact that significant diligence is prominent among outstanding Torah personalities in an attempt to prove total causation.*

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is sufficient on its own. On the contrary, it is plausible that this is an instance of reverse causation: people with greater abilities are more motivated by their potential to achieve. Having made these preliminary remarks, I will turn to examining some of the major sources on the topic.

## Moshe and his poor memory

One of the important sources which discusses the idea of Divine assistance with respect to Talmud Torah is a comment by Rashi based on a Midrash Rabba.

‘The Torah was given over to him (Moshe) as a gift, like a bride is to a groom, for he was unable to learn all of it in such a short time.’<sup>ix</sup>

Rashi’s interpretation of the Midrash seems to imply that this was an exceptional circumstance, rather than the normal procedure. Moshe was to be the sole transmitter of the Torah to the Jewish people, he had to master the entire Torah within the forty days that he was on the mountain. However, other commentators such as the Maharal and Hiddushei Harim extrapolate from this Midrash that this is the regular way through which Torah is acquired.<sup>x</sup>

Similarly, the Maharal in his commentary to Pirkei Avot writes that what differentiates ‘the crown of Torah’ from the crown of priesthood and kingship is the potential for Torah to be acquired by all who desire it.<sup>xi</sup>

## If you try you will succeed!

Another source they and others quote regarding this subject is the Gemara in Megilla:

‘If someone tells you (regarding learning Torah), “I exerted myself but did not succeed”, do not believe him.’<sup>xii</sup>

Although the Maharal explains this to mean that everyone has the potential within him to become a Torah scholar, the Gemara itself limits this principle:<sup>xiii</sup>

‘And even with Torah study this was only said regarding acquiring understanding of Torah, but in regard to retaining one’s learning, assistance from heaven is required.’

Thus, as Rashi explains, one could labour in Torah, and acquire understanding, but not retain what one has learned. Success in retaining learning is not guaranteed, irrespective of effort invested.<sup>xiv</sup>

Despite Rashi’s comments, R. HersHKovitz asserts that this passage only intends to say that success is not guaranteed through effort *alone*; *together* with other spiritual preparations solely ‘dependent on man’, total success is assured.<sup>xv</sup> R. HersHKovitz provides no source for this interpretation and indeed several difficulties arise from the phraseology of the text, though they are beyond the scope of this article.

The Maharal’s own opinion on this matter raises difficulties and requires a separate analysis. In Derekh Hayim he writes that the Torah opens itself up to all those who seek it, while in Ner Mitsva he writes that there are people who simply do not have the potential to become Torah scholars.<sup>xvi</sup> Furthermore, what the Maharal means when he writes that everyone has the ability to acquire ‘the crown of Torah’ is unclear, as his point is to contrast ‘the crown of Torah’ to the crowns of ‘priesthood’ and ‘kingship’ which are not possible to acquire at all.

Perhaps more extreme are statements by R. Menashe Klein who compares the building of the Menorah and learning Torah. In his commentary on the Torah he concludes:

‘Anyone who exerts himself over Torah has a sealed covenant that he will merit the crown of Torah.’<sup>xvii</sup>

## Maimonides and the NASA cleaner

In sharp contrast, the Rambam not only seems (see footnote) to accept the premise that not everyone has infinite potential in Torah study, but even suggests fundamental reasons for the wide innate discrepancies in intellectual potential.<sup>xviii</sup>

‘...Why did God create people who cannot develop their intellect? We see that the majority of people are totally lacking in wisdom and are drawn to their desires, while the wise are few in number and generally despised.

‘The answer is that these people serve one of two purposes. The first is to support and service the development of the rare wise man, for if everyone sought wisdom and philosophy then the progression of the world would be destroyed and life would quickly perish... Thus these people are needed to prepare and develop the material aspects of society so that the wise person has his sustenance prepared, the world can function and *wisdom can flourish*.’ [emphasis added]<sup>xix</sup>

Although this may sound like an elitist approach, it is important to stress that this is in fact the natural code of any social environment whether in sport, politics, art, business, or academia. The talented individuals take centre stage, while the majority adopt various support roles. In a football match there are those that prepare the pitch and there are referees who officiate, in politics and business the secretaries and office staff give administrative support, and in theatre the technicians and stage staff ensure the smooth running of a production. Economically speaking, this is the theory behind the law of comparative advantage, which produces maximum efficiency and benefits to society as a whole.<sup>xx</sup> The key to this point is the



focus on broad benefits rather than individual inequalities; if everyone only accepts centre stage then the world cannot function.

This point is also suggested by the Gemara in Kiddushin which discusses whether a father of limited financial means should prioritise his own or his son's Torah learning<sup>xxi</sup>. The Gemara's conclusion, which is codified by the Rambam, is that if the level of diligence is equal then the sharper one takes priority.<sup>xxii</sup> This seems to suggest that while diligence in Torah study is of primary importance, it is nevertheless important to facilitate the progression of those that have greater potential, thus causing 'wisdom to flourish' in the words of the Rambam. This principle seems to be in sympathy with a society which understands differences in innate potential and talent.

There is a story (most likely apocryphal but illustrative nonetheless) that when President Kennedy asked one of the cleaners working at NASA what he did, he replied: 'Mr President, I'm helping to put man on the moon.' True or not, perhaps such stories provide an important balance to the many accounts of the supreme visions and achievements of individuals. Clearly a form of both is necessary, as it is certainly true that only through intense ambition can it be ensured that the greatest leaders will emerge.

## The Hafets Hayim and Napoleon

This does not mean that the Talmudic Sages did not possess ambition and desire for their children to follow in their footsteps. Indeed, it is clear from many places that this was their dream and hope. The suggestion is simply that they were willing to acknowledge that it was not always possible.

The Gemara in Pesachim is an example of this. The Gemara lists various pieces of advice which the Sages gave to their students and children among which is the following:

'Rav said to Ayvu his son: "I have tried to teach you Talmud but have not succeeded, come let me teach you some worldly matters [business advice]"'.<sup>xxiii</sup>

It is interesting to consider whether Rav regarded his son's lack of success in learning to be a result of natural inability or a lack of effort. The former seems to be more likely as the expression used here in reference to the unsuccessful endeavour is 'lo mistaye milta'. This is an expression found in several places in reference to circumstances beyond human control.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Regarding this debate there is an interesting statement from the Hafets Hayim:

'Napoleon once said that soldiers who don't dream of becoming generals won't even succeed in becoming ordinary officers. I say this regarding Torah study.'<sup>xxv</sup>

This statement, while implicitly acknowledging that not everyone can succeed, nevertheless emphasises the importance of aiming high. Where exactly the balance lies between ambition and appreciating particular circumstances is a sensitive question which requires different answers for different personalities. Either way, this does not detract from the point made by the Rambam

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*There always has and always will be wide differences in natural potential and resulting achievements.*

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that there always has and always will be wide differences in natural potential and resulting achievements.

## As Righteous as Moshe

However, the Rambam himself seems to contradict the very view we have seen him express:

'Every man has the ability to become as righteous as Moshe our master or as evil as Yeravam the wicked one. He can become wise or foolish, merciful or cruel...'<sup>xxvi</sup>

Though the Rambam has stated that everyone can become as 'righteous as Moshe' rather than as 'wise as Moshe', he does state that everyone can become wise and this requires explanation.

The commentaries on the Rambam point out that this statement also seems to contradict a Gemara in Nidda which relates that before a baby is born an angel announces whether the baby will be 'strong or weak, foolish or wise', thus demonstrating that these traits are naturally implanted rather than acquired.<sup>xxvii</sup> The Kesef Mishneh resolves this point by explaining that the Rambam is referring to the ability to build a *personality* of one who seeks wisdom rather than intellectual capacity itself.<sup>xxviii</sup> The Gemara in Nidda on the other hand is referring to natural abilities, and takes the same position as the first Rambam we quoted.

In addition, the Rambam in his commentary on Pirkei Avot writes:

‘It [the Mishna in Avot 5:15: ...one who grasps quickly and forgets slowly, this is a bad portion (helek ra)] does not label someone who has difficulty understanding and forgets easily as wicked, as it is not within his power to change, and it is not a trait which can be acquired.’<sup>xxxix</sup>

This Mishna is clearly discussing retention of Torah knowledge, yet the Rambam clearly states that retention is ‘not a trait which can be acquired’ as we have already seen Rashi explain in his commentary to the Gemara in Megilla. Diminishing the significance of this point undermines the basic lesson of this Mishna.

From a similar perspective, Rabbenu Yona commenting on a different Mishna in Pirkei Avot (4:26) emphasises the importance of appreciating that reward is related to effort rather than the quantity of Torah knowledge absorbed, which will vary depending on age and intellect:

‘Why should it matter to someone that he forgets (his learning), either way he receives his reward... as long as he acts for the sake of Heaven.’<sup>xxx</sup>

## R. Schneur Zalman and the Maharsha



*R Schneur Zalman*

Another important source on the topic is the Shulhan Arukh Harav (R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi 1745-1812). Whilst suggesting that by making ‘one’s learning fixed and one’s work transient’ he is more likely to attain the Divine assistance referred to in the Gemara Megilla, he also admits that it is not within everyone’s grasp to become an

accomplished Torah scholar. In Hilkhot Talmud Torah, after several pages emphasising the utmost importance of attaining mastery of the whole Torah, he writes:

‘All of the above applies to a Torah scholar who has succeeded or has the potential to succeed in his studies to the extent that he will know the whole of the Oral Law from studying the Talmud and the Poskim such as the Rosh and the Bet Yosef. Someone who does not have this ability... as the verse says, “one in a thousand have I found”... is not obliged to live a life of deprivation and to make his work transient in order to increase learning which he cannot fully grasp... unless of course he wishes to act with piety and love of the Torah. Rather, such a person can fulfil his obligation through setting aside fixed

times for learning in the morning and at night so that he knows the laws of the Shulhan Arukh which are relevant to him... The rest of the day he should work in order to support talmidei hakhamim who can fully grasp all the laws and their true reasons, and it will be considered as if he himself has literally achieved this... as the verse says, “rejoice Zevulun in your journeys [‘business ventures’] and Yissakhar in your tents [of learning]”.’<sup>xxxi</sup>

The Maharsha (R. Samuel Eidels, 1555-1631) uses the same idea to suggest a resolution of an apparent contradiction in the Talmud. In one place we are taught that the first question a person is asked in the heavenly court is if he was honest in his business dealings, and only then is he asked if he set aside fixed times for learning, yet in another place we are told that a person is first judged by the court on his Torah study. The Maharsha explains that the former is discussing someone who does not see great success in his learning, thus his main activities are in the area of business and he is judged first on his primary activity.<sup>xxxii</sup> Even so, explains the Maharsha, such a person is nevertheless obliged to set aside fixed times for learning and therefore his second question is regarding these activities. The latter case discusses someone who is successful in learning, in which case he is judged first for not having learnt as he should. It would seem that the Maharsha also held that not everyone is capable of great success in the area of Torah study, as is indicated by the differences in the expectations outlined above.

## The Early Pious Ones

A final source to consider is a Gemara in Brakhot that seems to raise a difficulty concerning the Gemara we saw in Megilla, which stated that the ability to retain Torah knowledge is beyond one’s control.

‘The rabbis taught, “the early pious ones would wait an hour before starting to pray, pray for an hour, and then wait another hour”. If this routine took nine hours a day how did they manage to retain their Torah knowledge and how did they complete their labour? Because they were pious that their Torah was guarded and their labour was blessed.’<sup>xxxiii</sup>

While this Gemara certainly suggests a relationship between piety and the ability to retain one’s learning, it is important to note that this is speaking of a general comparison between different generations, rather than ‘a sealed covenant’ for each individual. This can be shown from the way this Gemara is coded in Halakha. The Rambam as well as the Tur learn from here that there is an obligation to wait ‘a little’ before praying in order to

focus one's mind.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The commentators wonder why this is adequate, when the Gemara which precedes the passage quoted above requires everyone to wait a whole hour. The Lehem Mishneh answers that the general concept of waiting before praying is learnt out from here, but the *specific* timeframe does not apply to later generations that are on a lower level.<sup>xxxv</sup> Hence the Rambam wrote as normative Halakha that in our times one should only wait 'a little' before praying, since there is no assurance that the Torah learnt will be 'guarded' as in earlier times.

There are other scattered references in the Gemara that seem to promise that one will become a Torah scholar in reward for certain actions and behaviour.<sup>xxxvi</sup> However, it would seem from the contexts of these passages that they are meant as blessings rather than absolute promises. It would also be reasonable to understand the statement 'people who are careful with Mezuzah will live in pleasant houses', which is mentioned earlier in the same passage, in a similar manner.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

## A final thought

Before concluding, a final point on the matter should be noted. Everyone including the Rambam would agree that through prayer it *may* be possible to attain heavenly guidance in the understanding of Torah, in the same way that prayer can be effective in any area of one's life; indeed, a prayer for wisdom and understanding is the first in the list of blessings of the weekday Amida.

The Rambam himself in his introduction to the Mishna makes this important point when discussing understanding of the esoteric sections of the Torah.

'Regarding the seeking out of wisdom, one should leave matters in the hands of the creator and pray and entreat him to grant understanding and guidance and reveal to him the secrets hidden in the Torah. This is what David intended when he said, "unveil my eyes so that I may see wonders from your Torah".'<sup>xxxviii</sup>

But here the Rambam is discussing direct and particular Divine intervention, not the regular working of God in the world.

## Conclusion

Having looked at some of the traditional sources, it seems that the Gemara and Rishonim discussed in this article did not entertain the possibility that everyone has the potential to become an outstanding scholar. While some mishnayot in Pirkei Avot contain advice about how to acquire and dedicate oneself to Torah, others remind us

about inborn intellectual variations.<sup>xxxix</sup> This seems to strike an important balance between emphasising the importance of each person's commitment to Torah, whilst at the same time appreciating fundamental differences in capability. Perhaps this is the practical relevance of what would otherwise be purely descriptive mishnayot.

According to the view of R. HersHKovitz, if pupils are struggling they should cling to their aspirations of becoming a 'gadol hador' in the 'knowledge' that it can eventually come true. The last three words of Pirkei Avot, 'lefum tzaara agra' – 'according to the effort is the reward' – may not have the same glamorous appeal, but provide more consistent and realistic encouragement to the broad spectrum of minds and personalities engaged in the field of Torah study.<sup>xl</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Y. HersHKovitz, Sheifot (Jerusalem 2003)

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>iv</sup> Mishna: Pe'a 1:1

<sup>v</sup> Rambam, Hilkhhot Talmud Torah 1:8

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>vii</sup> E. Winner, 'Fight Club: Is talent taught rather than innate?', (*The Times, Eureka*, Issue 8, 2010)

<sup>viii</sup> Tiferet Yisrael, Kiddushin 4:14. Incidentally, this lengthy piece subscribes to the medieval 'universalist' viewpoint of Hashgaha Pratit described by Joseph Faith in *Degel* 2:1. This is despite the fact that it was written in the eighteenth or nineteenth century after the lives of the Ari and Ba'al Shem Tov. Indeed, R. Lipshitz quotes several mystical references to reinforce this view. Parenthetically, He uses this same idea to explain the suffering of the righteous (as does Derashot HaRan8).

<sup>ix</sup> Rashi, Shemot 31:18; however, see Tanhuma 18 and Nedarim 38a where the emphasis is that Moshe kept *forgetting*, therefore God gave it to him as a gift.

<sup>x</sup> Maharal: Hiddushei Aggadot to Nedarim 38a; Hiddushei Harim: Shemot 31:18; see also Alei Shur 72

<sup>xi</sup> Maharal: Derekh Hayim, 4:17. This is in sharp contrast to the words of the Shulhan Arukh Harav, Hilkhhot Talmud Torah 3, Kuntres Aharon, who discusses the Torah's expectation of a 'Ba'al Bayit' who 'does not have the ability to merit the crown of Torah [even if he learns day and night].'

<sup>xii</sup> Megilla 6b

<sup>xiii</sup> Maharal, Be'er Hagola, end of Be'er 7, though it is possible that this is relative to the Am Haarets to whom he is making a comparison.

<sup>xiv</sup> Rashi, Megilla 6b

<sup>xv</sup> Y. Hershkowitz, Sheifot, 4

<sup>xvi</sup> Maharal, Derekh Hayim 4:15; Maharal, Ner Mitsva 116, Machon Yerushalayim. See footnote (R. Hartman) in Derekh Hayim ad loc., where he asks a similar question.

<sup>xvii</sup> R. Menashe Klein, Commentary to Shemot, 303-305

<sup>xviii</sup> The translation which follows is based on the Ibn Tibbon Hebrew translation of the original Arabic. The Kappach translation reads quite differently, though the idea is the same. There could be other ways of interpreting this Rambam and the reader is encouraged to see it in its full context to form his own opinion, as there are several questions which emerge from a closer reading.

<sup>xix</sup> Rambam, *Introduction to the Mishna*. See also Ketav Sofer on Bereshit who brings a similar idea regarding the unity of marriage.

<sup>xx</sup> See the Wikipedia entry for a straightforward example: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative\\_advantage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_advantage)

<sup>xxi</sup> Kiddushin 29b

<sup>xxii</sup> Rambam, Hilkhot Talmud Torah 1:4

<sup>xxiii</sup> Pesachim 113a

<sup>xxiv</sup> See for example Ketubot 7a

<sup>xxv</sup> Hafets Hayim: Olat Shlomo, Part 2 page 401, quoted in Sheifot p. 83. Similar sentiments are expressed by R. Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Yoreh De'ah 3:82.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Rambam: Hilkhot Teshuva 5:2

<sup>xxvii</sup> Niddah 16b; there is also a similar statement in Shabbat 156a, 'Mazal is the cause of wisdom'.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Kesef Mishneh on Hilkhot Teshuva 5:2

<sup>xxix</sup> Rambam, *Commentary to the Mishna*, Avot 5:15.

<sup>xxx</sup> Rabbenu Yona: *Commentary to Pirkei Avot* 4:26

<sup>xxxi</sup> R. Sh. Z. of Liadi, Shulhan Arukh Harav, Hilkhot Talmud Torah 3:4. See the Kuntres Aharon loc. cit., where R. Liadi elaborates on this theme and brings a support from the Gemara in Megilla quoted above (in accordance with Rashi's interpretation).

<sup>xxxii</sup> Maharsha: Sanhedrin 7a

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Brakhot 32b

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Rambam, Hilkhot Tefilla 4:16; Tur 93. The Shulhan Arukh however writes specifically an hour but see Mishna Berura loc. cit.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Lehem Mishneh as explained by R. Tsvi Elimelech Shapiro in Magid Ta'aluma, 246

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Shabbat 33b and Eruvin 54a

<sup>xxxvii</sup> See Maharal Ner Mitsva 114, who also explains that these statements are not meant as absolute assurances.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Rambam, *Introduction to the Mishna*

<sup>xxxix</sup> See the contrast between Avot 6:1 and 5: 15. It is interesting that Avot 6:1 mentions that a person who learns Torah for its own sake will become 'a steadily strengthening fountain', a metaphor for someone with profound understanding, rather than 'a cemented pit which doesn't lose a drop', which is the metaphor for someone who retains all his learning (these two metaphors are mentioned in Avot 2:11). This is in agreement with the Gemara in Megilla that retention is not guaranteed even with effort.

<sup>xl</sup> Ibid. 5:27. The Tosafot Yom Tov (R. Yom-Tov Lipman Heller 1579-1654) brings this Mishna as support for his view (Avot 4:12) that all reward for Torah study is dependent on effort 'whether (they have learnt) a lot or a little'. See also comments on Avot 2:21.

# *The Shemona Esrei: God, time and the Jewish people*

EDWARD ZINKIN

How should a Jew understand time? How does he/she relate to time and is that the same way that God relates to time? Does God in fact exist in time at all or is He entirely outside of the phenomenon.<sup>i</sup> In this article I will seek to demonstrate that we may use the weekly Shemona Esrei as a vehicle for understanding a Tanaitic concept of time. I will show that in the Shemona Esrei the Jewish people is seen as progressing in time according to an established structure but that while God is seen as entirely present in time He is not moving through it with His people. Rather He exists simultaneously at every point in time; perceiving and interacting with the first moments of creation and the final redemption and all that happens in between all together. I will argue that through the use of imagery, tense and structure the authors of this perennial tefilla were expressing, amongst the myriad ideas they placed within the text, this idea of the Jew moving through time experiencing God at every point.

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*The very structure of the Shemona Esrei leads the Jew progressively through time, constantly encountering the ever now of God.*

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To explain my contention I shall first demonstrate the way in which imagery is used to express time: by emphasising the beginning and end of time and through associating events that chronologically must be separate. Secondly I will demonstrate how the use of tense evokes an eternally present God in contrast to the chronological Jew. I will then show how the very structure of the Shemona Esrei leads the Jew progressively through time,

constantly encountering the ever now of God. While the Jew journeys through his own time and his people's history, the Ribbono Shel Olam constantly and simultaneously experiences Avraham, Moshiah, the author and the worshipper.



## **The imagery of the Shemona Esrei**

To begin, therefore, let us look at the imagery of the Shemona Esrei. In Hilkhot Tefilla, Rambam makes a rare departure and describes the theological and historical background of the Shemona Esrei.<sup>ii</sup> He informs us that originally there was no set formula for prayer but, because of the breakdown of linguistic unity and the loss of Hebrew among many of the people during the Babylonian Exile, Ezra and his Bet Din felt it necessary to set down an order of prayer so that any individual, however ignorant, could fulfil his duty of offering eloquent prayer. We are taught in halakhot two and four that in the fulfilment of this obligation one must first offer praise to God and that the Bet Din of Ezra formulated the first three berakhot of the Shemona Esrei to fulfil this function.

The question must then arise: why did they select these particular praises? When thinking of the astonishing things that God had done for the world and for Bnei

Yisrael one might have expected a list of praises to include a mention of Kriat Yam Suf, Mattan Torah, the man we were fed in the Midbar or any number of miraculous and wondrous things that are recorded in Tanakh.

Our first answer must, of course, be the one given in the Gemara.<sup>iii</sup> Tefillot on the subject of the Avot, of God's gevurah and of His kedusha are forcefully mandated in Tehillim 29:1-2. 'Havu lashem benei eilim, havu lashem kavod, va'oz. Havu lashem kavod shemo, hishtahavu lashem behadrat kodesh.'<sup>iv</sup> That indeed makes the headlines of prayers sensible but, arguably, it does not entirely illuminate the specific content imagery. But while the first berakha evokes the Avot in the beginning, middle and end it is also at pains to point out that while the eventual geula is associated with the memory of the Avot it does not come through their merit but rather 'lemaan shemo', for the sake of God's name.<sup>v</sup>

A further difficulty is that while it is true that tehiyat hametim, the resurrection of the dead, is an undeniable demonstration of God's might, there are plenty of other examples of Divine strength that might have been chosen.

<sup>vi</sup> It is only the third berakha that seems to consistently and unambiguously reflect the theme of the pasukim the Gemara cites as the source: the honour of the Name and the holiness of God.

## God's transcendence through time

What should we understand from the imagery chosen by Ezra and his Bet Din to fulfil the imperative derived from Tehillim? It is my contention that the images used in these berakhot are designed to evoke the beginning and the end of time and God's presence in both moments. In the first berakha we have creation and redemption connected by the Avot. The berakha says 'vekonei hakol, vezokher hasdei avot umayvi go'el livnee veneihem lemaan shemo.'<sup>vii</sup> In this short phrase we have the creation of the universe, the virtue of the Avot and the final redemption linked together through juxtaposition and connecting vavs. It is both the most marvellous summary of the whole of history ever created and an association of three temporal concepts: beginning, continuation and conclusion.

One might think the line only describes the beginning and the ending: (1) creation at the beginning and (2) the merit of the Avot leading to redemption at the end of history. This is why we have the important phrase 'lemaan shemo', 'for the sake of His name'. From this, we learn that the redemption will not come as a result of the 'hasdei Avot', 'the loving kindness of the Avot' but rather it comes for

the glory of God. The mention of the Avot has its own and distinct purpose in the berakha. It is my contention that it is brought to indicate the transcendent consciousness of God. By juxtaposing God's memory of the 'hasdei Avot' with the creation of everything and its conclusion we are taught that just as God created the world and will bring it to a close, He remembered, remembers and will remember the 'hasdei Avot'. Thus, the beginning, the end and all that flows in between are woven together.

We can see a similar juxtaposition of temporally distinct imagery in the second berakha, in which God is declared the Sustainer of life, the Ender of life, the Ressorator of the dead and the One who keeps faith with those sleeping in the earth.<sup>viii</sup> While some of these roles can be carried out at the same time - it is not unimaginable to conceive of God as simultaneously the Harbinger of life and of death - how can the 'mekayem emunato lisheinei afar' be contemporary with the 'mehaye metim'? In fact, not only are these two chronologically distinct events placed together within one berakha, they are placed out of sequence. God is described as the Resurrector of the dead twice before He is described as the Preserver of those dead. How can God resurrect before He preserves, unless to Him they are not separate experiences? These two images of the Preserver of the dead and the Restorer of life mark the most starkly contrasting images in the passage and the constant juxtaposition of the Bringer of life and the Ender of life only adds to the sense of different events in time being connected and understood to be, from God's perspective, essentially simultaneous.

## God's perpetual present

The problem remains however that grammar provides us with a system of language to associate disparate events in time while keeping them separate. We can even present a future event before the past one and use a sophisticated version of this system to indicate the correct chronological sequence. I am, of course, talking about tense. I do; I did; I will do; I did this after I had done that; and so on. It is not a very complicated system and, as I will demonstrate below, the authors of the Shemona Esrei were gifted at using it in sophisticated ways. It is therefore impressive, and a little surprising, how pervasively the present tense is used for God's actions. All of the images that I elaborated upon above are described using the present tense.

Not only are these chronologically disparate images bound together through juxtaposition and thematic



consistency they are also linked in the way that they are presented in time. We are not told that God created everything, remembers the 'hasdei Avot' and will bring the redemption. Nor are we told that God preserves life, keeps faith with those sleeping in the earth and will resurrect the dead. Rather all of these are described as action in which God is currently engaged. I stress *currently* because we must also remember that the Shemona Esrei is a living document and its words were not true simply when they were written but also when we recite them every day. When we stand in the presence of the Shekhina every day and recite those words we are saying that as we speak God is creating everything, protecting Avraham and bringing the redemption and the resurrection of the dead.

Of course, that is not all He is doing. As we recite the weekday Shemona Esrei God is doing at least nineteen things. For, if we look closely, we will notice that the nineteen hatimot, the conclusions to the berakhot, are all written in the present tense. It must be admitted that a present tense hatima makes the most logical sense for many of the berakhot: I can say without much doubt that at the time that people are saying the berakha of seliha, we will need God's forgiveness and we must hope that when we recite Shome'a Tefilla, God is listening to our prayers.<sup>ix</sup>

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*The Shemona Esrei is a living document and its words were not true simply when they were written but also when we recite them every day.*

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However, one could argue some hatimot would make more sense if expressed in the past or future tense. Should it not be 'blessed are You O Lord who was the shield of Avraham'?<sup>x</sup> Equally should it not be 'who will redeem Israel', 'who will bring together the scattered of His people Israel' or 'who will build Jerusalem'?<sup>xi</sup> Why, then, is the present tense used? Perhaps it is simply that hatimot are always expressed in the present tense? We only have to look at the berakha of Shehehiyanu to know that that is not the case. Another argument might be that we are using the present tense to evoke our desperate desire for these things to come. The problem with that, however, is that we do use a form of the future in the Shemona Esrei to describe these very events. In berakha seventeen we say

'viyerushalayim irekha berahamim *tashuv*', 'return to Jerusalem Your city.'<sup>xii</sup> We cannot say that the jussive is used here simply because it is more polite than a direct present imperative. We use the simple and direct imperative in the thirteenth and nineteenth berakhot: '*sim* helkeynu imahem', 'place our portion with them' and 'barkheyenu Avinu' 'bless us our Father.'

Having rejected these suggestions I posit that the present tense is used because the authors understood that from God's perspective He is in fact building Jerusalem, the first time, the second time and the final time, *as He listens to our prayer*. This answer explains why the past events are also evoked in the present tense.

## Divine and human perspectives

If this is true, why is God sometimes referred to in prayer using the future and past tenses? I suggest that the answer comes from the difference between the Divine and human perspectives evoked in the Shemona Esrei. When the authors imagined the world from the Divine perspective in the hatimot, in the praises of the first and second berakhot and the enumeration of the eternal attributes of God in the third berakha, ('ata kadosh', 'You are holy'), the present tense is used. However once human perspective is engaged the future and the past tenses appear. This occurs both when the authors describe the Jew in contrast to God and the Jew perceiving God.

We see the human in contrast with God most clearly in the third and eighth berakhot. In both cases we have an odd juxtaposition of the present and future tense. In the third berakha we have the statement 'atah kadosh veshimkha kadosh', 'You are holy and Your name is holy' juxtaposed with 'ukedoshim bekhool yom yehallalukha', 'and holy ones *will* praise you every day.' In the eighth berakha we have 'refa'enu Hashem venerafe' and 'hashivenu venivashe'a', 'heal us and we shall be healed' and 'save us and we shall be saved.' The future tense in Hebrew indicates the flow of time. The present, and occasionally even the past, rolling into the future is here in direct contrast with the immediate present tense. We therefore have an immediately described God against the temporal Jew.

This, I think, lies at the heart of how we should understand how time is evoked in the Shemona Esrei. On the one hand we have the immanent God and on the other we have the chronological Jew. God is depicted as ever present; experiencing His creation of the world while simultaneously bringing it to a close. He is described at once as building Jerusalem three times and listening to

Shaharit at Alei Tzion, while attending Ezra in the wreckage of Jerusalem. In contrast the Jew as an individual, and the Jews as a people, move through time, experiencing the immanence of God linearly. As human beings we experience a delay between God's salvation and our experience of it, for while we may not have yet seen it at the time we pray, God is already bringing it about in a time that is the future for us but the ever-now for Him.

This also explains why God is sometimes described using temporal language in the Shemona Esrei. If you look through the Shemona Esrei you will find that God is only described in the future or the past when we are describing our experience of God rather than the abstract truth of God. We see for example 'yehemu rahamekha' 'let Your compassion be awakened' against 'mishan umivtakh latsadikim' 'supporter and security of the righteous' and 'be'or panekha natata lanu', 'through the light of Your face you gave us' against 'hamevorekh', 'who blesses.'<sup>xiii</sup> In each of these cases we use the future and the past to describe what God does for us, how we experience Him, but the present to describe what God is.

The structure of the Shemona Esrei itself leads us to the historical Jew in contrast to an ahistorical God. We know from the very earliest sources that the order of some of the berakhot reflect the passage of time. On a national level,

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### *The structure of the Shemona Esrei itself leads us to the historical Jew in contrast to an ahistorical God.*

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the Gemara explains that berakhot fourteen to seventeen are in that sequence because first will come the rebuilding of Jerusalem, then will come the heir of David, then will come prayer and then will come the avoda in the Mikdash.<sup>xiv</sup> On a more personal level, the Gemara explains that the berakha of repentance comes after the berakha of insight because after insight comes forgiveness.<sup>xv</sup> We thus have the passage of Jewish history and the individual Jew's history woven into the structure of the text.

On the other hand, we find a more surprising structural juxtaposition. We are told that the tenth berakha on the ingathering of exiles follows the ninth berakha on the blessing of the years, because the verse in Yehezkel (36:8) associates the return of the exiles with the flowering of the land. However, if we look at the language of the berakhot

we see that both use the present tense while describing disparate points in time: 'barekh...hashana hazot' 'bless...this year' and 'sa nes', 'erect a banner.'<sup>xvi</sup> While one may closely follow the other in the pasuk the berakhot explicitly describe events which are separate in time using the present tense, implying that they are both happening now. These disparate 'nows' are brought into even sharper focus by being placed next to each other in berakhot that hint to the prerequisites for redemption. Thus, we have God in the current present directly contrasted with God in the future present in the two berakhot that the Gemara relates to the linear progression towards the final redemption.

## **Linear time and the eternal present**

In this paper I have tried to show that the imagery, grammar and structure of the Shemona Esrei tell us about a linear Jewish history, both personal and national, in contrast to a God who is omnipresent not just in space but in time. God's experience of His creation of the universe is juxtaposed with His bringing of the final redemption. The eternal truth of God's holiness is contrasted with the Jewish people's progressive recounting of that holiness in the depiction of the progress of Jewish history that is woven into the text. The different 'nows' of God's experience are placed against each other to remind us that what is, what was and what will be are conceits of human imagining, and are of no consequence to the immanent way in which God experiences the totality of existence.

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<sup>i</sup> I hope my readers will forgive the convention of referring to God with the capitalised male pronoun. I use it only to save space and because of the stylistic heaviness involved in always referring to Him euphemistically.

<sup>ii</sup> Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Tefillah 1:1-7. It is a departure in so far as the Rambam who sought to be as brief as possible rarely digressed into the history of the Jewish people.

<sup>iii</sup> Megilla 17b

<sup>iv</sup> Give the Lord, O sons of the mighty [i.e. the Avot], give the Lord honour and might. Give the Lord the honour of His Name, bow to the Lord in the beauty of His holiness'

<sup>v</sup> Shemona Esrei, first berakha

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<sup>vi</sup> Ibid: second berakha.

<sup>vii</sup> First berakha ‘and creates the world, and remembers the loving kindness of the Avot and brings a saviour to their children’s children for the sake of His name’

<sup>viii</sup> Second berakha ‘Mekhalkey hayim’, ‘mehayei metim’, ‘memit u’mehayee’, ‘mekayem emunato lishenei afar’

<sup>ix</sup> Sixth and sixteenth berakhot

<sup>x</sup> First berakha

<sup>xi</sup> Seventh, tenth and fourteenth berakhot

<sup>xii</sup> While I have translated tashuv into the imperative, which is a present tense command, in the Hebrew it is in fact jussive, which is a future tense command. In English, while we have grammatical terms to describe these concepts our vocabulary does not comfortably provide a jussive command form: a more literal if crude translation might be ‘may You return’ or ‘let Yourself return!’

<sup>xiii</sup> Thirteenth berakha; another jussive. Nineteenth berakha

<sup>xiv</sup> Megilla 17b to 18a

<sup>xv</sup> Megilla 17b. Fourth and fifth berakhot.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ninth berakha. The banner refers to the ingathering.

# Women leaders in Hasidism

ELI LOPIAN

The early Hasidic movement was unusual in many respects, not least in the leadership roles which some women enjoyed. I propose to examine the female as a leader in Hasidism and the consequence on the ideological role of women in the movement and how this has been understood by scholars such as S.A. Horodecky and Ada Rapoport-Albert. I will discuss three famous female Hasidic leaders and show that women could rise to the rank of a leader of the community, revered by both men and women, only in limited circumstances. Finally, I will investigate the dialectic spirituality in Hasidism and the effect this has on the role of women within it and how this varies depending on what focus of spirituality is prevalent within that sect.

## The Tsaddik

Every Hasidic community has a leader and spiritual figure known as the Tsaddik. The Tsaddik is one of the most important components of any Hasidic group. The followers of this Tsaddik will be guided through their lives by the words and teachings of this spiritual and inspirational leader. All issues and problems of the community will be presented to the Tsaddik, and his

responses and advice on these matters will be treated almost as if they came from God's mouth itself. Indeed, Joseph Dan argues that the survival of Hasidism into its third century against all odds is largely due to the institution of the Tsaddik as a powerful and respected leader followed religiously under all circumstances.<sup>i</sup> Even Naftali Lowenthal, who disagrees with Dan and argues that inherent ideological features explain Hasidism's survival into the modern day period, concludes that the Tsaddik plays a fundamental and important role in the survival and functioning of the Hasidic movement.<sup>ii</sup> Consequently, in order to understand the role played by women in Hasidism, we must assess women's role as leaders within the movement. This will deepen our understanding of women's roles within the movement and the extent of their equality with their male counterparts.

## Horodecky's view

S. A. Horodecky was the first academic to identify the standing of women in Hasidism as an area of adequate novelty and interest to merit particular discussion.<sup>iii</sup> He highlighted the equality that he perceived existed between male and female Hasidim. He contrasted this with what he called 'official Judaism' - the traditional Jewish Orthodox life of eighteenth century eastern Europe where female participation in public religious life was minimal and frowned upon. The reason for this difference, he explained, was because 'official Judaism' of that time was concerned mostly with an intellectual approach to the service of God as opposed to Hasidism which stressed spiritual and emotional means of getting closer to God.

Intellectuality was seen as a male quality and this excluded female participation, whereas spirituality and emotion was open to women as much as men. This,



*An early Bais Yaakov class*

argues Horodecky, is the reason why men and women had equal access and power within the Hasidic movement. Following from this, he reasons that given certain circumstances, Hasidism enabled some women to rise as high as the position of the Tsaddik, which was held predominantly by the male members of the movement. As Horodecky put it: 'If the woman was worthy, nothing could stand in her way'.<sup>iv</sup> He gives a number of examples involving mothers, sisters and daughters of the most famous Hasidic leaders and how they were regarded as 'endowed with divine inspiration...famous in the world of Hasidism for...knowledge of rabbinic legends and tales of the lives of the Tsaddikim' and even 'sought after by many of the Hasidim...for a blessing'.<sup>v</sup>

## Rapoport-Albert's view

Ada Rapoport-Albert in her article 'On Women in Hasidism' questions the reliability of these sources of the stories, but nonetheless recognises them as a valid representation of women as leaders and spiritual figures in Hasidism.<sup>vi</sup> However, she notes that the authority of these women leaders mentioned by Horodecky is through their relationship to male leaders, and not derived solely from their own stature. She comments that:

'It is not surprising, therefore, that Hasidism, a movement which almost uniquely in the history of Judaism had placed at the very centre of its theology and social organisation the charismatic personality of the leader, should exploit this tradition to the full, and allow the aura of perfect scholarly, moral and spiritual attributes, combined with supernatural powers surrounding the figure of the Tsaddik, to percolate to some of his female relations'.<sup>vii</sup>

So although Rapoport agrees with Horodecky that certain women did have roles as a type of leader she argues that there was no institutional aspect of leadership by women in the Hasidic movement. As Rapoport puts it, the question is not whether these prominent women actually existed (they probably did), the pertinent issue is whether the phenomenon of these independent female leaders was integrated into the ideology of Hasidism and whether this type of leadership was regarded as fully legitimate. Her answer to this question is unequivocally negative. She notes the lack of books and teachings compiled by these female leaders, whereas they were an important tool of communication for male leaders. Moreover, she

comments that the 'reports celebrating the activities of female Tsaddikim in Hasidism have emanated from the periphery of the Hasidic world', and therefore may not be representative of the movement as a whole.<sup>viii</sup>

She explains the way that Horodecky and his contemporaries interpreted these stories as a result of their origin in a Hasidic environment before the two World Wars, and their subsequent departure from it, when they became exposed to a variety of modern ideologies through whose perspectives they evaluated the experiences of their youth.

## The Maid of Ludmir

A story of a famous female Hasid - the Maid of Ludmir (1815-1892 or 1895) is the subject of much academic debate. Interestingly, this debate does not revolve around the facts of this extraordinary woman's life, about which there is a general consensus, rather it relates to what this story reveals about the extent of the role of women as Hasidic leaders. It is possible to use the case of the Maid of Ludmir to provide evidence for two completely opposing theories. Before turning to these analyses, let us first consider the facts of the case.<sup>ix</sup>

Hannah Rahel was the only daughter of a well-to-do and educated Jew. She lived in the Volhynian town of Ludmir. She was a beautiful girl with an unusually high intellect. She studied the Bible in the original and learned to write Hebrew. She even learnt Talmudic Aggadah, Midrash, and halakhic works, which was rare for women of that time. Her piety was also noteworthy, praying with ecstasy three times a day as a man would. As soon as she came of age she was betrothed to a man whom she had loved her whole childhood. However, due to her Hasidic custom, once she was engaged she was unable to be in contact with her groom until the wedding; this distressed her greatly. Her mother also died during this period. A combination of the above factors caused Hannah to withdraw from society and isolate herself completely. She would only venture out to visit her mother's grave. On one such visit to the cemetery she fell unconscious, followed by a prolonged and mysterious illness.

When she eventually recovered, she declared that she had 'transcended the world of the flesh' and consequently called off her engagement. She then built herself a Bet Midrash and adopted a life of male observance. Her reputation for saintliness and miracle working was established and men and women from all

over the country came to visit her, and she became known as the Maid of Ludmir. Whilst her popular gathering grew, the response of the famous male Tsaddikim became more negative. Some claimed that an 'evil' spirit was trapped inside her. R. Mordekhai of Chernobyl, tried to persuade her to live the expected life of a woman and encouraged her to marry. She finally agreed, but it soon failed and ended in divorce. She married once more, but got divorced again, living singly for the rest of her life. Although unsuccessful, her marriages did put an end to her career as a Tsaddik and her following declined sharply. Her final years were spent in the Land of Israel where she died in obscurity in old age.

What distinguishes this story from many others of a similar ilk is that the Maid of Ludmir was not related to any male leaders at that time. It was her own abilities and accomplishments which allowed her to gain a following which at its peak was very strong and recognisable.

Horodecky uses this story as proof of equal opportunities that existed among men and women in Hasidism. As long as the woman was worthy, she had the potential to rise to the lofty heights of the Tsaddik. What becomes unclear, according to Horodecky, is why there were only a handful of women leaders of

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note in Hasidic history. If there were equal opportunities among men and women, why were there not more female Tsaddikim? This is a weakness in Horodecky's position and analysis. Horodecky could perhaps argue that there were not enough women worthy to reach such a position. The sociological condition of Hasidic society meant it was less likely that women could reach such a position due to a lack of education and desire, but if they really wanted to and

had the ability they were able to become prominent leaders. However, such an explanation is hard to fit in with the equal opportunities theory which Horodecky espouses. If there were equal opportunities for men and women, then there should have been equal opportunities for each gender to develop towards becoming a Tsaddik.

Horodecky has recognised this and has changed the tone of his analysis of the Maid of Ludmir's story, which has become more restrained and cautious:

'In Hasidism, a modest, passive role is attached to a woman. From time to time she may approach a Tsaddik, pour out her soul before him and receive counsel and a blessing from him. Very rarely in the history of Hasidism do we encounter active female characters that have influence over their surroundings. Among these holy women who came close to the level of the Tsaddik is...the Maid of Ludmir' <sup>x</sup>

Rapoport approaches this case rather differently. She regards the Maid of Ludmir as a failure. She sought to rise in spirituality by transcending her own femininity. It was as if she accepted that by acting as a woman she would not be able to achieve full spiritual growth, and consequently declared she would not marry and lived a life of rigorous male observance. Indeed, when she embraced her femininity by marrying she lost her following. Moreover, contemporary Hasidic leaders - most notably R. Mordekhai of Chernobyl - regarded her as a peculiarity. This all points to the conclusion that a woman, especially one acting as a woman, could not reach the heights of a male Tsaddik in the Hasidic movement.

Nehemia Polen agrees with Ada Rapoport that the story of the Maid of Ludmir was a failure.<sup>xi</sup> However, he takes issue with Rapoport's analysis, arguing that there is an 'unequivocal negative' answer to the question of whether there was a phenomenon of independent female leaders who were integrated into the ideology and organisation of Hasidism, and were considered legitimate. According to Polen, Sarah Horowitz Sternfeld of Checiny (1838-1937), the Chenstiner Rebbetsin, was such a woman who was considered a female Tsaddik. When she died at the age of ninety-nine, survived by two hundred grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the obituaries in the Yiddish press made this clear. Warsaw's *Der Moment* wrote that 'after the death of her husband, Hasidim travelled to her with *kvittlakh*. She was the only woman in Poland who conducted herself as a Rebbe'. *Dos Yiddishe*



*Togblatt*, published by Agudat Yisrael, carried a lengthy article on her, focusing on her piety, wisdom, and devotion to the poor and needy. Moshe Feinkind, the Yiddish essayist, portrays her as a wise and compassionate woman giving advice to those whom sought her help.<sup>xii</sup> She apparently possessed miraculous powers and those in need, would make pilgrimages to see her. These were mostly women, although some rebbes would ask for blessings. Feinkind is quick to stress that she did not try to imitate a Hasidic Tsaddik, and she held no *tisch* nor told any Hasidic tales.

Polen suggests that we can see from the Chentshiner Rebbetsin a way in which a woman can become a Hasidic leader. However, the woman will only be accepted as such if she acts like a woman and does not encroach on the male domain. Maybe the reason Rapoport pays little attention to the success of the Chentshiner Rebbetsin is that she was looking for a completely different type of a female Hasidic leader, one who was independent of male influence, unlike the Chentshiner Rebbetsin, whose recognition originally emanated from her husband. Moreover, the case of the Chentshiner Rebbetsin challenges Rapoport's analysis of the Maid of Ludmir. Rapoport argues that the Maid could only operate as a Tsaddik and acquire a following when she denied her femininity. When the Maid accepted a life as a woman, by marrying, her support

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### *Setting up her network of schools and youth organisations for girls and women was a revolutionary step and a radical departure.*

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ebbed away. The Chentshiner Rebbetsin, by contrast, never attempted to transcend her female nature. She conducted herself as a woman and still became revered as a type of Tsaddik.

### **Sarah Schenierer**

Another extremely important female leader who bears significance on our investigation is Sarah Schenierer (1883-1935), the founder of the Bais Yaakov girls' school. Responding to a crisis in religiosity amongst young Jewish girls, Schenierer believed that a Jewish education for girls had to be established. Boys attended the *heder*, but since there were no Jewish schools at

that time, most Jewish girls were educated in non-Jewish schools. There, although often subject to intense anti-Semitism, they were influenced away from their religious beliefs to secular ones. At home, the 'modern' girl, who adopted revolutionary ideologies such as Marxism, would appear at a Shabbat table in immodest attire. Later her head might be in a novel, while her father was bent over a page of Talmud with his sons, dressed in traditional Hasidic attire.<sup>xiii</sup>

Schenierer sought the Belzer Rebbe's permission to open the schools and he gave his blessing. Setting up her network of schools and youth organisations for girls and women was a revolutionary step and a radical departure from established norms regarding the role of the woman's education in Judaism. She set up schools in Poland, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and Austria. The Gerer Rebbe also gave his approval of Bais Yaakov and many Hasidic girls joined the schools. Although Bais Yaakov was not primarily a Hasidic school, and no mystical teachings were on the syllabus, it can be seen nonetheless as a movement inspired by Hasidism. Judith Grunfeld, a teacher at a Bais Yaakov school, tells of the girls dancing and singing songs of religious significance.<sup>xiv</sup> The girls would also visit the graves of great Tsadikim as a way of achieving a personal spiritual encounter.

Sarah Schenierer was herself born into a Hasidic family. Naftali Lowenthal and others have claimed that Sarah Schenierer had the charisma of a spiritual leader.<sup>xv</sup> This helps to explain why the movement was so popular and successful. The way Schenierer was able to portray herself as a type of spiritual leader without attracting criticism from the Hasidic world, was by stressing the values of Bais Yaakov as a school which was not just about teaching girls knowledge, but equally importantly about the traditional Jewish female virtues of modesty, humility, and love. Moreover, Schenierer herself 'remained in her place and never challenged the superior authority of the men'.<sup>xvi</sup> She only had interaction as a spiritual leader with girls and women, and there is no evidence to suggest this spread to any male group. In this way, she was able to use her unique personality as a way of inspiring a generation of girls to live a religious life. Bais Yaakov can even be described as a female Hasidic sect filling the void of male dominated Hasidism.

## Habad

Finally, I want to look at female leadership roles other than those of a Rebbetsin or Tsaddik, with particular focus on Habad. According to Naftali Lowenthal, early Habad texts were polarised into two concepts of spirituality: the Upper Unity and the Lower Unity.<sup>xvii</sup> The Upper Unity reaches away from the world, while the Lower Unity reaches towards it. Lowenthal believes that the ideology of a Hasidic sect can be determined in reference to Upper Unity and Lower Unity. Those sects that have the Upper Unity as the core ideological concept will generally limit the role of women to looking after the domestic life of the home and the family. This is because the Upper Unity - reaching away from the world - is gained through interaction with the Tsaddik, which is predominantly a male domain. The Tsaddik of an Upper Unity sect will tend to stress rigorous religious observance according to his customs as a way of reaching beyond the world. An example of this type of Hasidism is Satmar, whose founder Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1886-1979) sought to create an elite enclave society untouched by modernity.

In Hasidic sects which emphasises the Lower Unity - reaching towards the world - in which the individual Hasid has to struggle to discover his own potential for holiness, there is a possibility that, particularly under the influence of modernity, the religious role of women could develop. An example of this type of Hasidism is Habad. Habad encourages an active role for women in the community, and they can become an integral part of religious society. This is highlighted by the role of the woman when a couple is sent on shlichut to a remote place in order to try to bring the Jews of that place closer to God and religious practice. The wife will usually be as active as the husband, hosting learning sessions for women and organising events. She will also run an open and friendly home often hosting guests for Shabbat meals.

## Conclusions

Female Tsaddikim were always extremely rare in Hasidism. However, in certain circumstances and with extraordinary female individuals, there have been female leaders who were both successful and regarded as legitimate - the Chentshiner Rebbetzin and Sarah Schenirer to name just two. However, when a woman has tried to conduct herself exactly like a male Tsaddik, she has faced problems - as the case of the Maid of Ludmir shows. Nevertheless, and importantly, that

there is a greater tendency for some parts of the Hasidic movement to accept female leaders than there is among Haredi Mitnagdim, where there is little evidence of powerful female leaders. Female leadership is even more common in Hasidic sects that have Lower Unity as their central concept, such as Habad.

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<sup>i</sup> J Dan, 'Hasidism- the Third Century' in *Hasidism Reappraised*, (London, Portland Or., 1996), 415-426

<sup>ii</sup> N Lowenthal 'Hasidism and Modernity: The Case of Habad', *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C, vol II, 109-116

<sup>iii</sup> S.A. Horodecky, *Ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Hasidim* (Tel Aviv, 1943) 68

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 69

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>vi</sup> A. Rapoport-Albert, 'On Women in Hasidism', S.A. Horodecky and the Maid of Ludmir Tradition', *History and Theory*, (1988), 495-525

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, 500

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, 502

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, 502-503

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, 504

<sup>xi</sup> Nehemia Polen. 'Miriam's Dance: Radical Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought'. *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992)

<sup>xii</sup> M. Feinkind, *Women-Rebbes and Famous Personalities in Poland*

<sup>xiii</sup> D. Weissman. 'Bais Yaakov: A historical model for Jewish feminists', in *The Jewish Woman* (New York 1976), 141

<sup>xiv</sup> J. Grunfeld, *An account of Bais Yaakov*, 119-145

<sup>xv</sup> N. Lowenthal. 'Womanhood and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism', in I Etkes, D Asaf (eds.), *In the circles of Hasidism, Essays in Memory of Mordechai Willenski*, (Jerusalem, 1999), 7-65

<sup>xvi</sup> D. Weissman. 'Bais Yaakov: A historical model for Jewish feminists', in *The Jewish Woman* (New York 1976), 143

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-6

# *Wisecrackers and korbanot: the emasculation of the Jew in war films*

BEN VOS

## War films are ‘popular’

Feature films given large-scale cinema release are popular art. The movie business, from Hollywood studios to DVD retailers, maximises profits by maximising appeal. Sophisticated patrons with deep pockets are less important than the number of tickets sold.

In order to increase sales, mass-market films rarely aim to alter audience preconceptions or pose awkward questions. While the movies of Jean Renoir or Alfred Hitchcock may be works of subtlety and craft, the history of the motion picture is not one of unalloyed sophistication or constant moral challenges.

When looking at successful movies we should expect a reflection of popular taste rather than any attempt to shape opinion. Pious Al Gore or Michael Moore documentaries are comparative rarities among the slew of Batmen, Bridget Joneses and by-the-book Disney romances.

Even where a popular film purports to be avant-garde or rebellious, there is often a sugar-coating to the pill. In the case of war films specifically and the public’s desire to see combat and explosions on screen, I suggest that a good portion of the audience for ostensibly ‘anti-war’ films such as *Platoon* or *Black Hawk Down* are less interested in Oliver Stone or Ridley Scott’s bleeding-hearts, than in fighting and big bangs.

Similarly, movies often pander to prejudice. The portrayal in *Enemy At The Gates* (2001) of docile Soviet soldiery with no apparent initiative has more to do with American views of *Homo Sovieticus* than with the Russian reality of the time.

It is not the purpose of this article to investigate to what extent and why popular movies boldly attempt to influence public opinion or slavishly follow popular tastes. I simply point out the staid nature of the war film as a genre to contextualise the repetitive devices, stereotypes and constant, aching clichéd themes that appear with regard to Jews. From popular war movies of the last 100 years, I will argue that not much more is on offer.

## The scope of this article

World Wars I (1914-1918) and II (1939-1945) were fought by conscripted armies. At that time there were very large numbers of young, socially-unconnected first to third generation male immigrant Jews. These men fought in the armies of the USA and UK and naturally feature regularly in films about the ‘common infantrymen’ of these conflicts. Because of the propaganda nature of the films, the names of Jewish soldiers, and their stereotyped behaviour, makes their ethnicity clear. They therefore form the bulk of the films I will analyse. I will look at a few films about conflicts other than the two world wars, – even *Independence Day*, which concerns a fictitious alien invasion – but Jews are inevitably thinner on the ground in films about Waterloo or Crimea.

There are many films which have proved impossible to find. I unearthed 62 films which I thought relevant to the subject, of which I managed to view 38, and found comprehensive synopses of a further 18. There will be films I have missed. While this article is a broad survey, it is incomplete and should be read as such.

This article will not deal with ‘true stories’: the way a filmmaker deals with characters only reveals his intentions when he is not forced simply to recount

what actually happened. This excludes several films based on a hard core of truth such as *Pride of the Marines* (1945) where machine-gunner Lee Diamond is seriously wounded, *The Killing Fields* (1984) about Cambodia war journalist Sydney Schanberg, Dutch film *Het bittere kruid* (1985), the doomed schoolchildren in *Au revoir, les enfants* (1987), Polish movie *Korczak* (1990), in which author and pedagogue Henryk Goldszmit goes to his death at Treblinka with the children he cares for, or *The Lost Battalion* (a 2001 remake of a 1919 original, which features at least one real-life Jewish soldier).

Unless the truth of a movie is very deeply buried in fiction I have not considered such films (though it is worth asking why so many people want to make films about Jews getting killed). Tempting though it would be then, to attack the simpering portrayal of the talented luftmensch in *The Pianist* (2002), it cannot be done because Władysław Szpilman was a real character. Films with wider factual ‘backdrops’ such as a battle or siege, do not necessarily count as true stories and are considered.

## Death in the war film

One of my main areas of focus will be one way films which get their point across in the most elemental way possible – by killing characters off. This article is therefore limited to war films which deal with soldiers, or at least where Jews are close to the front line. Civilian, ‘Home Front’ movies are not treated. Holocaust films are treated selectively because so many Jews died, and in so many ways, that it would be tragically impossible to read much significance into Jewish deaths. However, where a Holocaust storyline is directly pertinent to my themes, it is included.

I suggest that one can assume that where a film in which there is a death ends happily, or with some sort of equilibrium, then that death is a contribution to that balance. If a death is *necessary* for equilibrium to be achieved, then a war film, in which death is to be expected, allows the filmmaker an easier route to it than other genres. It is this ease-of-killing which has led me to war films, because I want to see whether Jews are particularly affected by that ease with which a character can be killed off.

## Background to Jewish portrayals in film

### Before World War I: The ‘Ghetto Jew’

Until the 1930s, Jews mainly featured in documentaries or heavily moralistic films known as ‘ghetto films’ as shabby East Europeans. i Stories often involved a stern patriarch battling the assimilatory instincts of his offspring: for instance the 1908 film *Romance of a Jewess*. The daughter marries out and then dies after a deathbed reconciliation. *The Jazz Singer* (1927) crowned this tradition with its tragic tale of a cantor father, his rebellious popular musician son and another deathbed reconciliation.

In early war films Jews appeared rarely, usually as impetuous, vaguely scheming yet scatterbrained, physically unprepossessing and martially unskilled, but with keen commercial acumen. This prejudiced view of Jews is not overtly hostile, though it is often used for comic effect. In *Fights of Nations* (1907) the section *Our Hebrew Friends* features two bickering Jewish hawkers and a gentile, who engage in a mutual kicking of rear-ends, which one of the Jews finds so enjoyable that he is prepared to bribe a policeman to allow it to continue.

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Numerous such clownish examples exist, such as *The Yiddisher Cowboy* (1911) or *Cohen Saves the Flag* (1913), in which Cohen and Goldberg poke each other’s eyes and bite each other’s ears over their rivalry for the love of Rebecca. Cohen and Goldberg enlist for the Union in the American Civil War; Cohen becomes a very-much-accidental hero so Goldberg pulls rank to get Cohen shot. Plucky Rebecca rescues Cohen by publicising his valour and Goldberg is punished. This

image of the fighting male Jew as petty, oafish and cowardly and made of weaker stuff than Jewish women, lived on for decades.

### **Between the Wars – the Jew as the ‘coming man’**

The 1930s saw a dramatic decline in the prominence of portrayals of Jews in American films. The 230 ghetto films produced before *The Jazz Singer* were not significantly added to in the early era of sound.<sup>ii</sup>

A 1934 American remake of the 1929 British film *The Lost Patrol*, featured a washed-up boxer called Abelson who in the remake was played by Sammy Stein, a Jewish bit-part player of impressive physique. Regardless of the intentions of the 1929 film (which I have been unable to see) as to the character’s ethnicity, the 1934 film makes Abelson a fairly obvious Jew and also a slow-witted, bumbling ruffian. Like all but one of his comrades, Abelson is killed by marauding Arabs. *The Lost Patrol* was all I could find from interwar American studios featuring Jewish soldiers.

Two films produced outside Hollywood deserve mention. The Jean Renoir movie *L’Grande Illusion* (1937) features four major characters: the aristocratic German superintendent of prisoners of war Captain Rauffenstein, and his three commissioned wards: wily working lad made good Lt. Maréchal, an ex-mechanic; Lt. Rosenthal the Jewish son of a rich banking dynasty; and Captain de Boeldieu, the sole representative of the old elite among the French officers under Rauffenstein’s command. Boeldieu and Rauffenstein perceive that their social class is being superseded by the middle class represented by Rosenthal and by the proletariat represented by Maréchal. The war is a catalyst for this change, yet Boeldieu appears reconciled to it. Eventually he dies to facilitate his comrades’ escape.

The almost unique phenomenon of a gentile dying for a Jew in a war film, may reflect the extraordinary political situation in France in 1937: this was a country where the Jewish Prime Minister, Leon Blum, had been beaten almost to death by a royalist mob a few months before taking office.

In other ways, Renoir’s film does not differ from the Anglo-Saxon film tradition in its portrayal of Jews through Lt. Rosenthal, whose origins are muddled and international and whose patriotism is explicitly based on the material wealth amassed in France and not on

anything intangible, as is the case with his lower class comrades. Rosenthal also fills the joker role we will see is commonly assigned to Jews. He is not a man of action, unlike Boeldieu and Maréchal, whose attempts to escape are recounted by Rauffenstein.

Though not a war movie, it is worth mentioning the Basil Rathbone vehicle *Loyalties*, a 1933 film which is unique as a relatively early British picture which treats as its main subject British anti-Semitism, and in which the viewer’s sympathies are directed to the rich, Jewish, Ferdinand de Levis.

These films from the interwar period portray British and French Jews as outside the mainstream of society. We will see that ‘half-in, half-out’ condition is the context for what happens to Jews in many later films.

### **World War II and since: the emasculated Jew**



*A Walk in the Sun*

Films produced during the American portion of World War II (1941-1945) often feature a multi-ethnic platoon in which each man is a recognisable type, identified by his name and perhaps some crude stereotyping. For instance, *Guadalcanal* (1943) features among others a Malone, an Alvarez, an Anderson and a Thurmond. *The Story of G.I. Joe* (1945) has a Murphy, a Dondaro, a Spencer and a Warnicki. The suspiciously happily-integrated pick ‘n’ mix nature of American society was on full and glorious display, with a cameo for an occasional ‘foreign’ character such as an African or a Sumatran islander, whose qualities always seem to include taciturn but unswerving loyalty to white American officers, semi-nudity, primitive weapons and the achievement of a heroic death.

Where are the Jews in this rainbow coalition? In *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943), the ship's captain reads off a list of the dead: Murphy, Anderson, Ribetti and Goldberg. The captain notes that 'it could be any one of us lying there'. The Jew then, had his place in propaganda flicks. The 1930s dearth of Jewish portrayals was over at least for the duration of the conflict.

What form do these Jewish figures take? Across a broad swathe of the war films I examined, stock Jewish characters emerge and suffer similar fates. The unifying feature of Jewish characters is their emasculation, which is generally achieved in one or more of the following three ways.

### Comic Jews

The Comic Jew is usually physically unprepossessing and reveals his ethnicity by his Brooklyn accent; he is the platoon joker and serves as relief from the earnest, chisel-jawed activities of the Anglo-Celtic lead characters, but he is also quick-witted or, at the least, quick to talk back to his superiors. The Comic Jew is unmartial and unthreatening. He does not need to die to be emasculated: he is already an unconvincing soldier. He appears regularly in the propagandising 'platoon films' of the 1940s and 1950s.



*Stalag 17*

### Sacrifice Jews

Where Jews are portrayed as militarily skilled, they tend to die. Jewish lives are sacrificed for the sake of non-Jewish lives, or are sold for some fatuous ethical lesson to be learned by the dead Jew's comrades. In short, where a non-Comic Jew shows himself the equal of the non-Jew at war-fighting, he generally perishes.

### Moral Paragon Jews

After World War II, there was a short grace period in which assimilated Jews are either portrayed neutrally, or as bearers (having just been victims to the corruption) of European civilisation and everything that is good therein. Moral Paragon Jews may be intended as 'positive' portrayals, though I would argue that being considered intuitively and irrepressibly holy is a form of emasculation.

### Wisecrackers

*Action in The North Atlantic* (1943) centres on a tanker in a merchant convoy headed from the States to the UK. Abel 'Chips' Abrams (played by Sam Levene) is another New York wisecracker: 'I got faith in God, President Roosevelt, and the Brooklyn Dodgers in the order of their importance.' As he is a Comic Jew, Chips does not 'need' to die – he is already emasculated by his lack of war-spirit.

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*Bataan* (1943) is set during the Japanese advance at the beginning of the Pacific war. We are introduced to the scratch squad of characters - tasked to destroy a bridge vital to the Japanese advance - with a gloomy note: '96 priceless days were bought for us – with their lives – by the defenders of Bataan'. We know that the characters are all doomed. But how will they die?

Serving under Captain Lassiter and Sergeant Dane is Corporal Jake Feingold, a portly 'Chemical Company' (non-combat) soldier who suffers from bunions and mistakes a monkey for a Japanese soldier, which he misses with his first shot. He is a regular soldier, bumbling enough to have lost his squad, which is the only reason he joins Lassiter. He is also faintly cowardly ('You gonna go looking for trouble?'). He is meant to be likeable but in an oafish, unsoldierly way.

The squad die off one-by-one. A Latino character nicknamed 'Yankee' is tortured and strangled by the enemy. Irish cook Molloy manages somehow to shoot down a Japanese aeroplane with a Thompson



submachine gun but is killed in the process. A Philippino dies of malaria whilst saying the *Mea Culpa*, but before he does so benefits from the quinine given to him by the conscientious-objector medic, though the medic himself also has the disease! Even 'conchies' can die nobly! This is a lesson in earnest propaganda.

In the concluding battle all the Americans are fierce and effective fighters: no ethno-religious group can do worse than any other. Bumbling Feingold does his bit before being shot, but in his death throes complains about his bunions and falls face-down into a filthy puddle. Sgt. Dane, by contrast, is killed making a heroic last stand in the last moments of the film; he digs his own grave, is consumed by a wild bloodlust and is overcome only by the weight of Japanese numbers. While this 'white' NCO is arguably portrayed as a fighter superior to all the non-Anglo-Saxons, an undignified, humiliating end is reserved exclusively for the Jewish combatant. Of all the ethnicities characterised, it is only the Jew who raises a laugh in death.

A similar character to Feingold is Weinberg, Second Engineer in the B-17 which is the focus of *Air Force* (1943). Among the various American stereotypes portrayed, Brooklynite Weinberg is the least warlike. He is overweight, slow, unprepossessing, and a wisecracker. He reacts to events with an unserious detachment or a smart remark rather than action. Weinberg can best the Japanese in combat, but footage of him fighting is sped up to comic effect; he suffers pratfalls and impotently curses the enemy.

The Comic Jew stereotype was not entirely unvaried. In *A Walk in the Sun* (1945), whose subject is a platoon marching into Sicily, some stock personalities are introduced by a narrator, including 'Friedman, lathe operator and amateur boxing champion, New York City.' Though he joshes incessantly with his friend Pvt. Rivera, the dialogue is realistic and often fit to laugh with. Friedman is not in Feingold or Weinberg's mould. He is physically imposing and is insouciant in the face of enemy violence; he and Rivera operate their Browning machine-gun with ease and skill. He expresses serious hatred for the Germans and a desire to 'crush them' something which one cannot imagine from the classic Comic Jew.

Is the comparatively realistic portrayal of Friedman the result of a Jewish director (Lewis Milestone), something *Bataan!* and *Air Force* lacked? Perhaps, but more likely Friedman is just about comic enough not to

'have' to die. The revelation of the Holocaust may also be relevant.

## Shoa and Sacrifice

The recognition of the Shoa (the British Government announced its knowledge in December 1942) sees the Sacrifice Jew become almost as common as the Comic Jew. There seemed to be developing a halting recognition that Jews were being removed from the world and that their portrayal needed more dignity than comic sidelining. But what remains is emasculation; a mass audience cannot be intimidated by clowns, but a martial Jew might frighten the horses. If a Jew appears who is not comic, or not wholly comic, he tends not to survive the film.

Elements of both the Comic and the Sacrifice Jew can be found in the 1942 movie *To Be or Not to Be*, a comedy set amongst a theatre troupe in occupied Warsaw. Greenberg, the one character who strongly implies his own Jewishness, is basically a New York

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Jewish character transposed to Poland, who backchats his employer and the occupiers. He ends the film being taken away by German troops, having dressed up as Hitler to distract the Germans from his colleagues (explicitly for the sake of Poland), enabling their escape to Britain. Greenberg is a Comic Jew, but was also sacrificed to save the lives of gentiles.

More subtle is the Sacrifice Jew character of Leo 'Transport' Andreof, another New York Jew played this time by Sam Levene in *Gung Ho!* (1943).<sup>iii</sup> As we would expect, Andreof is a gently jokey working-class regular soldier – he 'don't read the papers past the funny page' – apparently with a non-combat background (hence his nickname), yet he wears good conduct stripes. Having served pre-war with Nordic-sounding Lt. Col. Thorwald, Andreof is a doting sidekick to the officer.

During the climactic battle with the Japanese which ends *Gung Ho!*, Andreof is the most prominent amongst those killed – doubly so as a 'non-combat' character. The narrator informs us that the fallen 'died

for an ideal.' Colonel Thorwald speaks on the submarine after the mission has been completed and it is worth quoting him at length because it is rare to have a character elucidate on the reason behind a Jew's death:

*'Raiders... Whatever anyone may do in the days ahead, this was the first offensive action to be carried out. Our victory however has not been without the loss of men who were like brothers to us. But what of the future for those of us who remain? Our course is clear. It is for us at this moment with the memory of the sacrifice of our brothers still fresh, to dedicate again our hearts, our minds and our bodies to the great task that lies ahead. We must go further, and dedicate ourselves also to the monumental task of assuring that the peace which follows this holocaust will be a just, equitable and conclusive peace. And beyond that, lies the mission of making certain that the social order which we bequeath to our sons and daughters is truly based on freedom for which these men died.'*

Anderof is a less silly character than Feingold and Weinberg, but his martial potency is neutralised by his death. As a non-Comic Jew, his emasculation is achieved by being killed.

## Return to form

As abruptly as nuanced portrayals of Jews appeared after the Holocaust became known, they ceased. In *Stalag 17* (1953), a POW suspense movie, comic relief is provided by two of the inmates, Harry Shapiro and his friend 'Animal', whom the barrack chief calls the 'barracks' clowns'. Almost the consummate Comic Jew, Harry is slightly light-fingered, sensuous (he and Animal wangle themselves into the Russian female soldiers' barracks), artful but trivial (he receives repossession threats by post for a car he cannot pay for). He contrasts greatly with the serious, grudge-bearing men of action who share his barrack, being so far removed from physical action that when he diverts a German from discovering the hidden radio aerial by inviting him to play volleyball, the guard feels safe giving him his rifle to hold! He is *already emasculated*.

In the 1952 remake of the 1926 movie *What Price Glory*, Pvt. Lipinsky is the company clerk: not a central character, he is a non-martial, slightly incompetent, complaining soldier, shorter and older than most of his

comrades. He is not killed, but as the funniest person in an unfunny comedy, Lipinsky repeats earlier Jewish stereotypes as an archetype Comic Jew. The wise-cracking Jewish Pfc. Bernstein in *Attack!* (1956) is just another platoon joker, as is Cpl. Crane in *All The Young Men* (1960). They do not die, but do not 'need' to: their martial nature is already compromised by their humour.

Just as the Comic Jew made a reappearance in the 1950s, so did the Jew-as-sacrifice. *Destination Gobi*, also from 1953, is a ridiculous tale of American Navy scientists operating a weather station in the Mongolian desert. The film is approaching its end when with the aid of Mongol horsemen the scientists are on the verge of escaping the Japanese-occupied part of Asia by sea. The enemy engages them and thickset, carping, wisecracking scientist Wilbur 'Coney' Cohen is killed. The junk on which the Americans are sailing is re-named the 'U.S.S. Cohen' in his honour and as a result of the newly-painted name, circling US bombers do not attack. Directly because of Cohen's death, the gentiles survive. Similarly in effect, *In the Deep Six* (1958) features a Jewish petty officer, Frenchy, who dies on a mission helping a pacifist officer to prove his worth.

## Impact of the State of Israel

Israel's military successes of the 1960s appear to have moved the portrayal of Jews once again away from the comic, not to subtle characterisations, but rather back to the old Sacrifice stereotype. In *Anzio* (1968), Peter Falk plays Corporal Jack Rabinoff, a promiscuous, war-loving 'Black Devil' (First Special Service Force commando) attached to the US Rangers for the 1943 Italy landings.

Does Rabinoff's portrayal constitute progress on previous depictions of bumbling, ineffective Jewish fighters? Rabinoff is killed drawing the fire of a German sniper away from his comrades. In direct reaction to Rabinoff dying, the war journalist Ennis picks up a weapon for the first time and himself shoots one of the two remaining Germans. So Rabinoff is a Sacrifice Jew, who dies to impart what now reads (and probably did then) as a rather trivial piece of moral knowledge. Following the fight, Ennis answers a question he posed to a general at the start of the film:

*Ennis: Men kill each other because they like to...war has never solved anything, history teaches us that. But you face a man with a gun*

*in your hands, you live more intensely in that moment than at any moment in your life.*

*General: [this is a] helluva condemnation of mankind.*

*Ennis: But maybe if we recognise it and admit it to ourselves, we might learn to live with each other.*

The Sacrifice Jew appears in Dutch film *The Soldier of Orange* (1977). Jan Weinberg is a blond-haired Jewish college boxer. Weinberg fights collaborationist police when they assault a cowering Jewish hawk (an archetypal *smous jood*) – who has not had the benefit of assimilating into Dutch society through higher education. Weinberg's name 'Jan' indicates that he is not meant to be an atypical Jew.<sup>iv</sup> Caught by the Germans while attempting to flee the country, he is tortured then shot without assisting the Germans, but not before he manages to pass on to his comrades the name of a supposed traitor. The information is wrong, but Jan does not know that. He has died to save gentiles and we sympathise with him.

By this time the Comic Jew was not quite dead, but had to don female disguise when *Private Benjamin* was released. Duped and double-crossed throughout the film, Judy Benjamin succeeds by luck as much as by judgment for much of the time, and is fully in the tradition of *Cohen Saves the Flag*.

The highest-grossing movie of 1996 was *Independence Day*.<sup>v</sup> In this film it is an alcoholic, Vietnam-vet, widowed alien abductee gentile loser who makes up for his wasted life by immolating himself for the sake of mankind, flying a bomb-laden jet into an alien spaceship. The Jews in this semi-war film survive. Is this progress? I fear not, because the main Jewish character is a chess-playing boffin who was divorced by his gentile wife for his lack of vim. David Levinson is a sympathetic character, but weak; a 'type' which ethno-shy audiences may be comfortable with. He is a categorisable 'scientist Jew' rather than the older 'Comic Jew'. When Levinson regains the affections of his ex-wife there is still no triumph for the Jewish people because the lady in question is not Jewish. Again the result is not positive for the Jewish people.

## Contemporary portrayals: the rise and rise of the Sacrifice Jew

The crude Comic Jew seems to have disappeared after *Private Benjamin*, but the Sacrifice Jew remains a

standard device. In *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) Jacob is a soldier in Vietnam. He and, significantly, his son, are both dead by the end of the movie. The 'aim' of the film and Jacob's death, is to accuse the Pentagon of using mind-altering drugs on US soldiers during the conflict. Again, a Jew (Jews, to be precise) imparts a lesson by his death.

Giving a distasteful moral twist on the Jew-as-Korban is *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), in which US Ranger Stanley Mellish is a motivated, competent Jewish soldier. Towards the end of the film a POW previously set free by the squad kills Mellish in a horrific knife fight. That would just be the fortunes of war, but a cowardly gentile comrade of Mellish's named Upham fails to intervene in the fight, and when the final battle is over and the by-now recaptured POW appears rebellious, Upham shoots him in cold blood, presumably having 'learned a lesson'. To shoot prisoners is a legally dubious and expensively won lesson, but is portrayed as worthwhile.

The following year saw Robin Williams as the eponymous Jakob the Liar (1999) in which a shopkeeper who starts a rumour giving false hope to Jews ghettoised by the Germans is shot by Nazis, but redeems himself by revealing in the process that all of them are destined to die. Again, a stirring moral point is made, though at the cost of a Jewish life. There is one departure from the normal scheme: as there are no gentiles present for whose sakes the Jew can die, there are Jews instead; but as they are Jews, their fate is also death.

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*A stirring moral point is made, though at the cost of a Jewish life.*

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The 1961 Polish movie *Samson*, is relevant, in which Jakub Gold escapes the Nazi-established Warsaw ghetto. Gold's Jewish girlfriend Lucyna abandons her false identity to re-enter the ghetto to look for him when they are separated. He 'should' have done the same, by the morality of the film, but does not. So here the Sacrifice Jew is a woman. At the end of the film, though Jakub has outlived the ghetto, he has by his survival proved a moral and martial failure, another form of emasculation for a male Jew who could have joined the Resistance.

German movie *The Red Baron* (2008) is an interpretation of the career of First World War fighter pilot the Baron von Richthofen. It features a number of real-life characters though an ostentatiously Jewish pilot – Friedrich Sternberg – is fictitious. Why did the filmmakers not feature prominent real-life Jewish German pilots Paul Billik, Willi Rosenstein or Friedrich Rüdénberg, instead inventing a Jew who never lived? I believe the answer is that these three survived the war and the filmmakers wanted a Jewish plot device, a Sacrifice Jew who could die usefully for the plot. It is Sternberg's elaborately-treated, heroic death which sends Richthofen into near collapse and eventual rebirth as a more whole, thoughtful man.

## The Jew as Moral Paragon

A twist on the Sacrifice Jew is the Jew as Moral Paragon. In this vein, Herman Wouk's Pulitzer prize-winning novel *The Caine Mutiny* was made into a 1954 film of the same name in which officers in the US Navy, serving 'for the duration' undermine their long-serving career-sailor, ship's captain. Lieutenant Greenwald, the defence counsel for one of the officers, secures freedom for the defendant but recoils in shame at his own conduct and accuses the mutineers of not supporting their captain when he most needed their help. The film ends soon after Greenwald's moral confrontation.

Lt. Ansel Goldberg is a USAAF bombardier who reveals a bombing error contrary to the wishes of his comrades in *Command Decision* (1948). This revelatory act is Goldberg's main contribution to the plot.

Leadership movie *Twelve O'Clock High* (1959) features a Lt. Zimmerman, who commits suicide in part, it seems, to atone for his navigation error which caused delay to a bombing raid and hence the deaths of several flight crews.

*Hamburger Hill* (1987) features two Jewish soldiers, neither of whom seems particularly morally elevated. However, the faceless Ruth Silverman, who is named as the girlfriend of Pvt. Martin Bienstock (later killed) writes him a 'Dear John' letter telling him she will no longer write to him because of the immorality of the conflict (Vietnam) in which he is engaged. The catchphrase of Bienstock's comrades, uttered in response to the waste of life surrounding them, is 'It don't matter nothing'. It *does* matter to Bienstock and this sets his fate apart from theirs.

Phil Lowenthal, the navigator aboard the eponymous B-17 in *The Memphis Belle* (1990) is shown to be more than ordinarily nervous about flying the final mission of his tour of duty. He finds new reserves of courage, however, and saves the day.

Whether as moral agents who teach by their deaths, like Zimmerman or Rabinoff in *Anzio*, by revelation like Greenwald or Goldberg, or by redemption like Lowenthal, moral significance is bestowed on these soldiering Jews in the movies. Even in *Hamburger Hill*, a dystopian film made at a cynical time, the dead Jewish soldier remains a moral weathervane of sorts. It grates that so often the men's moral power is revealed only by their deaths - their ultimate emasculation - when being put on a moral pedestal is a crippling enough restraint.

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*Jewish men's moral power is revealed only by their deaths - their ultimate emasculation.*

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## Our own worst enemy?

*Enemy at the Gates* (2001) is perhaps more vulgar in its treatment of Jewish characters than anything since Sir Walter Scott's novel *Ivanhoe* (1819). It features a classic Sacrifice Jew and culminates with a supposedly-redemptive death of a Jewish character for the sake of a non-Jewish comrade, but it is so reminiscent of the vilest anti-Semitic fairy tales that it deserves ample coverage.

The story is very loosely based on the wartime career of Vasily Zaitsev, a Russian sniper of peasant origins who became a hero for his shooting prowess during the defence of Stalingrad against German siege. Other characters include Danilov, who is wholly invented, and Tania Chernova, a beautiful female member of the city militia and sniper, who did exist but who is portrayed very differently from her real-life self.

Danilov is Jewish and a Communist Party commissar, working just behind the front lines to bolster the troops by incendiary propaganda. He is introduced as a more pampered, superior-rank type to Zaitsev and unlike the hardy peasant, who snipes his way out of difficulty when the two first meet, he is content to pretend to play dead amongst a pile of Russian corpses.

As a political appendage of the Soviet state, Danilov does not fight, yet he propels himself and Zaitsev to fame through articles on the sniper's kills. He is bespectacled and unmartial, made to look like Vassily Grossman, but his propaganda pieces are angry and bloodthirsty, reminiscent of the article 'Kill' (1942), by Ilya Ehrenburg.

The juxtaposition of the pushy, slightly elevated, bookish, frustrated, un-physical Jew with the reluctant hero gentile, rurally brought up, blessed with a practical skill and a killer instinct, has rarely been more unsubtly portrayed outside of anti-Semitic literature.

Both Danilov and Zaitsev fall for Tania. Danilov has Tania transferred out of Zaitsev's reach when he learns of the romantic competition. Tania's Jewishness becomes apparent when she speaks of training to defend the yishuv. She wishes to fight as she tells first Danilov, who in turn wishes to keep her safe. Zaitsev enrolls Tania as a sniper when she tells him how her parents were murdered. Danilov is portrayed as soft-hearted, even as unwilling to defend his own people, whereas Tania could and would fight for her parents, her city, Russia or even a Jewish Palestine.

At the end of the film, under the erroneous impression that Tania may have been killed and realising that he has lost in love, Danilov reveals himself with fatal result to an enemy sniper, exposing the latter's position and enabling Zaitsev to kill the German. Danilov's bizarre act of self-sacrifice can be seen in the Hollywood tradition of redemptive deaths: a character may have been a spineless whelk throughout a movie, 'but golly gee, he went out like a man.'

The particular and most distasteful unpleasantness of *Enemy at the Gates* is that Danilov's death is followed by the pairing-off of tough-girl Tania with Zaitsev; in reality, Zaitsev may have been involved with Tania Chernova, but unlike in the film, the real Tania was not Jewish. Making her Jewish further emasculates the inadequate dead Jew Danilov.

Not so different from *Enemy at the Gates* in some ways is Quentin Tarantino's recent treatment of the Second World War.<sup>vi</sup> Unlike Danilov, the Jewish characters have few lines, are violent, vengeful, and in the spirit of the ethnocentric 2000s are described as 'Jewish American soldiers' rather than American Jews. One might argue that the depiction of the almost-all-Jewish unit as ultra-violent thugs, rather than wiseguys, moral plot hinges or martyrs shows progress. Against this is the fact that their officer is not Jewish.

More disturbing, and similar to the case of Danilov, is that the men's covert operation requires most of them to die in the process; the only survivor is called 'The Little Man' by the Germans and is thereby emasculated. A female Jewish character develops a parallel plot to that of the 'basterds', with a similar result. All the Jews are madly vengeful, reminiscent of antique oriental stereotypes in their fury and bloodthirstiness. The results are spectacular but uncomfortable viewing. Death or emasculation yet again!

## Emasculation by intermarriage

We have now seen two ways in which the Jew is emasculated, first by being made a comic character, and secondly by being killed, often for the sake of his non-Jewish comrades. If he is particularly unlucky a Jewish character in a war film will be both a buffoon and a sacrifice. There is an important third means by which the Jew is emasculated. As a rule of thumb, where non-comic Jews survive war films and marry, they marry gentiles. We have seen this model already in *Enemy at the Gates*.

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### *As a rule of thumb, where non-comic Jews survive war films and marry, they marry gentiles.*

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The 1958 adaption of Edward Anhalt's 1948 novel *The Young Lions* is a tale of three intertwined soldiers' lives: two Americans and a German. In the book, Jewish soldier Ackerman is killed at the end by the German. In the film, Ackerman survives, but returns to his non-Jewish wife and child. While he has not been emasculated by being killed, his Jewishness has been erased instead.

The French movie *Lacombe, Lucien* (1974) is a strange, grim film about a strange, grim teenage peasant boy who collaborates with the Vichy regime in wartime France. Lucien, the lad in question, is introduced to Albert Horn, an ex-Parisian Jewish tailor of *mitteleuropäan* origin. Horn is in hiding with his beautiful, blonde, Jewishly-uninterested daughter who is unsubtly named 'France' and whose honour Horn guards jealously. Horn's mother is traditional, religious, unattractive, and does not speak to the Vichyites who plague her son for free clothes in return for permission to remain alive.

Horn himself is louche, vulgar, lounging around in silk and velvet gowns, a none-too-subtle caricature of a ghetto Jew, elevated through trade to the *salons* of the *beau monde*. He claims to be French ‘sometimes’; he washes his hands after contact with gentiles and his meagre flat is piled high with mysterious dusty tomes and lit by low-hanging lamps (one is reminded of Scott’s description of Isaac the Jew’s unfeasibly oriental house in *Ivanhoe*). When Lucien stalls in helping the Horns escape to Spain, Horn forces his hand by confronting him at the hotel from where the Vichy police operate. Albert is arrested and sent away, presumably to his death, and the film implies that Lucien is impressed by Albert’s self-sacrifice.

Lucien kills an SS guard while together they are arresting the elderly Mrs. Horn and France Horn. There are other reasons for this killing, but Lucien then takes the Jews to the Spanish border. France sleeps with Lucien in a picturesque hayloft and seems to love him, though he has raped her on previous occasions (once in a bathroom – the combination of Jews, sex, cleanliness and bathrooms is a phenomenon that can be followed in much anti-Jewish literature and film). France considers killing Lucien but does not.

Then we are informed, over a final scene of France’s and the elderly Mrs. Horn’s freedom, that Lucien was eventually executed by the Resistance. Has he achieved redemption? Did Albert Horn show him how to act like a man? Did Albert Horn embrace his death to free his daughter, a sort of redeemed Shylock?

There is no doubt in the film that Vichy is evil, but it seems that parts of it, peasant French parts, can be redeemed by a Jewish death, and the Jews can be Francified if they ‘give up’ their Jewishness. For while the girl France survives, is she still Jewish? ‘Lucien, I’m tired, tired of being a Jew,’ she says. The choice of her name makes it seem that we are intended to view her explicit assimilation as a positive development. The result may be saved lives, but it is also Jewish oblivion and the death of the only Jewish man.

Much-lauded Italian film *Life is Beautiful* (1997) features Guido, a Jew who convinces his son that the German occupation is part of a game, even managing to disguise his own murder by German soldiers. In part, this ignorance saves the child’s life. The Jew has died, as per other films, but surely he is survived by his wife and child? Does that not indicate that the emasculation is incomplete? No, because Guido’s wife and therefore also his child are not Jewish. Horribly

therefore, this excellently-made film should be considered to have explicitly sacrificed Jewish continuity as well as an individual Jew’s life, for the sake of gentiles.

*Charlotte Gray* (2001), is an adaption of a Sebastian Faulks novel. It is similar to *Life Is Beautiful* in its grim racial separation. There are four characters of Jewish origin: a father and son, and two unrelated children. The father is an elderly artist and an eccentric, so by my criteria might have been hoped to be already comic and weak enough to be allowed to survive, however Jewish he may be. But he does not survive, and neither do the two children. The artist’s son is only half-Jewish, so is not deported to his death and eventually liaises romantically with the non-Jewish heroine. No Jew seems to survive without being denuded of their Jewishness by intermarriage or a change of cultural affinity.

More recently, the character of Shoshana in Tarantino’s contribution, though a determined killer like Tania in *Enemy At The Gates*, is apparently too good a catch to be paired up with a Jewish man. She does not even meet any of the Jewish male characters. Where a strong Jew is involved, and there is a chance that he or she might survive, there has to be a non-Jewish lover or spouse. Heaven forbid, it seems, that a proud or combative Jew should ever produce more of the same.

## Counter examples

Naturally, there are counter examples to the general pattern of Jewish emasculation I have set out. In *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), a rather non-descript Jewish soldier is the last of a platoon to die, but he imparts no lesson, and saves no others, in doing so. An unloaded attitude to Jewish soldiers is also displayed in *Torpedo Run* (1958) in which submarine radio operator Orville ‘Goldy’ Goldstein doesn’t have much to say but is tall, blonde and surprisingly strong and silent.

Lieutenant Solomon in *Since You Went Away* (1944) wears a prestigious Navy Cross medal ribbon; I do not know whether he survives the film, as I have not seen it in full. The German film *Hitlerjunge Salomon* (released here as *Europa Europa*) (1990) follows Solek, who survives the war pretending to be Aryan, and ends up happily in Mandate Palestine. In the Dutch movie *Zwartboek* (“Black Book”) (1996) a Jewish chanteuse named Rachel Stein survives to kill the murderer of her family, make aliyah, marry another Jew and have

children! A triumph for Jewish continuity, put above any moral messages, sacrifice or cloyingly meaningful deaths. French Great War movie *Joyeux Noël* (2005) features a Jewish German officer who survives the fighting with no discernible faults or weakness.

The North African Czech campaign film *Tobruk* (2008) reverses the themes I have identified. It features Lieberman, who is initially physically and militarily incompetent but survives the film, whereas his best friend – whose life he has previously saved – dies in a firefight so that he, Lieberman, may live. There are other examples, and perhaps it is significant that many of them come from recent films. Perhaps the hold of the old stereotypes is weakening.

## Conclusion

The Jew as buffoon clowning around while gentiles are busy with the important practical business of fighting wars is, after 60 years of the State of Israel, an archaic stereotype and has almost disappeared.

Yet there remains the troubling role of Jews in war films as sacrifices for the moral improvement of, or to save the lives of, gentiles. These celluloid sacrifices are still being made. A 1960s spin by Professor Robert Alter on the post-war situation was that through the ‘sentimentalisation of the Jews’, the filmmaking representatives of western culture have projected ‘its secret fears, its unadmitted desires or illusory fantasies of itself onto a patently unreal image of a figure from another culture.’<sup>vii</sup> The Jews in these films are an almost other-worldly entity, separate from real-life Jews and certainly from non-Jews, and free to be fixed with any quality needing a human representative.

Alter’s theory of idealisation of Jews may be one pop-culture method of dealing with a slow-to-assimilate real-life ethnic minority; but it seems to me to be yet another mode of emasculation particular to the years immediately after the war and the Holocaust. Before and after the idealisation phase, martial emasculation is achieved through comic characters and sacrifices. Few Jews survive war films with their lives, or willing to ‘produce’ more Jews.

I do not know whether the shifting forms of emasculation applied to military Jews in movies are a product of fear of Jews, hatred (or self-hatred in many cases) or both. On the assumption that movies reflect the popular mind to some degree, then the slow improvement in our portrayal from the hapless Cohen saving the flag in 1913, to the bloodshot-eyed killers of

Tarantino’s depiction, is only superficially impressive. The mainstream western movie narrative simply does not allow us to fight, to win and to survive.

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<sup>i</sup> Tom Zakin, ‘You Are Your Mother’s Son: Film, Gender, and Ethnicity in Assimilationist identity during the 1930s’, paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, 24 May 2009

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Levene often played Jewish roles, notably that of Lt. Abrams in the 1930s *Thin Man* films

<sup>iv</sup> I have a Jewish family tree with 6,000 names, most of them Dutch: I do not remember a single ‘Jan’

<sup>v</sup>

<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=independenceday.htm>

<sup>vi</sup> *Inglourious Basterds* (2009).

<sup>vii</sup> ‘Sentimentalizing the Jews’ in *Commentary* September 1965, quoted in P. Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Indiana 1984)



## Letter to the Editor

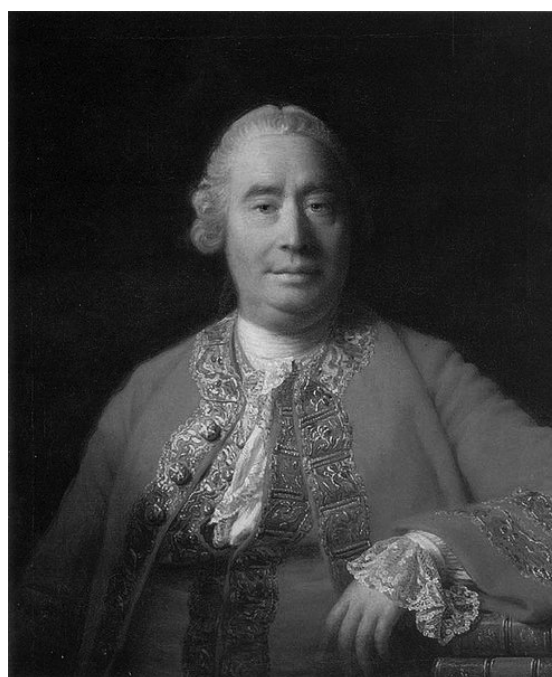
**Sir,**

You are to be congratulated, along with your contributing authors, for another superb edition of *Degel*: a truly exciting development for modern Anglo-Jewry. Nevertheless, there were a few unrelated issues, arising from two separate contributions that I'd like to respond to.

Taking them in reverse order, I would first of all like to discuss a couple of points that arise from Joseph Sueke's probing and scholarly article concerning wicked teachers. The various opinions that Sueke sketched, with such clarity, are as thought-provoking as they are useful for the day-to-day life of a Modern Orthodox Jew, combining secular and religious study. Nevertheless, there were some aspects of his analysis that I would like to challenge.

Before one can explore the answer to a question such as, 'is it permissible to learn from a wicked teacher?', it is imperative that we define our terms. In particular, we need a clearer idea as to what constitutes wickedness (or at least wickedness-for-the-purposes-of-this-discussion). Many of the Rabbanim that Sueke quotes assumed that Aristotle was a wicked man. Sueke himself, in providing an halakhic justification for quoting the words of David Hume, made a similar assumption regarding the great Scottish philosopher. How did these Rabbanim, and indeed Sueke, ground such assumptions – what does it mean, for them, to be a wicked person?

It was insinuated that Aristotle was wicked for believing that the world wasn't created at some point in time. But, when we recognise that Aristotle was in a tiny minority of monotheists,



*David Hume*

waging a religious war against an ocean of polytheistic pagans; that he was, most likely, unaware of the existence of the Torah, and living without the ethical examples of Avraham and Moshe to follow; when we add to this the fact that he strove to bring education to the masses (which would have been anathema to the elitism of Plato) and to publicise the oneness and perfection of God; it becomes a bit of a push to call him wicked on the back of this one doctrine about the nature of time and creation! When we add to this the fact that various Rishonim were openly willing to entertain this very Aristotelian notion – that the world wasn't actually created at any point in time (though very few of them actually subscribed to it) – our grounds for thinking Aristotle to be

wicked become shakier still – unless we're also willing to label the various Rishonim wicked in Aristotle's wake.

As for David Hume – it is generally accepted that his sceptical attitude contributed to the rise of secular humanism and its disregard for all things religious. But Hume's own religious convictions are a matter shrouded in ambiguity. He was an opponent of Catholicism and extreme forms of Protestantism, but surely this alone doesn't make him wicked. And to call him wicked because he, perhaps inadvertently, caused others to become atheists seems somewhat unfair.

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*What is it, except for the fact that they are not Jewish, that transforms Aristotle and Hume into wicked people?*

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How then do we come to the view that Aristotle and Hume are wicked? What does it mean to be wicked? By all accounts, Hume was a perfectly pleasant person, inclined towards good deeds and political liberty for all. Aristotle strove throughout his life to manifest in deed and character his best understanding of virtue. Rav Elisha ben Abuya, Sueke's other example, may well have been wicked: he knew the truth of Judaism and yet rejected the mitzvot; he also made a sordid advance on a woman of ill-repute. But is somebody who was never a talmid hakham, and never knew the truth of Judaism, wicked just because they don't believe in every dictum of our faith? What is it, except for the fact that they are not Jewish, that transforms Aristotle and Hume into wicked people?

Perhaps Sueke can be defended on these lines: in the specific halakhic topic of learning from the wicked, the term 'wicked' takes on a very technical meaning; in this context, all it means to be wicked is to fail to live up to one's halakhic obligations. To the extent that Aristotle and Hume failed to observe the seven commandments incumbent upon gentiles, they

were, for the purposes of this halakhic discussion, wicked people. According to the Rambam, a gentile fails to live up to these commandments merely for failing to realise that they were in fact commanded by God. Our general use of the term 'wicked' implies moral degradation. But somebody who conforms to all the norms of the seven commandments of Benei Noah without realising that they were actually commanded in them, is clearly not morally degenerate, even if they are wicked in this very technical sense of the word. If this is all that Sueke, and the sources he was quoting, meant by 'wicked', it should have been clarified for two reasons. First, not to specify the very restricted, and non-standard, sense of this word before applying it to people like Aristotle and Hume, who were, to all intents and purposes, far from moral degradation, is to engage in character assassination. Secondly, it changes the whole tenor of the discussion. If, when a Rishon forbids learning from the wicked, he merely means to prohibit learning from the morally depraved, then we might have a different response to his position than had he meant, by the term wicked, the morally praiseworthy non-believer.

The final issue I would like to raise with Sueke's article is as follows. Sueke suggests that the relationship between a teacher and a student in the realm of Torah study is highly intimate and therefore fraught with danger, which, Sueke insists, cannot be said, at least not in general, for the relationship between a teacher of secular studies and his/her students. This may well reflect the experience of many in the Modern Orthodox world, who attend university to acquire certain skills and a qualification, and don't necessarily want, or allow themselves, to be drawn into a passionate desire for secular wisdom. However, when a student attends university because they thirst for scholarship, things often turn out differently.

A student hungry for secular wisdom will likely enrol in a course of post-graduate research in which they will be appointed an academic supervisor. These relationships are very often stormy, intense, and highly intimate, as two minds share in a passion for a very specific and

in-depth area of thought, barely known to, or understood by, the uninitiated. From the time of Plato, in which the student teacher relationship was deeply interwoven with homoerotic desire, to the tempestuous relationship between Russell and his student Wittgenstein: the history of scholarship attests to the fact that Torah, unique in its holiness, is not unique in the intensity of the relationships that it generates between student and teacher. Such intensity, when channelled appropriately, is to be desired if the modern-orthodox embrace of modernity is to be anything more than a compromise.

The second contribution I want to discuss, if very briefly, came from Jeremy Jacobs. It is always refreshing to see that the leadership of the United Synagogue is passionate about the future of the US: surely one of Anglo-Orthodoxy's most important institutions. I recognise the difficulty of the road ahead. The US has to fight assimilation – keeping members in the fold – on the one hand, and, in order to ensure its financial health, it has to add value to synagogue membership. The current state of affairs, in which people are able to benefit from the Bet Din, the Kashrut Department, and the warmth of US congregations, without membership, and therefore, without making any financial contribution, seems unsustainable. How can the US, in order to secure its financial well-being, add value to membership without closing off the above mentioned services, which,

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*On the whole, Tribe's output has been much more remarkable for its razzmatazz than it has been for its vibrant Jewish content.*

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clearly, should be free-of-charge, to non-members? The challenge is gargantuan.

Nevertheless, there was something worrying in the content of Mr. Jacobs' hopeful vision. Mr Jacobs sought to demonstrate that a 'strong United Synagogue, proudly embracing the very

best values and traditions of Jewish life ... is no mere pipe dream' with an example. His example was the successful US youth wing: Tribe. He followed this assertion with the admission that there is 'much still to do'. Now, let me explain why I'm not filled with confidence when Tribe is held up as example of the way things are headed.

It is true that Tribe has had some stunning successes and is responsible for some truly phenomenal advances in Anglo-Jewish life: the rise of the community youth worker; the engaging weekly activities that have emanated from Rabbi Shaw's groundbreaking work in Stanmore; to name but two. Nevertheless, it remains true that, on the whole, Tribe's output has been much more remarkable for its razzmatazz than it has been for its vibrant Jewish content 'embracing the very best values and traditions of Jewish life'. It was no wonder that Tribe could swell the ranks of its membership, some years ago, by offering free DVD players to students who signed up enough of their friends. But, what has become of our religious community if membership is seen merely as a means to gaining a DVD player?

Of course, the US has to add value to membership, and there is a talmudic dictum of 'mitokh shelo lishma, ba lishma' (if you start off doing the right thing for the wrong reason, you'll end up doing it for the right reason): get the Jews into the US, so the reasoning runs, and then get them to identify more with their Judaism. I'm sure there's some merit to this line of reasoning. But the real challenge for Anglo-Jewish institutions isn't to sell membership in return for discount cards; we have to remember that we are more than just a business; we are a religious congregation; the real challenge is to package genuine religiosity in such an exciting way that people want to sign up not because of the gimmicks but because of the content; the real challenge is to create communities that are truly faith communities nourishing the Jewish soul; the real challenge is to excite kids about educational content more often than you excite them with a Jewish football tournament. If we cannot make the genuine 'product' of Jewish life attractive to sufficient numbers, then something

is deeply wrong – something that should not be papered over by discount cards.

I look forward to future issues of your engaging journal.

With best wishes,

Samuel Lebens

Yeshivat Hamivtar,  
Efrat,  
Israel.

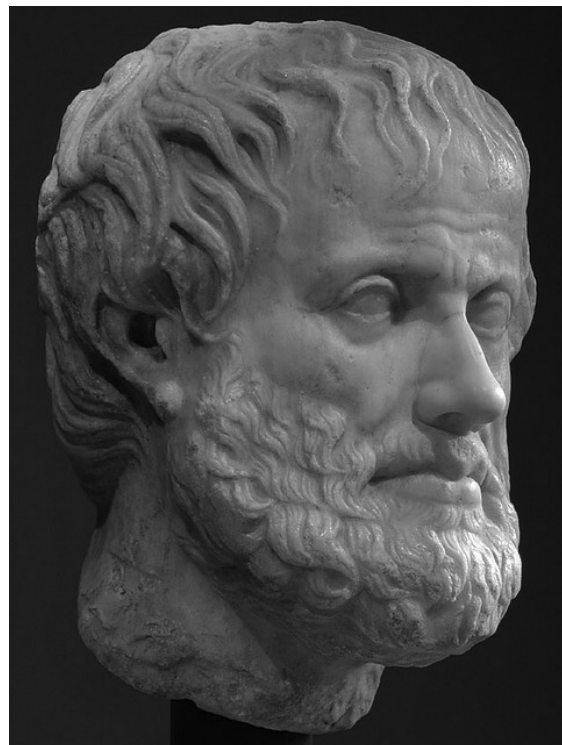
## Responses

Sir,

I am grateful to Dr Lebens for his critique of my article, passionately argued, which has encouraged me to clarify my own understanding of the subject. To write about learning from wicked teachers, and not define the terms, is a serious omission. I will attempt to rectify this, deal with his criticisms of my remarks about Aristotle and David Hume, and, finally, examine more closely the difference between learning secular wisdom and Torah, from a teacher.

Wickedness means different things in different contexts, and its use in Rabbinic literature, in many cases, differs from the conventional meaning of ethical depravity. In the courtroom, for example, a 'wicked' witness, who is thereby disqualified from giving testimony, is one who is suspect in monetary matters: the dice player and the lender of money with interest, to give but a couple of examples (Sanhedrin 24b). Although, not necessarily ethically depraved, the Torah uses the term wicked to describe this witness (Shemot 23:1). In the context of those who lose their share in the World to Come, wickedness is defined as having heretical beliefs. It includes those who say that the resurrection of the dead has no source in the Torah, and that the Torah does not come from Heaven (Sanhedrin 90a). There is no suggestion here that these people are ethically depraved; it is their heretical beliefs which make them wicked. For a teacher, there is yet another definition.

The verse in Malakhi, the scriptural source at the heart of the issue, says 'they shall seek learning from his mouth, for he is an angel of the Lord of Hosts (Malakhi 2:7)'. And, by implication, a



Aristotle

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*In the Rivash's opinion,  
Aristotle held two views that  
undermine the very foundation  
of Jewish belief.*

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teacher who falls short of this angelic benchmark is off-limits. Clearly, this cannot be understood literally; indeed, if it were, who could ever put themselves forward to be a teacher –

‘there is no man on earth who does (only) good and sins not’ (Kohelet 7:20)? Nevertheless, there is an expectation that the teacher must be at a high level of piety. Admittedly, it is hard to know exactly where to draw the line, and to provide any definitive criteria would be an over simplification. It can be difficult to decide which teacher makes it into this elite group, and which falls short. We can, however, make definite judgements in certain clear-cut cases. For example, Elisha ben Abuya, with his heretical beliefs, violation of the Shabbat, and display of immorality, is undoubtedly in the non-angelic camp.

Can we stretch this further and force Aristotle and Hume to keep company with Elisha ben Abuya? I think so. After all, my argument is not that Aristotle and Hume are the ‘embodiment of evil’, as Dr Lebens suggests, simply that they do not make it into the elite group. Perhaps, instead of my article being titled ‘The Rambam’s view of learning from wicked teachers’ it would have been clearer, although somewhat awkward, to give it the title, ‘The Rambam’s view of learning from teachers who are not like “angels of the Lord”’.

Once we have framed the debate in these terms, we can see why the Rivash, for example, believes we should stay away from Aristotle’s teachings. In the Rivash’s opinion, Aristotle held two views that undermine the very foundation of Jewish belief. These are the Aristotelian views that the universe is eternal and that God has no direct involvement in the day to day running of the world. And when we add to that Aristotle’s insistence that true knowledge can come only from human investigation, and not tradition passed down from one generation to the next, an idea which runs counter to our belief in the Masora, it becomes impossible to claim that Aristotle can take his place among those teachers who are like angels of the Lord.

As for David Hume, the Scottish philosopher who openly mocked belief in God and religious practice (see for example Treatise on Miracles and Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding), it is out of the question to say that he is the type of teacher the prophet Malakhi had in mind.

I am unclear as to how the Rivash would treat great Rabbis who considered the possibility that Aristotle was right. Rav Sadya Gaon and the Ralbag were willing to entertain the Aristotelian view that the universe was not created at a point in time. Perhaps the Rivash is not too concerned as these Rabbis suggest merely that such a thing is possible, not that this is actually what happened.

While I agree with Dr Lebens when he says that the relationship between a student and a secular teacher can be highly intimate, I believe that it is fundamentally different from the relationship between a student and a teacher of Torah. When it comes to secular studies, the student chooses his teacher based on the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom: does he have a good command over the subject; can he communicate ideas effectively; can he inspire the student to engage with the subject? But this is where it ends. The professor’s life outside the classroom is of no concern to the student. What difference is there if outside the classroom the teacher is a brute? Even if he does happen to be ethical, this is coincidental. The relationship, therefore, is essentially limited. Not so with a teacher of Torah.

In Torah, the student sees his teacher beyond the confines of the classroom and examines every nuance of his teacher’s personal conduct. Several students in the Talmud followed their Rabbis into the bathroom and hid beneath their beds – ‘It is Torah, and learn it I must’ was their motto (Berakhot 62a). Misguided, perhaps (as is clear from the sugya there), but, when it comes to

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*In Torah, the student sees his teacher beyond the confines of the classroom and examines every nuance of his teacher’s personal conduct.*

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Torah, we can see the extent of just how far the student-teacher relationship goes.

The transmission of knowledge from teacher to student is fraught with danger. Who knows what subtle influences and biases are woven into the

fabric of the wicked teacher's lessons? Who can say, for certain, that they are a gadol like Rabbi Meir in Hagiga, and therefore capable of extracting the good lessons from the wicked teachers words? We must, indeed, choose our teachers carefully.

Yours faithfully,

*Joseph Sueke*

London

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**Sir,**

I was surprised and perturbed by the response of Samuel Lebens to an article by Jeremy Jacobs in your publication, where he states 'Tribe's output has been much more remarkable for its razzmatazz than it has been for its vibrant Jewish content 'embracing the very best values and traditions of Jewish life'.'

Dr Lebens is misinformed. He should know that Tribe is running far more than 'razzmatazz' across the community. We run an ever expanding summer camp which has over 150 children

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*Tribe is running far more than  
'razzmatazz' across the  
community.*

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attending this summer, the vast majority of whom are not observant. We supply hundreds of hours of shiurim to a whole range of students on gap year courses with FZY and the like. Tribe now runs successful trips to Israel, Budapest and Poland inspiring hundreds of young people every year. On top of all of that we are currently



engaged in revolutionising our children's services and hedaram across our communities.

I fully agree with Dr Lebens that 'the real challenge is to package genuine religiosity in such an exciting way that people want to sign up, not because of the gimmicks but because of the content'. It is true that in our early days Tribe used various methods to raise awareness, but this was always an initial strategy to allow us to eventually grow into the organisation that we now are. Without laying the foundations at the beginning there is no way we would now be in the position we are in. I can guarantee to Dr Lebens that the forty sixth formers who davened Shaharit at Auschwitz this year came with Tribe because of the content and content alone. Tribe has been instrumental in setting up a curriculum across US communities that engages and interacts with young Jewish souls from birth till marriage; it is a work in progress but a work that places content and identity at the heart of the organisation.

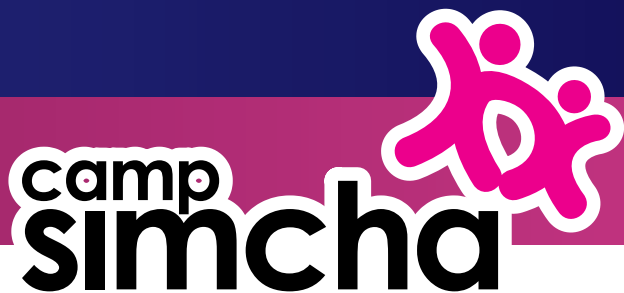
I can assure Dr Lebens that Tribe is looking forward to continuing to expand its groundbreaking Jewish activities across our US communities with an emphasis on content above all else.

Yours faithfully,

*Rabbi Andrew Shaw*

Executive Director, Tribe  
0208 343 5656  
[rabbishaw@tribeuk.com](mailto:rabbishaw@tribeuk.com)





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A FOUNDER OF ALEI TZION

ה. ב. צ. נ. ת.