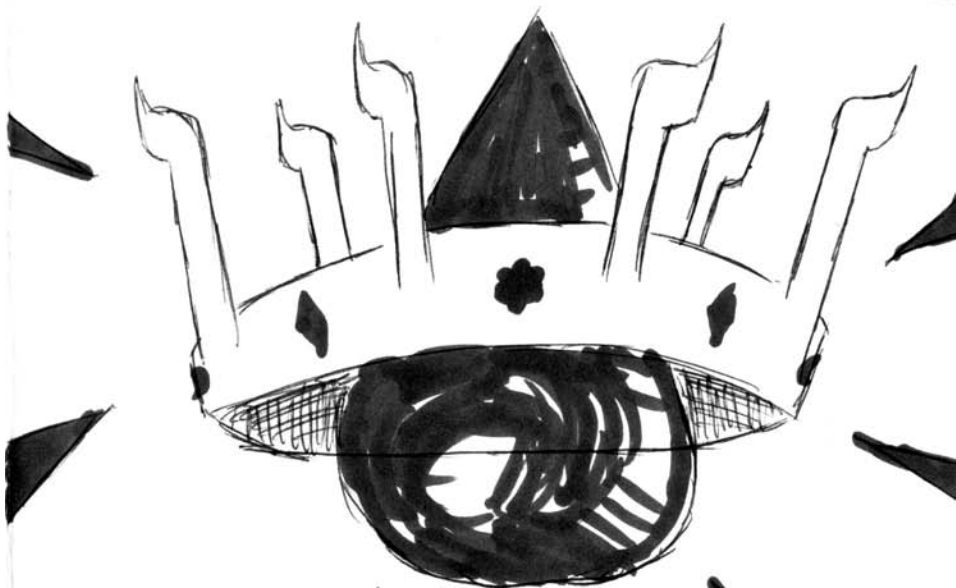


מימים מחזוריים



The Student
Torah Journal of
Maimonides School

העיתון התורני של
ישיבת רמב"ם

תשע"א • 2010-2011

מים אחרונים

Mayim Achronim

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The Student Torah Journal of

Maimonides School

Brookline, Massachusetts

Editors' Note

It is our pleasure to present to you this year's edition of *Mayim Achronim*, the Torah Journal of Maimonides School. We are sure that you will be edified by the articles found herein. We must extend our heartfelt thanks to our contributors, who, in the face of nearly insurmountable workloads, managed to produce, as always, thought-provoking and rigorously composed articles. We must also acknowledge the impending *aliyah* of our esteemed Rosh Yeshiva and faculty advisor to *Mayim Achronim*, Rabbi David Shapiro. His astute advice and careful copy-editing have been indispensable to the preparation of this journal. We wish him and his Rebbetzin all the best in Israel, and since we know that אין תורה כתורת ארץ ישראל, we look forward to continuing to learn Torah from Rabbi Shapiro long distance. Thanks as well are due to Erica Schultz, who has ably facilitated the publication of this journal.

A note to the reader: Though *Mayim Achronim* contains mostly articles, non-verbal expression is a powerful avenue through which profound ideas and concepts may be conveyed. To that end, the following Judaically-themed art pieces have been included in this edition of the journal: Sara Flesh's "*Magen David Color Palette*," Yonina Frim's "Night Expanse," Ms. Sara Herst's "Verse Illustration," Ms. Susana McDonnell's "Star Abstraction," Rivka Rumshiskaya's "Fall Growth", and Ms. Erica Schultz's "Elokai Ntzor". The front and back covers were drawn by *Mayim Achronim* Art Director Ari Green.

Editorially yours,
Elliot M. Salinger and Avinoam J. Stillman

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An Aggadic Interpretation of ים and ירושלים Annie Davis

Editors' Note: This article is adapted from the d'var Torah delivered during Maccabia on June 1, 2011.

Throughout the Aggadah, חז"ל appear to be rather ambivalent about the sea. On the one hand, they portray it as arrogant and dangerous, yet on the other, they liken it to prayer and repentance. For example, in כ:כ, ישעיהו, the sea is compared to רשעים: "והרשעים כים נגרש" — "The wicked are like the raging sea." ילקוט שמעוני (פרק יז, רמז תכ) explains this comparison as follows: "One wave says, 'When I rise up, I will overwhelm the entire world,' but as soon as it reaches the sand, it is subdued. However, the next wave learns nothing from the first." According to ילקוט שמעוני, the ocean represents an unhealthy combination of roiling ambition and extreme egocentrism, the sort that often causes humans to err and suffer.

מדרש תהילים, however, presents the sea in a different light. It relates (מזמור צג) a story of Hadrian Caesar, who wanted to understand how the sea praised God. To achieve this end, he put several men into a glass chest and lowered them into the Mediterranean. When the men were pulled out of the water, they declared that they had heard the sea praising God thus: "אדיר" — "The Lord on high is mighty." Here we see the ocean's capacity for תפילה, perhaps a metaphor for our own.

In a similar vein, איכה רבה states: "Prayer is akin to a ritual bath, while repentance is like the ocean. Just as a ritual bath is sometimes closed, so, too, are the Gates of Prayer sometimes closed. But the ocean is always open for anyone who wants to bathe in it, just as the Gates of Repentance are always open" (פרשה ג, פסקה טו). Thus, in addition to being simultaneously cast as the epitome of conceit and the essence of prayer, the sea is depicted as a welcoming doorway for the penitent. Although חז"ל describe the sea as haughty and destructive, they also

associate it with תשובה and תפילה. This brings us to the topic of יום ירושלים.

יום ירושלים is a day not only of celebration, but also of contemplation. As we rejoice over the reunification of Jerusalem, it would be appropriate to pause briefly and recall that our actions led to its downfall two thousand years ago. אבות דרבי נתן beautifully expresses the tension between the קדושה and רשעות that existed in Jerusalem: “Ten portions of suffering are in the world: nine are in Jerusalem, and one is in the rest of the world. Ten portions of physical strength are in the world: nine are in Jerusalem, and one is in the rest of the world. Ten portions of wisdom are in the world: nine are in Jerusalem, and one is in the rest of the world. Ten portions of hypocrisy are in the world: nine are in Jerusalem, and one is in the rest of the world. Ten portions of Torah are in the world: nine are in Jerusalem, and one is in the rest of the world.”

Jews, like the sea, have the potential for bad and good. Like the waves of the ocean, our arrogance led to our downfall, to גלות. Yet we also possess faculties for strength, wisdom, Torah, תפילה, and תשובה.

אגדת בראשית presents a מדרש that offers a clear parallel to our history: “A valiant captain had a ship in which he prevailed over both waters and winds. When pirates came against him, he rose up and slew them all. After a while, just as he reached the entrance to a port, a violent wind came, and his ship broke apart. He began beseeching mercy of the people [on shore]: ‘I beg of you, save me.’ They replied, ‘Yesterday you prevailed over both winds and pirates, and now you ask others to save you?’ He said, ‘As long as my ship was in existence, I was valiant and did not need to have people help me. Now that my ship has broken apart, my strength, too, is broken.’”

During the time of ישעיהו, the military and economic success of יהודה made us conceited, marring our relationship with God, our ship, and leading to the חורבן. However, it is important to remember that ships can be repaired. And it is up to us as much

as to God to make sure that ירושלים becomes עיר הבנויה במהרה
בימינו.

מלאכי ג:כג
Yehuda Gale

"הנה אנוכי שולח לכם את אלייה הנביא לפני בוא יום ה' הגדול והנורא"

הנה אני לוקח את בני ישראל מבין הגויים אשר הלכו שם (יחזקאל לו: כא)
אנוכי הוא מנחמכם (ישעיהו נא: יב)
שלח לכם את הדגן והתירוש והיצהר ושבעתם אתו ולא אתן אתכם עוד
חרפה בגוים (יואל ב: יט)
לכם לב חדש ורוח חדשה אתן בקרבכם (יחזקאל לו: כו)
את ירושלים גילה ועמה משוש (ישעיהו סה: יח)
אלייה התשבי קום (מלכים ב א: ג)
הנביא אשר שלחו ה' באמת (ירמיהו כח: ט)
לפני ה' כי בא לשפוט הארץ (תהילים צח: ט)
בוא אלי בבקר ויפתח פי ולא נאלמתי עוד (יחזקאל לג: כב)
יום ה' על כל הגויים (עובדיה א: טו)
ה' מלך ישראל וגואלו (ישעיהו מד: ו)
הגדול המחולל בגויים (יחזקאל לו: כג)
והנורא שומר הברית והחסד לאוהביו ולשומרי מצוותיו (דניאל ט: ד)

Tongs Made From Tongs

Ms. Adina Polen Mayse

Editors' Note: This article was adapted by the author from her דרשה on the occasion of her becoming a בת מצוה, which was composed in collaboration with her father, Rabbi Dr. Nehemia Polen.

The Mishnah in *Pirkei Avot* Chapter Five, Mishnah Six, tells us that there are ten things which were created by God *Erev Shabbat Bein ha-Shmashot*—on the eve of the first Sabbath of creation, at twilight. As with any list, we will seek to discover why the items on the list were chosen, and to understand what theme unites them as a group. Additionally, we will attempt to discern the significance of their creation at twilight, the *Bein ha-Shmashot* time, at the moment of transition from the week to Shabbat.

To begin our examination of these questions, let us first review the Mishnah:

עשרה דברים נבראו בערב שבת בין השמשות, ואלו הן: פי הארץ, ופי הבאר, ופי האתון, והקשת, והמן, והמטה, והשמיר, והכתב, והמכתב, והלוחות. ויש אומרים, אף: המזיקין, וקבורתו של משה, ואילו של אברהם אבינו. ויש אומרים, אף צבת בצבת עשויה.

“... These are: The mouth of the earth; The mouth of the well; The mouth of the donkey; The rainbow; The Manna; The rod; The *Shamir*; The writing; The format; and the stone tablets. And some include: the spirits; the grave of Moshe; and the ram of Abraham. Others include: The original tongs, for tongs can only be made by means of tongs.”

The Commentary of Rav Ovadia of Bartenura (15th Century) explains these terms as follows:

1. “The mouth of the earth” refers to the opening in the earth which swallowed up Korach after he rebelled against Moshe.

2. “The mouth of the well” refers to the wellspring which followed *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert, on account of the merit of Miriam. This well uttered a song of praise which is recorder in *Sefer Devarim*.
3. “The mouth of the donkey” refers to the donkey which spoke to the prophet Bil’am in the desert, when he was called upon to curse *Bnei Yisrael* and in the end blessed them.
4. “The rainbow” refers to God’s bestowal of the rainbow to Noah as a sign of the covenant that God would never again bring a flood to destroy the entire earth.
5. “The manna” refers to the heavenly food which sustained *Bnei Yisrael* during the forty years in the desert.
6. “The rod” refers to the Staff of Moshe, with which he performed the miracles of the Exodus.
7. “The Shamir” refers to a miraculous and tiny creature which had the power to burrow through the hardest stone. It was used to engrave the gemstones which were placed upon the *choshen*, the breastplate of the *Kohen Gadol*, upon which were written the names of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.
8. “The Writing” refers to the shape of the Hebrew letters which were on the tablets of the Ten Commandments.
9. “The Format” refers to the fact that the writing on the tablets could be read from all four sides of the Tablets of stone.
10. “The Tablets of Stone” refers to the construction of the Tablets themselves.

The last item listed in the Mishnah, *tzevat* or tongs, is considered miraculous because tongs can only be fashioned by use of other tongs, to hold them in the fire so that they can be shaped properly. This leads to a paradox of infinite regress: if each pair of tongs requires a prior pair to make it, how was the first pair fashioned? So the Mishnah tells us that the first pair was made by God on *Erev Shabbat Bein ha-Shmashot*, at twilight just before Shabbat of the first week of creation.

As we have noted above, this Mishnah provokes a number of questions. First of all, what is the significance of the time *Bein ha-Shmashot*—what does it mean to say that these items were created at the end of the first week of creation, just before Shabbat? Secondly, what common feature unites the items chosen for the list? Why did the Mishnah choose these items and not others? If the Mishnah wanted to list all the miracles in the Torah, why did it not mention the splitting of the Yam Suf, the Sea of Reeds, for example?

To try to answer these questions, my father and I looked at commentaries to the Mishnah for their insights. The Rambam (1135-1204) in his Mishnah commentary writes:

“We do not believe that God’s Will changes from time to time. Rather, at the beginning of creation all things were given their nature: *teva*. What we call nature is nothing more than the habitual way the world generally functions. Even a miracle is really part of nature; it is just that the item in question only acts that way very rarely. But even in situations that we call miraculous, God built it into his plan at creation that they should one day act in an unusual manner. Therefore, the Mishnah tells us that on Erev Shabbat it was built into the plan of the earth that it would one day open up to swallow Korach and his followers. It was built into the plan of nature that one day Miriam’s well would give water, and that one day the donkey would talk to Bil’am. One may ask, if all miracles were actually built into the nature of things from their inception, why does the Mishnah specify only these ten items? The answer is that indeed all miracles were built into creation, but only these ten were initiated *Erev Shabbat Bein ha-Shmashot*. The splitting of the Sea, for example, was provided for when the upper waters were divided from the lower waters on the second day of creation. Similarly, on the fourth day, when the sun was created, a provision was built in that the sun would stand still in the days of Joshua. All miracles were

provided for during the first week of creation, but only these ten were put into nature on *Erev Shabbat Bein ha-Shmashot*.”

The Rambam’s comment on the Mishnah is consistent with his general approach, minimizing the role of miracles, and stressing the importance of *teva*, nature: *Olam ke-minhago noheg*: The world follows its established pattern. But the Rambam’s approach prompts another question: Why weren’t the miracles listed in the Mishnah *also* built into nature on the day they were created? For example, why wasn’t the provision for Bil’am’s donkey built into nature at the same time that the animals were created? Similarly, why wasn’t Miriam’s well created when the water was created? The Rambam’s approach does little to clarify what unites the ten items listed in the Mishnah, and what distinguished them from any other miracles found in the Torah.

These questions are raised by the Meiri—Rabbi Menachem ben Shlomo of Perpignon (1249-1316)—in his commentary on Pirkei Avot. The Meiri also points out that not all of the items on the list have a miraculous quality. The rainbow, for example, is a natural phenomenon. The Meiri’s own approach to the Mishnah is that the items on the list are all necessary for the preservation of the Jewish People and the beliefs of Judaism. For example: the mouth of the earth which devoured Korach teaches the principle that the wicked are punished, while Miriam’s well teaches us that the righteous are rewarded. The rainbow was not a miracle, but is a constant reminder of Judaism’s belief in divine providence [which saved Noah from the flood]. The staff reminds us of the Exodus from Egypt. The grave of Moses is important not because it was miraculous, but because it was hidden from all humans. This prevented us from falling into the error of treating Moshe as a god and worshipping at his grave.

The Meiri also points to a version of our Mishnah’s list found in the Gemara Pesachim 54b. The Gemara adds to the list the cave which gave shelter to Moshe and Eliyahu at Har Sinai. According to the Meiri, this cave symbolizes the principle of

prophecy, because in order to become a prophet, one must isolate oneself and meditate [*hitbodedut*]. Since prophecy is an essential principle of Judaism, the cave of Moshe and Eliyahu finds its place in the Mishnah.

But the Meiri's approach is not without its own difficulties. For one may still ask the question which he himself asks of Maimonides: why wasn't the splitting of the Yam Suf included in the Mishnah, since it was essential to the survival of Bnei Yisrael as they left Egypt, and teaches us the belief in divine power and Providence. Also, the Meiri does not address the significance of the time *Bein ha-Shmashot*, and why the Mishnah makes such a point of specifying this time period.

A Hasidic approach is found in the commentary to Pirkei Avot of the Kozienitzer Maggid, Rabbi Yisrael ben Shabbtai Hapstein (1733-1814). In his commentary, known as Avodat Yisrael, the Maggid first explains the term *Bein ha-Shmashot*. He writes that the term suggests *Shnei Shimushin*—dual function: שפעם משמש כך, ופעם כך.

Each item on the list can function in one of two different ways. The time of twilight is symbolic of the in-between-ness of the item, the fact that it can be understood or used in one of two different ways.

One good example of the way the Kozienitzer Maggid understands the Mishnah is his interpretation of the *Pi ha-Be'er*, the mouth of the well. He notes that *Be'er* can also mean to explain, or to interpret. He quotes a verse in the beginning of *Sefer Devarim* (1:5),

הואיל משה באר את התורה הזאת שהיא התורה שבעל פה שהיא כמו באר ממש – מקור נובע מים שאין להם סוף.
“Moshe began to interpret this Torah, which is to say, the Oral Torah. The Oral Torah is truly like a wellspring—a source overflowing with water endlessly.”

In good Hasidic fashion, the Kozienitzer Maggid creates an association based on sound between two words. But this is no

mere wordplay, because he shows how the two concepts are truly related in a very deep way. The mouth of the well is actually the mouth which brings forth new explanations of the Torah. And he continues:

כי בתורה שבכתב יש בה על כל פנים מדה וקצבה כפי הנראה. אבל תורה שבעל פה היא פירוש התורה שבכתב לאין קץ וחקר – ועל ידה נתגלה פירוש התורה שבכתב. נמצא שהתורה שבכתב מתעטרת בתורה שבעל פה.

“The written Torah has a measure and a limit. But the Oral Torah, the interpretation of the Written Torah, is endless and without measure. The Oral Torah reveals the inner meaning of the Written Torah, such that the Written Torah is crowned by the Oral Torah.”

For the Kozienitzer Maggid, the *Pi ha-Be'er* exemplifies the *Bein ha-Shmashot* quality—the dual nature of Torah interpretation. This is demonstrated in the very fact that *Be'er* can mean both well and interpretation, and that the flow of interpretation is endless. Furthermore, the *Bein ha-Shmashot* nature of Torah expresses itself in the dual concept of *Torah she-bi-Chtav/Torah she-be-Al Peh*. That is, the Torah itself is finite in written form, but infinite in its capacity for interpretation. This is the real meaning of *Bein ha-Shmashot*—the in-between-ness of Torah.

Another example of the Kozienitzer Maggid's approach is his interpretation of the Mishnah's item #6, the *Mateh*, the Staff of Moshe with which he performed the miracles. The Kozienitzer Maggid points out that the word *Mateh* can be taken not as a noun, but as a transitive verb, meaning “to incline, to cause to lean in a certain direction.” Once again, a hasidic wordplay discloses an inner deeper level of meaning: the *Mateh* demonstrates the human ability to use language to incline meaning in different directions, and thereby to change our reality, just as Moshe inclined the Staff, and changed the water into dry land. And, the Kozienitzer Maggid notes, this too is an

example of *Bein ha-Shmashot*, the dual quality of the world: that the Sea is created to be a Sea, but when Hashem working through Moshe wants to make a change, it can become dry land.

In a similar manner, the Kozienitzer Maggid explains the significance of items #8 and #9: *Ha-Ktav ve-ha-Michtav*—the writing and the Format of the Tablets. He states that each time a person produces a new understanding of Torah, he creates a new heaven and a new earth. When we utter the holy letters of Hebrew when we daven or study Torah, then Hashem is enclothed in those letters and words—*תלבש באלו האותיות והדיבורים*—but Hashem’s greatness and power are unbounded, so from each tiny letter there emerges a great world, a new world, full of new possibilities, unbounded by the limitations of the old world which preceded it—*ועכשיו נעשה עולם אחר חדש*.

My father suggested an addition to the interpretation of the Kozienitzer Maggid. It may be pointed out that all of the items in the Mishnah’s original list relate in some manner to language, and point to the power of language to transform reality. The opening in the earth which sent Korach to his grave is not simply called a hole, a cleft or a chasm, but a “mouth.” Miriam’s well is also described as having a mouth, which, as we know, broke out in a song of praise. Bil’am’s donkey was given the ability to use its mouth in human language. The rainbow is indeed a natural phenomenon, but only after the flood does Hashem call it *Ot Brit*—a sign of the covenant—*Ot* meaning both sign and letter. Similarly, a flask of Mannah was placed in the *Beit ha-Mikdash* as a sign and reminder of Hashem’s love of Bnei Yisrael. The *Mateh*—the Staff of Moses—is described as performing the *Otot*, the signs. The Shamir was used to engrave the names of the Twelve Tribes of Israel on the gemstones of the Choshen. The last three of the ten—The Writing, The Format, and The Tablets of Stone—clearly relate to language and its power. So, what unites the items on the Mishnah’s list is their *Bein ha-Shmashot* “in-between” quality. The Mishnah is pointing to the power of language to bring this “in-between” quality to life, and to make positive transformations in the world.

But if this is correct, how do we understand the last item in the Mishnah, the *Tzvat be-Tzvat Asuyah*, the tongs which can only be fashioned by tongs. What does this have to do with the transformative power of language?

This may be understood in light of a Tosefta in Eiruvim chapter eight:

הלכות שבת, חגיגות, ומעילות, כהררין התלוין
בסערה. מקרא מועט והלכות מרובות ואין להם על מי
שיסמכו.

“The laws of Shabbat, festival offerings, and trespass of sanctuary are like mountains hanging by a hair; just a few verses of scripture in the Written Torah but with many *halachot* in the Oral Law, and they have nothing upon which to support themselves.”

At this point the Tosefta in Eiruvim is almost identical to a famous passage in Chapter One of Mishnah Chagiga. However, the Tosefta now continues in a manner not found in the Mishnah. The Tosefta says,

מכאן אמר רבי יהושע – צבתא בצבתא מתעבדא –
צבתא קדמיתא מה הות? הא לאיי בריה הות.

Translated from the Aramaic this means: “Rabbi Yehoshua concludes from this that Tongs can only be made with tongs. How were the first tongs made? In truth, they were a divine creation.”

This Tosefta passage is very puzzling. What do the tongs have to do with the *halachot* of Shabbos? What the Tosefta appears to mean is that the process of interpretation is the basis of the Oral Torah. It generates all the many laws of *hilchot* Shabbat not found explicitly in the Written Torah. Once we have the idea that we can use our minds to understand, explain, and interpret the text, we can continue the process indefinitely. But what is the origin of the notion that our understanding is a tool

which, like tongs, can pick up the sacred text to turn it over, to examine it from every angle, to place it in the fiery furnace of the search for truth, and to shape and fashion new approaches and interpretations? This primal understanding of the power of the human mind and human language must be, according to the Tosefta, a gift from Hashem. As the Yerushalmi Shabbat, Chapter Twelve, Halacha Five puts it:

מאות אחת את למדת כמה אותות—“From one letter, from one sign, you learn many letters, many signs...”

But the initial letter—the starting point of the system, the first in the series—is, we believe, a gift from Hashem.

Between Integrity and Intellect: Being Orthodox in Academic Jewish Studies¹

Ariel Evan Mayse

There is sleuthing in scholarship as there is in crime, and it is as full of mystery, danger, intrigue, suspense, and thrills—if only the story were told.

—Harry Austryn Wolfson²

How great it is for those who toil in Torah study day and night, for the Holy

One listens to the voice of those who immerse themselves in Torah, and each word of their *novellae* creates a new heaven.

—Zohar 1:4b

“That’s funny, I didn’t even know that Harvard has *Jewish Studies*,” is inevitably the first response I receive whenever I mention to friends or relatives that I’m a graduate student at Harvard specializing in Jewish mysticism. After I patiently explain to them a bit about the Harvard Center for Jewish Studies, and about the rich field of academic Jewish Studies in general, the second question is equally unavoidable: “Isn’t that difficult for you?” As I am a rather obvious Orthodox Jew, the tensions between my academic and personal lives cannot be easily hidden. Negotiating a balance between my own religious proclivities and the goal of objective scholarship is never easy, and the choice to pursue an intellectual existence in the realm of higher education is one inherently full of challenges.

¹ Note to the reader: This essay was written in the fall of 2008, during my first semester as a graduate student. Since then my thought on this subject has undergone significant evolution, and though my basic thesis remains unchanged, it goes without saying that were I to rewrite the piece today, this would be a vastly different work. Foremost amongst these transformative elements was my exposure to the work of Prof. Isadore Twersky [The Talner Rebbe, HaRav Yitzhak Twersky *zt”l*], a scholar of unique magnitude whose work embodies the productive synthesis and creative tension between academic analysis and impassioned religiosity. [This essay will be appearing in the upcoming volume of *B’Iyyun: Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought on Campus*—Ed.]

² As quoted in Schwartz, Leo W. *Wolfson of Harvard: Portrait of a Scholar*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), p. 250.

Though I've found that this dialectic has proven most enriching to both my scholarship and my personal life, the questions remain: To what extent may engagement in Jewish Studies serve as both an intellectual profession and a spiritual enterprise providing a source of viable cultural energy for *kehal Yisrael*, the Jewish community as a whole? In other words, does the careful academic analysis of Judaism hold value for the broader Jewish community, both inside and outside of the Orthodox world? Furthermore, does the scholarly examination of Jewish history and religion, and Jewish mysticism in particular, hold a unique set of benefits that would be otherwise inaccessible without a university setting?

With these issues in mind, I hope to call into question the common assumption that studying Judaism as an academic discipline is innately impossible for the Orthodox scholar. In fact, just the opposite is true. The project of Jewish Studies represents a unique opportunity for the Orthodox community to use the tools, vocabulary, and methodology of modern scholarship to better articulate and investigate the depths of our own intellectual traditions. To be sure, one working in this field is confronted with ideas that, if ignored or left unresolved, can lead to a feeling of incongruence between personal and professional life. Issues like alternative readings of history that contradict internal Jewish memory, or higher source criticism of the religious texts that continue to guide our lives, do challenge the fundamental assumptions that the Orthodox academic brings to the table, but these theories exist whether we engage with them constructively or not.

On the other hand, I have found that when approached correctly, the field of Jewish Studies yields an immense array of spiritual truths particularly applicable to the American Orthodox community. Specifically, I believe that the scholarly examination of the intellectual history of Hasidism, my chosen field, has much to contribute towards increasing the vibrancy and dynamism of American Jewry.

From its genesis in eighteenth-century Eastern Europe as a pietistic mystical revivalist movement, Hasidism has

sought to fight religious decay and rote observance, combating materialism and moral relativism with a fundamental belief that the physical world is no more than a tool for experiencing the Divine. Though the movement itself has certainly not proven immune to these same ills, I believe the ideals expressed throughout Hasidic literature have nonetheless retained their value and remain spiritually compelling. Yet with few exceptions, this vibrant theology remains tragically outside the purview of those Orthodox Jews who are not immersed in the narrow confines of contemporary Hasidic society.

It is my contention that the possibility of bridging these two worlds and translating the message of Hasidism into terms more readily digestible to mainstream American Orthodoxy lies primarily through the vehicle of academia. Historically, I believe this sort of translation of worthy but less renowned ideas into modern Jewish terms has been a pivotal function performed by Jewish academia. Indeed, a tracing of the recent development of Jewish studies as a discipline, particularly as practiced in Orthodox Jewry, proves illuminating to an understanding of how the field can be fruitful for Orthodoxy.³

³ The history of Jewish Studies has been the subject of a substantial number of papers and books, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to engage with all of them here. To reference only a few of those not explicitly discussed in this article, see Arnold J. Band, 'Jewish Studies in American Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities,' *American Jewish Yearbook*, 67 (1966), pp. 3-31; David Biale, 'Between Polemics and Apologetics: Jewish Studies in the Age of Multiculturalism,' *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 3 (1996), pp. 174-84; Shaye J.D. Cohen and Edward L. Greenstein, ed., *The State of Jewish Studies* (Detroit, 1990); Nahum Karlinsky, 'The Dawn of Hasidic-Haredi Historiography,' *Modern Judaism*, 27:1 (2007); Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish is Jewish History* (Oxford, 2007); Harold S. and Paul Ritterband Wechsler, 'Jewish Learning in American Universities: The Literature of a Field,' *Modern Judaism*, 3 (1983), pp. 253-89.

From Afterthought to Spiritual Catalyst

Despite Israeli scholar Anita Shapira's lament for the "decline" of Jewish Studies in the 1990s,⁴ the past decade has seen a marked increase in academic activity in the realms of Jewish religion, material culture, music and languages.⁵ The Association for Jewish Studies (AJS), an international professional organization established for the study of Judaism at institutions of higher education, now boasts a membership of 1700 faculty and students, many of whom are housed in the over 150 Jewish Studies programs or departments found in universities in the United States alone. With some 250 endowed chairs to be found across several continents, it seems that Jewish Studies will remain an established and stable sector of academia.

Of more immediate interest for our purposes is a remarkable demographic figure gleaned from a recent poll of AJS members. Of the Jewish respondents (92% of the total survey group), 21% of these individuals identified themselves as Orthodox.⁶ If we are to take this sample as representative of the entire member body, then AJS has somewhere in the vicinity of 340 Orthodox members engaging in some form of academic Jewish studies. Since this survey was the first of its kind and lacks data from previous years, it is impossible to speculate if this number has risen or fallen over the past fifty years. Nevertheless, this striking figure is disproportionately high, and it begs the question of why Orthodox Jews are

⁴ Shapira, pp. 113-15.

⁵ Previously, in the 1960s, an increase was partially spurred by the emerging focus on "ethnic studies," but more importantly, the development of Jewish Studies was a reflection of a greater cultural trend towards stronger Jewish self-identification as well as a renewed support for Israel amongst American Jews after 1967. See: Robert Alter, 'What Jewish Studies Can Do,' *Commentary* 58 (October 1974), pp. 71-6, esp. 73; Anita Shapira, 'Reflections on the Rise and Fall of Judaic Studies,' *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 3 (1996), pp. 112-22, esp. 113.

⁶ The full results of this survey, performed in 2007-08 by Steven M. Cohen and Judith Veinstein, may be found on the AJS website (<http://www.ajsnet.org>).

choosing to pursue careers in secular institutions of higher education, instead of remaining only within the traditional yeshiva world. Since these scholars continue to maintain their Orthodox affiliation, the answer must at least in part be that they feel a university environment and approach hold an inimitable set of benefits that cannot be accessed outside of this unique milieu. What might these be?

To answer this question from the perspective of my field, I offer two very different but equally outstanding twentieth-century scholars of Jewish mysticism as examples of academicians who worked in Jewish Studies with the intention of not simply describing the Jewish religion, but inspiring and sustaining the Jewish people as well. These scholars demonstrate that, if approached correctly—namely, with the underlying mandate that the insights gleaned from Jewish history are valuable for the construction of a healthy future—Jewish Studies may be an invaluable contribution to Orthodox thought. To understand these men, though, it is important to understand the context from which they emerged—the spiritual climate within which they arose, and which they strove to change.

The Politics of Mysticism

The academic investigation of Judaism, and subsequently Jewish mysticism, has its origins in early nineteenth-century Germany. Starting with the work of Leopold Zunz (d. 1886) and maturing over the next century, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (lit. Science of Judaism) emerged as a loose coalition of German scholars committed to examining the Jewish religion in a university setting through an objective, critical methodology.⁷

⁷ See Irving Greenberg, 'Scholarship and Continuity: Dilemma and Dialectic,' in Leon A. Jick, ed., *The Teaching of Judaica in American Universities* (1970), pp. 115-31, esp. 115-17. The *Wissenschaft* school was essentially the result of newfound social emancipation and motivated by the universalistic ideals of the *haskalah*, and it represented an important feature of Judaism's encounter with modernity: a shift towards a greater sense of

Though there were advocates of the *Wissenschaft*, such as David Tzvi Hoffmann and Esriel Hildesheimer (1820-1899), who believed that academic scholarship could be reconciled with religious observance, for many practitioners this new intellectual paradigm meant a concerted break from tradition.⁸ It was neither the goal of these scholars to safeguard the Jewish religion, which they saw as a decaying and antiquated phenomenon, nor to ensure the continuity of the Jewish community, but rather to place Judaism under the knife and systematically dissect it using the instruments of historiography and philology. These scholars were especially antagonistic towards any elements of Judaism that did not integrate well with modernity, and reserved particularly harsh criticism for *kabbalah*, the Jewish mystical tradition.

Many of the early ideologues of the cultural Zionist movement, which was already gaining momentum in fin-de-siècle Europe, also believed in the value of scientific analysis of Jewish religion and history according to modern principles of scholarship. However, cultural Zionism rejected the *Wissenschaft's* generally assimilationist vision and approached the study of Judaism as a positive and vitalizing force of national renewal, naturally centered on (and in) the land of Israel. Of the numerous outstanding scholars of this movement, the prolific and impressive career of Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) stands out as particularly relevant for our study—though more for what it lacks than what it provides.⁹

historical self-consciousness. See Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, 1994), pp. 1-5, and also Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, 1982), pp. 81-103.

⁸ See: Marc B. Shapiro, 'Rabbi David Zevi Hoffmann on Torah and *Wissenschaft*,' *The Torah U Madda Journal*, 6 (1995-1996), pp. 129-37; Marc B. Shapiro, 'Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer's Program of Torah u-Madda,' *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, 9 (2000), pp. 76-86.

⁹ For scholarly interpretations of the life and work of Scholem, see: Daniel Abrams, 'Defining Modern Academic Scholarship: Gershom Scholem and the Establishment of a New (?) Discipline,' *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 9 (2000), pp. 267-302; David Biale, *Gershom Scholem:*

Born into an acculturated bourgeois German Jewish home, Scholem began to explore Judaism as a young adult. Though he briefly flirted with traditional observance, he eventually left this path in favor of academia and wrote his groundbreaking doctorate on *Sefer ha-Bahir*, an abstruse and difficult medieval Jewish mystical text. After immigrating to Palestine in 1923, Scholem spent the remainder of his life clarifying and scientifically interpreting the historical evolution of *kabbalah*.

In direct contrast to the *Wissenschaft* scholars who condemned Jewish mysticism as a marginal, inconsequential and primitive substratum of Judaism, Scholem believed that *kabbalah* was an ancient and ever-present force that had sustained and animated Judaism from just underneath the surface. He condemned his academic predecessors for engaging in petty and impotent apologetics, intentionally suppressing any facets of Judaism not up to their “rationalist” standards, and thereby destroying any relevant message *kabbalah* may have had. Scholem was a religious anarchist, and although he held little stock in traditional observance, he did believe firmly in the examination of Jewish mysticism and the broader discipline of historiography of ideas as crucial components of a healthy national existence.¹⁰

And yet, despite Scholem’s obvious devotion to *kabbalah* and his belief in mysticism having been an important vitalizing force throughout Jewish history in the Diaspora, he explicitly denied that there could be any authentic expressions

Kabbalah and Counter-History (Cambridge, 1982); Daniel Weidner, ‘Reading Gershom Scholem,’ *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 96 (2006), pp. 203-31. Of particular relevance to the topic at hand, see: Michael Oppenheim, ‘The Meaning of Hasidut: Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem,’ *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 44 (1981), pp. 409-23; Rachel White, ‘Recovering the Past, Renewing the Present: The Buber-Scholem Controversy over Hasidism Reinterpreted,’ *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 14 (2007), pp. 364-92.

¹⁰ Gershom Scholem, ‘Reflections on Modern Jewish Studies,’ in Avraham Shapira, ed., and Jonathan Chipman, trans., *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in our Time* (Philadelphia, 1997), pp. 51-71, esp. 61-65.

of Jewish mysticism in his day. We must assume that he would not have significantly altered this position regarding our present time.¹¹ Just as the secular *Wissenschaft* had sought to provide an academic eulogy for Judaism as a whole, Scholem focused on analyzing and investigating the entire continuum of Jewish mysticism entirely as a phenomenon of the past, one whose importance as a source of spiritual inspiration for the Jewish people had been superseded by Zionism.¹² Scholem was a scholar of extraordinary brilliance, but his understanding of Jewish Studies as a secular and nationalistic enterprise couched within the sphere of cultural Zionism will not provide the American Orthodox community with a viable spiritual model.

Only a few years before the start of Scholem's career, Hillel Zeitlin (1871-1942) also began to establish the framework of a Jewish revitalization based on teachings of *kabbalah*. In stark contrast to Scholem's disbelief in traditional observance, however, Zeitlin eventually came to articulate a national renewal that was firmly and unequivocally committed to following *halakha* (Jewish Law). Raised in a family of Habad Hasidim in White Russia, his childhood was steeped in Jewish culture and mystical learning. After intensively studying philosophy and embarking on a secular academic career, Zeitlin returned to Orthodox praxis and devoted his intellectual activities to the study of Judaism, focusing in particular on *kabbalah* and Hasidism.¹³ It is my belief that his

¹¹ Gershom Scholem, 'Reflections on the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time,' in Avraham Shapir, ed., and Jonathan Chipman, trans., *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in our Time* (Philadelphia, 1997), pp. 6-19. Boaz Huss notes that Scholem left the door open for a future reemergence of mysticism, albeit in a transformed and secularized manner. See Boaz Huss, 'Ask No Questions: Gershom Scholem and the Study of Contemporary Jewish Mysticism,' *Modern Judaism*, 25 (2005), pp. 141-58, esp. 144.

¹² Huss, pp. 144-45.

¹³ Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche and Zion* (Ithaca, 2004), pp. 189-214, p. 214; Arthur Green, 'Three Warsaw Mystics,' *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 13 (1996), pp. 1-58, pp. 32-34.

numerous publications on these subjects have both enduring scholastic worth and profound spiritual value.¹⁴

In his work Zeitlin blurred the ostensibly clear lines between academia and spirituality, articulating the ideas of the Hasidic masters in an authentic manner while retaining the intellectual discipline of an academic scholar. Zeitlin committed his life to passionately studying and teaching the doctrines of Jewish mysticism, and if the account describing his murder at the hands of the Nazis is to be believed, Zeitlin marched to his death adorned in his *tallit* and *tefilin* with a copy of the *Zohar* nestled in his arms. Nevertheless, Zeitlin's contributions to the study of Jewish mysticism, and perhaps even more unfortunately, his eternally relevant vision for the Jewish future, have been sidelined or forgotten by the majority of the English-speaking Jewish world.¹⁵

Zeitlin believed that all expressions of Judaism at his time, including Hasidism, had become defunct, and that every sector of religious life needed a profound revitalization. He decried the religious behavioralism surrounding him, and was particularly appalled by the factionalized and fragmented Jewish community.¹⁶ To counteract these social illnesses, Zeitlin imagined a national return to tradition that included Zionism, but was more importantly characterized by a utopian concord amongst the Jewish people, focused on observance of the Torah and authentic engagement with Jewish texts. Undergirding this entire program lay the messages of Hasidism, namely imbuing a sense of wonder at the holiness of the everyday into mundane actions, the recognizing of the

¹⁴ See for example: Hillel Zeitlin, *Be-Fardes ha-Hasidut ve'ha-Kabbalah* (Tel Aviv, 1960); H. Zeitlin, *Rabbi Nahman Braslaver* (New York, 1952).

¹⁵ See: Shraga Bar-Sella, *Ben Sa'ar li-Demamah: Hayav u-Mishnato shel Hillel Zeitlin* (Tel Aviv, 1999); Shraga Bar-Sella, 'On the Brink of Disaster: Hillel Zeitlin's Struggle for Jewish Survival in Poland,' *Polin*, 11 (1998); Moshe Waldoks, 'Hillel Zeitlin: The Early Years (1894-1919)' Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University (Waltham, MA, 1984).

¹⁶ See: Bar-Sella, 'On the Brink,' 84; Bar-Sella, *Ben Sa'ar li-Demamah*, p. 221.

fundamental unity of the Jewish people, and the understanding that material gains are far less important than spiritual integrity. By applying Zeitlin's still-relevant model of reencountering with our literary heritage in an academic setting to American Orthodoxy, perhaps we may also be able to experience a cultural and religious renewal.

Orthodoxy in the Modern Academic Arena

Stepping back from the intellectual luminaries of the past and returning to present day Orthodox scholars grappling with the questions and lessons of Jewish studies, two current Jewish academics—Moshe Bernstein and Shalom Carmy—have made significant contributions towards understanding this dilemma. Bernstein, longtime Professor of Bible at Yeshiva University, has correctly noted that it is in the realm of Jewish Studies that the difficulties of the approach of *Torah u-Madda*, the necessary balance between religious commitments and engagement with secular culture, are most pronounced.¹⁷ However, Bernstein has also suggested that the study of traditional Jewish texts from a historical or academic point of view may be seen as falling within the category of *Talmud Torah*, albeit in a less explicit manner than the learning in a yeshiva. That is, the goals of traditional learning and modern Jewish Studies “are not diametrically opposed, but may lead separate and parallel existences as different manifestations of Torah.”¹⁸ Since university level research demands engagement with a broad array of sources, both primary and secondary, the Jewish scholar may tap into valuable materials ordinarily beyond the curriculum of the traditional *beit midrash*, utilizing them to present a much richer and finely nuanced picture of Jewish history.

¹⁷ Moshe Bernstein, ‘The Orthodox Jewish Scholar and Jewish Scholarship: Duties and Dilemmas,’ *The Torah u’Madda Journal*, 3 (1991-1992), pp. 8-27, p. 16.

¹⁸ Bernstein, pp. 14-9.

While the study of Judaism according to the principles of modern scholarship is certainly not without its dangers, the outright rejection (or ignoring) of modernity in favor of complete cultural and intellectual insularity has dangerous repercussions as well. Though the oft-quoted reactionary aphorism “when Rabbis became doctors, Judaism got sick” no doubt contains some truth, the opposite holds true as well: miseducation is equally destructive.¹⁹ If Shamma Friedman, Professor of Talmud at Bar-Ilan University and the Jewish Theological Seminary, is correct in positing that Jewish scholarship as a whole has indeed entered an age of intellectual exploration based on scientific principles, then simply dismissing academia offhand will not provide a satisfying answer for the Orthodox community.²⁰ In Bernstein’s own words, “If we can do scholarship properly, then we have a responsibility to do it; it is no longer a *reshut* [option], it may become a *hovah* [obligation].”²¹ Hagiography cannot substitute for biography, nor may simple reiteration of inherited wisdom take the place of engaged and constructive scholarship. In plain terms, a historically ignorant and theologically myopic approach will only deaden Orthodoxy’s spiritual future.

Precision of thought and critical analysis are among the most principal goals of academia. In this vein, YU Professor Shalom Carmy has lucidly argued in favor of academic Jewish Studies for the reason that “the disciplined study of language, literature and thought enables us to better articulate and experience these things and to liberate ourselves from distorted or inferior ways of experiencing them.”²² Since one’s learning or experiences may only be expressed and conveyed through

¹⁹ See: Mark Angel, ‘Reflections on Torah Education and Mis-Education,’ *Tradition* 41:2 (2008), pp. 10-23

²⁰ See Shamma Friedman, *Talmud Arukh: Ha-Sokher et ha-Umanin*, (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 3-5.

²¹ Bernstein, p. 25.

²² Shalom Carmy, ‘To Get the Better of Words: An Apology for *Yir’at Shamayim* in Academic Jewish Studies,’ *The Torah u-Madda Journal*, pp. 7-24, esp. 9.

language, the vexing struggle with the articulation of ideas lies at the heart of both the academic and religious scholastic venture. Carmy writes:

The alternative to serious, disciplined reflection of the language we make ours is not an artless, spontaneous innocence about language. To receive our language passively, to purchase it cheaply, off the rack, as it were, means, in our secular society, selling our souls to shoddy thinking and fashionably educated (or semi-educated) jargon.²³

Similarly, blindly following either academic or spiritual dogmatism inherently cheapens the intellectual experience and mars scholarship of any kind. We are obligated to seek the clearest and most authentic articulation of religion we can muster, with all the tools at our disposal.

The Centrality of Hasidism: A Personal Reflection

Both Scholem and Zeitlin believed that Jewish mystical texts held the keys to vibrant Jewish life. And yet, the same survey of AJS scholars quoted earlier also reports that despite the relatively high popular profile of their field, only 1.3% of the participants referred to “Jewish Mysticism” as their area of specialization. Why is it then that I’ve chosen the study of *kabbalah*, and of Hasidism in particular? In essence, I believe that the written texts and the stories of the Hasidic masters have a wider spiritual significance that can transcend the barriers of the insular Hasidic milieu. The illnesses of apathy, entitlement, and self-contentment are immense maladies that plague the post-modern American Jewish community across denominational lines, and the wisdom of the Hasidic masters is particularly important for providing real solutions to these problems. In the literature of Hasidism there exists a vast and vital spiritual wellspring relatively untapped by modern Jewish communities, the majority of whom are without access to the

²³ Carmy, p. 10.

relative nuances of these difficult texts. In joining those who translate and analyze these works in a university context, I hope to assist in rectifying this dissonance and to help provide the Jewish people with an entrance into the magisterial Hasidic library.

At this point I must say a few words regarding the difference between my own position and that taken by the adherents of neo-hasidism, a (post)modern decentralized revivalist movement which also looks to traditional Hasidic thought as the wellsprings of its inspiration. Though the term “neo-hasidism” dates back to the Yiddish writings of I.L. Peretz, it is now most often associated with the Jewish Renewal or *havurah* groups who see themselves as the modern inheritors of the Hasidic tradition. They too believe that Hasidism contains a relevant spiritual message for American Jewry, but one that is not intrinsically bound to Jewish Law, and that mystical or ecstatic experiences are in fact sometimes held back by traditional ritual. In no unequivocal terms, I maintain that the spiritual message of Hasidism cannot be removed from a firm commitment to the *halakhic* framework of Orthodox Jewish observance, a factor which the original authors of these texts took for granted. This was the position of Zeitlin, who also believed that any authentic program of renewal had to happen within the four *amot* of Jewish law.

And what of the choice of the university as a central locus? The academic discipline provides a rigor, a precision, and historic context. The university provides a forum for dialogue with other scholars in the field who may have helpful insights. The university makes available an expanded curriculum beyond a small canon of religiously valuable texts, further expanding the textual tapestry of Jewish history. Perhaps most importantly, academia imparts to the student the linguistic, historiographic, and literary tools to properly and exactly articulate the difficult ideas found in our mystical tradition. Knowledge without communication is unverifiable and untenable, and it thus remains ultimately beyond the reach of human experience.



“Verse Illustration”
Ms. Sara Herst

“Night Expanse”
Yonina Frim



“Fall Growth”
Rivka Rumshiskaya

“Magen David Color Palette”
Sara Flesh



“Star Abstraction”
Ms. Susana McDonnell



“Elokai Ntzor” (2007)
Ms. Erica Schultz

Of course, it is only with trepidation that one enters the halls of academe, for the risks are many. Gershom Scholem recognized them:

I threw myself into ancient books,
I was awestruck by their signs.
I spent too much time alone with them.
I could no longer leave them behind.
The glimmer of Truth is ancient,
Yet disaster is unforeseen:
Generations are weakly linked,
And knowledge is not clean.

...

Time transformed casts us a fearsome glance,
For it is unwilling to turn back again.
Yet abandoned joys grow palpable
Once your Vision has dissolved in pain.²⁴

Yet simply circumventing these dangers by avoiding engagement with academia altogether precludes any of the benefits of modern scholarship, a price our community can ill afford. The Orthodox scholar undeniably has a dual commitment to both the academic world and to the Orthodox community at large.²⁵ A scholar, even a religious academician working in the realm of Jewish Studies, must have the integrity to remain within the accepted boundaries and rigors of his field as defined by the general academic community.²⁶ However, it is precisely this discipline that brings one to the level of lucidity of thought and precise articulation of ideas demanded by academia, and I believe that such clarity and understanding will continue to have an invaluable role in allowing the American Orthodox community best fulfill our spiritual

²⁴ Gershom Scholem, 'Vae Victis—Or, Death in the Professoriate,' in Richard Sieburth, trans., *The Fullness of Time*, (Jerusalem, 2003), pp. 109-11.

²⁵ Bernstein, p. 10.

²⁶ Bernstein, pp. 16-7.

mandate to engage with Torah in the most meaningful way possible.

Concluding Remarks

In bringing this conversation to a close, I shall return once more to the passages that preface this brief study. As Harry Austryn Wolfson, a pioneer of American Jewish Studies and long-time Harvard faculty member, has eloquently articulated, the quest for knowledge for its own sake lies at the heart of the academic venture. But without actualizing such knowledge, communicating it to others for the benefit of living individuals, the search remains dangerously close to intellectual hedonism. The author of the Zohar, the foundational text of Jewish mysticism, suggests that to engage in learning is to dive into the words of yesterday, using them to create the language of tomorrow. Academic study (and by extension teaching) must be approached not only as sterile acts of description and analysis, but rather as creative endeavors in and of themselves. It is not enough for the Jewish scholar to spend all of his time quantifying and analyzing the Jewish past; it is also his responsibility to be an active participant in the construction of a viable Jewish future.²⁷

²⁷ I thank Arthur Green for helping me to formulate this point.

יש מאין ויש מיש

Yoni Nouriel

קריאת שמע, one of the benedictions paired with יוצר המאורות, contains numerous descriptions of what God did and is doing in our world. One of the ideas the ברכה articulates is that God has structured the scientific wonders of the natural world.

Indeed, this proclamation should rightly engender a profound love and awe of God in us.¹ Among these illustrations of the natural world is that of "יוצר אור ובורא חושך," that God fashions light and creates darkness.² These are wonders with which we are all familiar.

We must assume that the fact that the ברכה uses one term, יוצר, to refer to light, and another, בורא, to refer to darkness, is of significance. The specific word choice in the ברכה of יוצר המאורות should direct our attention to the inner ideas that the terms יוצר and בורא reflect. In order to understand the application of the two different verbs, an idea suggested by רמב"ן must be introduced.

The creation of the universe, which we reference in יוצר המאורות, is described in a more confusing and vague fashion in פרשת בראשית. The מפרשים shape what the תורה itself says into concrete ideas and ideals stemming from their radical, revolutionary minds, perceiving the world according to their explanations; in this realm, they create their own reality. For example, רמב"ן explains the abstract pre-creation state of space, time, direction, and the like. He utilizes a combination of deep analytical kabbalistic observations as well as rational Greek philosophy, with a logically constructed method resembling Descartes' Universal Science. In his commentary to the first פסוק in the Torah, רמב"ן concerns himself with the well-known problem of the state of the universe before

¹ See הלכות יסודי התורה ב: א.

² This formulation is based on ישעיהו מה: ז. The important discrepancy between the language of the פסוק and that of the ברכה will be addressed later.

existence, namely, how something could have evolved from nothing (ex nihilo):

ועתה שמע פירוש המקרא על פשוטו נכון וברור. הקב"ה ברא כל הנבראים מאפיסה מוחלטת. ואין אצלנו בלשון הקדש בהוצאת היש מאין אלא לשון "ברא," ואין כל הנעשה, תחת השמש או למעלה, הוה מן האין התחלה ראשונה. אבל הוציא מן האפס הגמור המוחלט יסוד דק מאד, אין בו ממש, אבל הוא כח ממציא, מוכן לקבל הצורה ולצאת מן הכוח אל הפועל. והוא החומר הראשון, נקרא ליוונים "היולי." ואחר ההיולי לא ברא דבר, אבל יצר ועשה, כי ממנו המציא הכל והלביש הצורות ותיקן אותן. ודע, כי השמים וכל אשר בהם חומר אחד, והארץ וכל אשר בה חומר אחד. והקב"ה ברא אלו שניהם מאין, ושניהם לבדם נבראים, והכל נעשים מהם.

Interestingly enough, the subtle shift of one verb (בורא), to another (יוצר)—originally both meaning *create*—spawns a world of a difference, pun intended. "בורא," create, is the Omnipotent creating a substance from nothing: the bridge between infinite and finite, Godly and mortal, transcendent and empirical: יש מאין. Humans can never perform an act of בריאה. However, a יוצר, a fashioner, is one who molds a form from an existing material: יש מיש. This is a more anthropomorphic description, in that humans can be יוצרים as well.

Fundamentally, רמב"ן rejected the Parmenidean and Epicurean concept of eternal matter. Not even "nothing," as is implied by רמב"ן, could exist forever.³ This contrast between temporary and eternal can be compared to basic planar geometry. God is a line, כביכול, extending infinitely in both directions, but physical existence is a ray, starting at one point but stretching on.

Let us now return to the ברכה. The word "בורא" is used in accordance with the term "חשך," darkness or absence of light, and the idea of "יוצר" is paired with the word "אור," light or brightness. This fascinating matching must be understood. It hints to the nature of "light" and "darkness," the intrinsic relationship between a "fashioner" or "creator" and its

³ See א-ב and Descartes' Meditations I.

creations. To shed light on this shadowy system of relationships, an investigation of each phrase is needed.

We shall begin with the pairing and order of the words. God, in His infinite wisdom, breaches the gap of nothingness in creating something from nothing. God creates darkness from the void of the emptiness which we are unable to comprehend: "בורא חשך." Therefore, the prerequisite for any creation is darkness. Only from the dark can every entity branch out; the result of dark is light. Light was created from an object that already existed, that of the darkness. However, even though darkness is the beginning step through which existence is perceived, light is placed before dark in the text of the ברכה, indicating that light is more important than dark.⁴ "ויורא אלקים... כי טוב" is said only upon the אור, not the חשך. Therefore, it can be seen that dark was created only so that there could be light. Without having dark, light would be indefinable; on the other hand, with no concept of light, dark would not be fit to exist.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to replace the straightforward, intelligible English words of "darkness" and "light" with their truer meanings according to the ideas expressed in this essay.

רבה בראשית רבה says that the אור created on the first day is the special, unadulterated light that is stored for the righteous in עולם הבא. The ילקוט שמעוני says that the אור is the תורה, the greatest light in the cosmos, the light that was employed to create the world. This was the same light that brought the Israelites out from the dark מצרים into awesome and refreshing redemption. Therefore, the צדיק, the exceptionally righteous individual, is called אור. Many מדרשים note that the word אור

⁴ See רש"י ד"ה "מכאן שההדיוט קופץ בראש" and שמות ו: כז: to רשב"ם and רש"י to פסוק ו: כז: where he notes the placing of המן at the end of the פסוק. It would seem to follow then that קופץ בראש supports our notion that the first name mentioned in an enumeration is considered more important. Also see רש"י there and מגילה ט. and במדבר כז: א on רש"י.

can be an allusion to the future redemption.⁵ Similarly, fire, which gives off brilliant light, is likened to the תורה. On the פסוק that states that God “saw the light, and it was good,” רשב”ם notes that the simple understanding of this verse is that God saw the appearance of the light and that it appeared “good” to Him. In truth, light is the existential dynamic of life, both emotional and intellectual, which fills man with an awareness of God.

Darkness is the representation of despair, an eclipse of God. Darkness, pain, bitterness, trials, grief, distress have posed questions to philosophers throughout history. Additionally, night is when one is more easily frightened. The גמרא in : ברכות יא even considers the possibility of not reciting “חשך” in the ברכה, departing from the language of the פסוק in ישעיהו, and replacing it with “נוגה,” twilight, because darkness is very frightening and we wish not to proclaim the “negatives” that God has wrought. However, there is still hope; light is the response, the extension yet opposite of darkness. Light represents the ontological meaning and outcome of darkness, a wanting plea for God, “את פניך ה' אבקש.” Light is the positive energy invested in the world. It is one of the deepest desires of man, the long-lost gem that so many have sought out. Light is happiness, peace, serenity, love, understanding, color. As Leibniz once said, “It is in reflecting upon the works that we are able to discover the one who wrought.”

חושך is the preface to everything; nothing in the world is given without its fair share of associated distress:

רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר : שלש מתנות טובות נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל וכולן לא נתנו אלא ע”י יסורין. אלו הן : תורה, וארץ ישראל, והעולם הבא.⁶

However, the suffering is not the ultimate sum of everything, as Schopenhauer might want us to believe. Rather, the אור, the

⁵ For example, see מדרש רבה on פרשת בהעלותך.

⁶ ברכות ה.

happiness, strength, and success derived from the חושך, is the goal. Simply put, neither חושך nor אור would exist one without the other; it is impossible for חושך to come into being without the stipulation that אור must be created with it,⁷ and אור can only be reflected upon once חושך has been recognized. This dualistic, dialectic aspect of two ideas which are mutually dependant on each other allows us a profound insight into theodicy. The distinction between two ideas molds and shapes the definitions of each respective idea.⁸

The ברכה of יוצר המארות seems to articulate a combination of two perspectives on theodicy, those of the Rav זצ"ל and Leibniz. At the end of one spectrum, The Rav refers us back to חז"ל, who state that Judaism has viewed theodicy as a metaphysical factor.⁹ The proper response to bad events is not to question God. Rather, it is to relentlessly and, in a sense, mindlessly ignore the reason or cause of the bad. At the other end, Leibniz boldly states, "For why praise Him for what He has done if He would be equally praiseworthy in doing the contrary?" Leibniz believed in the notion that one needs to examine the works of God, and consequently justify the bad through logical reasoning. The ברכה is cognizant of these two ideas and fuses them into an aggregate concept: one must look within nature, meditate upon it, and come to the realization that the חושך is necessary for the existence of אור. In a word, the

⁷ See : מגילה יג : אין הקב"ה מכה את ישראל אלא אם כן בורא להם רפואה , תחילה."

⁸ Though this insight bears resemblance to a heretical theology which חז"ל referred to as "שתי רשויות" , the main difference between this theology of dualism and those of ancient Semitic religions is that in the latter, these two "forces" of good and bad come from two separate entities respectively. However, in the ideology articulated here, the two halves are from precisely one whole and one source only, i.e. the One God.

⁹ See Rabbi Shalom Carmy's "Tell Them I've Had a Good Life," published in *The Torah U-Madda Journal* Volume Eight (1999), in which the author has a drastically different outlook on the subject of theodicy. I am indebted to R. Carmy's article for many of the sources which I consciously and subconsciously drew upon for this article.

Rav would say to ignore any suffering, while Leibniz would instruct us to logically justify the חושך, which has an apparent cause that we can conceptualize. אור יוצר thus conveys the image that meditation upon the practical considerations of חושך is necessary for the belief in אור.¹⁰

To sum up, אור is dependent on חושך to exist, and only through the חושך grows the אור. Only through the creation of חושך can אור be recognized, and when an absence of אור occurs, by definition חושך exists. We could go so far as to state that it would even be unjustified to bring about אור without the חושך. Conversely, חושך is dependent upon the premise of אור insofar that if אור were not the ultimate objective of the חושך, חושך would not have been created. The only reason for the existence of חושך is to bring about its כנגדו, i.e. אור. To sum up this concept in the concise phrasing of the רמח"ל, "השפלתו תהיה הגבהתו".

How does this understanding of חושך and אור and of the nature of a correct attitude towards God and oneself fit in with a list of praises to God, שבח? How does this understanding of God relate to God's interactions with His creations? The praise of "יוצר אור ובורא חושך" could be seen as a preface to the following phrase, with each statement logically preceding the next: "עושה שלום ובורא את הכל" "[God] makes peace and creates everything."¹¹ This is to say that both the motivation to live for a higher purpose and the desperation which is ignited when God hides Himself are created by God. We first declare that as Jews we believe in happiness, אור, as well as suffering, חושך, and the harmony between them.¹² This completes and

¹⁰ This notion may be seen in other sources, for example, בראשית to רש"י, ב:כ.

¹¹ The term "כל" takes the place of "רעי" as noted in : ברכות יא. Therefore, שלום=אור=יוצר, and הכל=הרע=חושך=בורא. Interestingly, the term שלום is still placed before הכל=הרע, consistent with my observation in footnote 4.

¹² See Rabbi David Shapiro's *Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat ha-Omer and Shavu'ot*, p. 43, where the Rav is quoted as

actively creates the שלום, which, in fact, constitutes all of creation, הכל. The creation of everything, בריאת הכל, is entirely inclusive. Continuing in the text of the benediction, the meaning of the phrase "המאיר לארץ ולדרים עליה ברחמים" is that it would not be acceptable or justifiable for a Perfect Being to withhold this "badness." In fact, it is "mercy," or "graciousness," that God has given us חשך. The next clause, "ובטובו מחדש בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית" means that this precious gift of existential despair is repeated on a continuous cycle, that of degradation and then redemption. God is, needless to say, wholly justified in presenting us with adversity. To paraphrase Leibniz, how could the cosmos have been created sensibly otherwise?! Indeed, Descartes, in essence, came to a conclusion that accepted that the אור and the חשך come from one source, God, and that this reality of nature must be constantly renewed, "מחדש בכל יום."

אנחנו החומר, ואתה יוצרנו.

follows, "Man is never secure. There is no security in *Yahadus*, and the fact that I am happy now does not mean that I'll be happy the next day."

קריאת המגילה: A Case Study in Rabbinic Authority Elliot M. Salinger

The perorations of various sections of the משנה תורה have long been recognized as opportunities for the astute student of the work to peer into the Maimonidean mind, as they often share ethical and philosophical insights that go beyond the nitty-gritty details of the הלכות that have been presented. Some of these ending notes are more straightforward, while others demand careful and close attention to discover the directive or intended intimation of the passage. One of the more challenging of such sections is the end of מגילה, which has attracted a large deal of study and speculation.

משנה תורה: הלכות מגילה ב:יח

כל ספרי הנביאים וכל הכתובים עתידין ליבטל לימות המשיח חוץ ממגילת אסתר, והרי היא קיימת כחמשה חומשי תורה וכהלכות של תורה שבעל פה שאינן בטלין לעולם. ואע"פ שכל זכרון הצרות ייבטל, שנאמר: "כי נשכחו הצרות הראשונות וכי נסתרו מעיני,"¹ ימי הפורים לא ייבטלו, שנאמר: "וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם."²

The source for this strange Maimonidean statement may be found in the Palestinian Talmud.

תלמוד ירושלמי: מגילה פ"א ה"ה (דף ז ע"א)

ר' יוחנן ורשב"ל: ר' יוחנן אמר: הנביאים והכתובים עתידין ליבטל וחמשה סיפרי תורה אינן עתידין ליבטל. מה טעמא? "קול גדול ולא יסף."³ רשב"ל אמר: אף מגילת אסתר והלכות אינן עתידין ליבטל. נאמר כאן: "קול גדול ולא יסף,"⁴ ונאמר להלן: "וזכרם לא יסף מזרעם."⁵ הלכות: "הליכות עולם לו."⁶

¹ ישעיהו סה: טז

² אסתר ט: כח

³ דברים ה: יט

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ אסתר ט: כח

⁶ חבוקק ג: ו

That רמב"ם, despite his documented proclivity and predilection for the *ירושלמי*,⁷ chose to incorporate this radical midrashic motif into his discussion of פורים is baffling. What does it mean that נ"ך will become "בטל"? And what does the phrase "the days of פורים will not be nullified" signify? Additionally, the assertion that most of נ"ך will be irrelevant (at the least) in the eschaton is slightly incongruous with רמב"ם's rationalistic, naturalistic conception of *המשיח ימות*.⁸ Not only is the simple meaning of this passage abstruse, but, more significantly, it is difficult to understand רמב"ם's specific motivation in including this *מדרש* into the *משנה תורה*. Though רמב"ם maintained that *אגדה* was not to be taken literally,⁹ he incorporated aggadic selections throughout the *משנה תורה* when they bolstered his point.¹⁰ Consequently, it behooves us to understand רמב"ם's intent in this passage. First, we will examine the reactions of the traditional commentators to this רמב"ם.

⁷ Vide, for example, R. Prof. Isadore (Yitzhak) Twersky's *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (Mishneh Torah), New Haven: Yale University Press (1980), p. 10 n12 and p. 52, and the references cited therein.

⁸ This conception finds expression in רמב"ם's presentation of the Messianic process and subsequent era in the final two chapters of *הלכות מלכים*, especially *יא ג* and *יב א*. רמב"ם also stridently believed that no fundamental changes in the halachic system and its methodology will occur in the Messianic era, *contra* ר' יוחנן and ר' יוסף. In fact, a prerequisite for enumeration in *תרי"ג* for רמב"ם is that a *מצוה* be operative *לדורות*, which includes *המשיח ימות*. The most well known application of this principle is Rav Chayyim of Brisk's explanation as to the absence of the commandment of *זכירת יציאת מצרים* in *ספר המצוות*. Vide Rabbi David Shapiro's *Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat ha-Omer, and Shavu'ot*, Jerusalem: Urim Publications (2005), pp. 20-21. Although רמב"ם does have Talmudic precedent in his assertion that natural law will not be breached in *ימות המשיח* in the statement of שמואל that "אין בין העולם הזה לימות המשיח אלא שעבוד מלכות בלבד" (*סנהדרין דף צא ע"ב*) the highly original and controversial nature of the Maimonidean approach should not be glossed over; vide R. Twersky, p. 451 n231.

⁹ רמב"ם explains his approach to *אגדה* in his introduction to *פרק חלק* of *פירוש המשניות* in the *סנהדרין*.

¹⁰ R. Twersky, pp. 150-153, 219.

Chronologically, the history of the interpretation of this passage begins with ראב"ד.

השגות הראב"ד להמשנה תורה: הלכות מגילה ב:יח
א"א: לא יבטל דבר מכל הספרים, שאין ספר שאין בו למוד.
אבל כך אמרו: אפילו יבטלו שאר ספרים מלקרות בהם, מגילה לא
תבטל מלקרותה בצבור. עכ"ל.

ראב"ד's animadversion does not seek to explicate the difficult
ס and is more concerned with the meaning of the original
passage in the ירושלמי.

ראב"ד on this passage further explains לחם משנה.

פירוש הלחם משנה להמשנה תורה: שם
נראה כוונתו שהוא הבין בדברי רבינו ז"ל שר"ל שספרי
הנביאים יתבטלו לגמרי ואין לומדים מהם לדבר מן הדברים וכמאן
דליתיה ואמר שאין הדבר כן שהרי כל ספר וספר מהם אנו לומדים ממנו
דברים הרבה וא"כ יתבטלו אותם הדינים, וזה אמרו שאין ספר שאין בו
למודין, לכך אמר דאין הכוונה כמ"ש רבינו ז"ל שיגנוזו אלא קיימים יהיו
אלא אע"פ שאין קוראים בהם בכל שעה אלא לשום עת רחוק מ"מ
במגילת אסתר קורין.

ראב"ד's explication of לחם משנה
ס and the גמרא does not have any textual support, though
it does render רמב"ם's own statement less logically perplexing.
המגיד here reflects the difficult nature of this
passage.¹¹

פירוש המגיד משנה להמשנה תורה: שם
במדרש, ויש כאן השגה. ואם כוונתו כפשוטו לימות המשיח
האמת יראה את דרכו.

¹¹ רמב"ם's reticence perhaps may be attributed to the fact that רמב"ם's
statement has no practical implications in the pre-Messianic era. Vide הלכות
מלכים יב:ב.

Interestingly, the printer here added his own editorial gloss to this
רמב"ם: רמב"ם to try to explicate the puzzling מגיד משנה:
"אמר המגיה: אכן נוכל ליישב שכוונת הרמב"ם על קריאתן שלא יהי על דרך החיוב
רק קריאת המגילה."

Unfortunately, none of the classical commentators assist the reader in understanding רמב"ם's intent in this strange passage.

To find a satisfactory explanation for the רמב"ם at the end of הלכות מגילה, we must look to the רמב"ם at the beginning of הלכות מגילה.¹²

משנה תורה: הלכות מגילה א:א

קריאת המגילה בזמנה מצות עשה מדברי סופרים. והדברים ידועים שהיא תקנת הנביאים. והכל חייבים בקריאתה אנשים ונשים וגרים ועבדים משוחררים. ומחנכין את הקטנים לקרותה. ואפילו כהנים בעבודתן מבטלין עבודתן ובאין לשמוע מקרא מגילה. וכן מבטלים תלמוד תורה לשמוע מקרא מגילה קל וחומר לשאר מצות של תורה שכולן נדחין מפני מקרא מגילה. ואין לך דבר שנדחה מקרא מגילה מפניו חוץ ממת מצוה שאין לו קוברין שהפוגע בו קוברו תחלה ואחר כך קורא.

This formulation is noteworthy in its emphasis on the scope of the חיוב—which individuals are obligated to recite the מגילה—and on the relative power of the חיוב—which other commandments are superseded by קריאת המגילה. It seems that the רמב"ם was particularly concerned with the חיוב itself, since he usually first describes the essential character of a מצוה first, and only after does he delineate the scope of the חיוב or what the חיוב trumps.¹³

From the passages at the beginning and end of הלכות מגילה, we see that רמב"ם was focused on the nature and essence of the חיוב מקרא מגילה. The enduring, immutable חיוב of מקרא מגילה and the holiday of פורים itself are stressed in the end of הלכות מגילה, and the scope of the חיוב and its powerful

¹² Rav Soloveitchik also connected the first and last sections of הלכות מגילה, but his analysis emphasized a different aspect of the מצוה. This insight has been recorded in הררי קדם סימן ריד (ח"א עמ' שעב-שעג).

¹³ For examples of instances in which רמב"ם discusses who is and is not obligated far after the introduction of the מצוה, vide הלכות ק"ש ד: א: הלכות, הלכות סוכה, הלכות שופר ב: א: הלכות חמץ ומצה ו: י: הלכות ברכות ה: א: ציצית ג: ט: הלכות חגיגה ב: א: ו: א:

nature are accentuated in its beginning. simply cited the **רמב"ם** since it supported his preoccupation with the **חיוב** of **מדרש** **מקרא מגילה**.

The question now becomes why **רמב"ם** was so focused on the weighty nature of **פורים** and the **מקרא מגילה** in the first place. I would like to suggest that **רמב"ם** is responding to the classic problem with **פורים** and the reading of the **מגילה**. Namely, the entire enterprise of establishing the **מגילה** was highly precarious from a halachic-jurisprudential perspective. What exactly was the justification for creating a new holiday with its own "מצוה"? *Prima facie*, this type of Rabbinic enactment should be prohibited as **בל תוסיף**.

The challenge of **פורים** to **בל תוסיף** is reflected most starkly in a **ברייתא** in the **בבלי** and a **מימרא** in the **ירושלמי**.

תלמוד בבלי: מסכת מגילה: דף יד ע"א

ת"ר: ארבעים ושמונה נביאים ושבע נביאות נתנבאו להם לישראל ולא פחתו ולא הותירו על מה שכתוב בתורה חוץ ממקרא מגילה.

תלמוד ירושלמי: מגילה פ"א ה"ה (דף ו ע"ב עד דף ז ע"א)

ר' שמואל בר נחמן בשם ר' יונתן: שמונים וחמשה זקנים ומהם שלשים וכמה נביאים היו מצטערין על הדבר הזה. אמרו: כתוב, "אלה המצוות אשר צוה ה' את משה,"¹⁴ אלו המצוות שנצטוינו מפי משה. וכך אמר לנו משה: אין נביא אחר עתיד לחדש לכם דבר מעתה. ומרדכי ואסתר מבקשים לחדש לנו דבר?! לא זזו משם נושאים ונותנים בדבר עד שהאיר הקדוש ברוך הוא את עיניהם ומצאו אותה כתובה בתורה ובנביאים ובכתובים...

These sources admit that the institution of the **מגילה** was unprecedented and particularly challenging from a legal perspective.

Now that we can see the texts to which **רמב"ם** was reacting, we can understand his precise intent and meaning. **רמב"ם** wished to accentuate that **פורים** and **מקרא מגילה** are justifiable since **חז"ל** are, indeed, given the power to create new commandments, even those that do not directly act to

¹⁴ ויקרא כז: לד

safeguard currently existing Biblical precepts, so long as they are not claimed to be Scriptural. This idea was a major one in the Maimonidean system since it validated and vindicated Rabbinic Judaism. רמב"ם explains this doctrine in two main places, in the opening section of הלכות ממרים and in a short section of the introduction to the משנה תורה, nestled between the enumeration of the תרי"ג and the programmatic listing of the various sections of the משנה תורה.

משנה תורה: הלכות ממרים

(א) בית דין הגדול שבירושלים הם עיקר תורה שבעל פה. והם עמודי ההוראה ומהם חק ומשפט יוצא לכל ישראל. ועליהן הבטיחה תורה, שנאמר: "על פי התורה אשר יורוך,"¹⁵ זו מצות עשה. וכל המאמין במשה רבינו ובתורתו חייב לסמוך מעשה הדת עליהן ולישען עליהן.

(ב) כל מי שאינו עושה כהוראתן עובר בלא תעשה, שנאמר: "לא תסור מכל הדבר אשר יגידו לך ימין ושמאל..."¹⁶ אחד דברים שלמדו אותן מפי השמועה, והם תורה שבעל פה, ואחד דברים שלמדום מפי דעתם באחת מן המדות שהתורה נדרשת בהן ונראה בעיניהם שדבר זה כך הוא, ואחד דברים שעשאו סייג לתורה ולפי מה שהשעה צריכה, והן הגזרות והתקנות והמנהגות, כל אחד ואחד מאלו השלשה דברים מצות עשה לשמוע להן. והעובר על כל אחד מהן עובר בלא תעשה. הרי הוא אומר "על פי התורה אשר יורוך" אלו התקנות והגזירות והמנהגות שיורו בהם לרבים כדי לחזק הדת ולתקן העולם. "ועל המשפט אשר יאמרו" אלו דברים שילמדו אותן מן הדין באחת מן המדות שהתורה נדרשת בהן. "מכל הדבר אשר יגידו לך" זו הקבלה שקבלו איש מפי איש.

הקדמה להמשנה תורה

ויש מצות אחרות שנתחדשו אחר מתן תורה, וקבעו אותן נביאים וחכמים ופשטו בכל ישראל, כגון מקרא מגילה, ונר חנוכה, ותענית תשעה באב, וימים, ועירובין. ויש לכל מצוה ומצוה מאלו פירושין ודקדוקין, והכול יתבאר בחיבור זה. כל אלו המצות שנתחדשו חייבין אנו לקבלם ולשומרם, שנאמר "לא תסור מן הדבר," ואינם תוספת על מצות התורה. ועל מה הזהירה תורה "לא תוסף עליו ולא תגרע ממנו,"¹⁷ שלא יהיה נביא רשאי לחדש דבר ולומר שהקדוש ברוך הוא ציווהו במצוה זו להוסיפה למצות התורה, או לחסר אחת מאלו

¹⁵ דברים יז: יא

¹⁶ Cf. ibid.

¹⁷ דברים יג: א

השש מאות ושלש עשרה מצות. אבל אם הוסיפו בית דין עם נביא שיהיה באותו הזמן מצוה דרך תקנה, או דרך הוראה, או דרך גזירה, אין זו תוספת, שהרי לא אמרו שהקדוש ברוך הוא ציוה לעשות עירוב או לקרות המגילה בעונתה. ואילו אמרו כן, היו מוסיפין על התורה. אלא כך אנו אומרין: שהנביאים עם בית דין תיקנו וציוו לקרות המגילה בעונתה כדי להזכיר שבחו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ותשועות שעשה לנו, והיה קרוב לשווענו כדי לברכו ולהללו, וכדי להודיע לדורות הבאים שאמת מה שהבטיחנו בתורה, "ומי גוי גדול אשר לו אלוקים קרובים אליו."¹⁸ על דרך זו היא כל מצוה ומצוה שהיא מדברי סופרים, בין עשה בין לא תעשה.

This latter passage forcefully argues that קריאת המגילה is not a violation of תוספי and that we must read the מגילה since we are required to obey Rabbinic legislation under the rubric of לא תסור. That רמב"ם goes from discussing all Rabbinic mandates generally to קריאת המגילה specifically is also significant; פורים was, historically, the test case in which חז"ל first exercised their prerogative to create entirely new legislation.¹⁹ The anti-Karaite polemical thrust of this passage also should not be ignored.²⁰

Consequently, רמב"ם must accentuate the חיוב itself, the broad scope of individuals to whom it applies, and its weighty nature as evidenced by the stature of מצות which it displaces in order to underscore that the חיוב מקרא מגילה is legally justifiable. Similarly, he emphasizes that the מגילה will continue to be read in ימות המשיח, and adopts the מדרש of the ירושלמי to do so, to further bring home the point that the חיוב not only exists, but is of considerable import.

Along with simply explaining some curious choices that רמב"ם makes in his presentation of מקרא מגילה, this thesis may further assist in understanding רמב"ם's more general

¹⁸ Cf. דברים ד: ז-ח.

¹⁹ However, the citation of the פסוק indicates that the Sages' true authority to promulgate new commandments ultimately comes from Scripture; חז"ל's license to expand Biblical Judaism into its Rabbinic offspring found its basis in תניין.

²⁰ R. Twersky, p. 234.

jurisprudential conceptions. At the very least, these Maimonidean passages highlight the supreme, authoritative nature of חז"ל vis-à-vis the interpretation of both תורה שבכתב and תורה שבעל פה.

The Debate of מצוה הידור מצוה

Amitai Samuels

A.

The Gemara in ב states:

דתניא : זה קלי, ואנוהו - התנאה לפניו במצוות ; עשה לפניו סוכה נאה,
ולולב נאה, ושופר נאה, ציצית נאה,
ספר תורה נאה וכתוב בו לשמו בדיו נאה, בקולמוס נאה, בלבלר אומן
וכורכו בשיראין נאין.

Our Sages guide us in how we are to perform מצוות. We should fulfill them with הידור מצוה. There are two מצוות in which we experience הידור מצוה the most. On סוכות we gather for ourselves the אתרוג, הדסים, לולב, ארבע מינים, and ערבות. Regarding our use of the אתרוג the Torah itself teaches us to fulfill this commandment with הידור מצוה, as it states in ויקרא "ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר" כג: מ: The other example of הידור מצוה is lighting the חנוכה on חנוכה. There is a special type of הידור מצוה: חנוכה מן המהדרין. The issue of חנוכה מן המהדרין is discussed in: שבת דף כא. In this article I will explore and examine the development of the הלכה and common practices of הידור מצוה on חנוכה.

B.

תנו רבנן : מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו. והמהדרין - נר לכל אחד ואחד.
והמהדרין מן המהדרין, בית שמאי אומרים : יום ראשון מדליק שמנה,
מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך ;
ובית הלל אומרים : יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.
(מסכת שבת דף כא :)

The Talmud explains the three levels of lighting חנוכה candles. The essential מצוה of חנוכה is נרות חנוכה, one light each night for a man and his entire family. The Gemara then explains the second level, called מהדרין. According to רש"י, מהדרין is the designation given to those who pursue מצוות, as he comments on the Gemara: "והמהדרין - אחר המצוות."

הלכות of פרק ד, on the other hand, רמב"ם explains that מהדרין are those who are "מהדר את המצוה" who beautify מצוות. The מהדרין's obligation is נר לכל אחד אחד, one light each night for every individual in the household. The last level of lighting חנוכה candles, where the Gemara introduces the argument between בית הלל ובית שמאי, is the debated case of מהדרין מן המהדרין, those who passionately pursue or beautify מצוות. בית שמאי explain how on the first night of חנוכה one lights eight lights, and from then on one decreases the number of lights he kindles each night: "מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך". However, בית הלל teach that "יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך". On the first night one kindles one light, and then each night one increasingly adds another light.

and רמב"ם תוספות provide for us two logical ways in which to interpret מההדרין מן המהדרין. The בעלי התוספות understand that branching off of the basic מצוה of איש וביתו נר איש וביתו are the two alternative choices of מההדרין מן המהדרין and with which one can enhance the basic מצוה of the חנוכה lights:

והמההדרין מן המהדרין - נראה לר"י דב"ש ובי"ה לא קיימי אלא אנר איש וביתו, שכן יש יותר הידור דאיכא היכרא כשמוסיף והולך או מחסר שהוא כנגד ימים הנכנסים או היוצאים. אבל אם עושה נר לכל אחד, אפי' יוסיף מכאן ואילך, ליכא היכרא שיסברו שכך יש בני אדם בבית. (תוספות שם)

תוספות's explanation for arguing that there should be one חנוכה in each window on the מההדרין מן המהדרין level is that תוספות find it essential that external observers know what night of חנוכה it is. תוספות interpret that the הידור of the חנוכה lights is that the lights tell the story and indicate what number night it is. The רמב"ם, in פרק ד, הלכות מגילה וחנוכה, translates the meaning of מההדרין מן המהדרין in a very different way:

(א) כמה נרות הוא מדליק בחנוכה, מצותה שיהיה כל בית ובית מדליק נר אחד, בין שהיו אנשי הבית מרובין בין שלא היה בו אלא אדם אחד, והמהדר את המצוה מדליק נרות כמנין אנשי הבית, נר לכל אחד ואחד

בין אנשים בין נשים, והמהדר יתר על זה ועושה מצוה מן המובחר מדליק נר לכל אחד ואחד בלילה הראשון ומוסיף והולך בכל לילה ולילה נר אחד.

(ב) כיצד? הרי שהיו אנשי הבית עשרה, בלילה הראשון מדליק עשרה נרות ובליל שני עשרים ובליל שלישי שלשים עד שנמצא מדליק בליל שמיני שמונים נרות.

(ג) מנהג פשוט בכל ערינו בספרד שיהיו כל אנשי הבית מדליקין נר אחד בלילה הראשון ומוסיפין והולכין נר בכל לילה ולילה עד שנמצא מדליק בליל שמיני שמונה נרות, בין שהיו אנשי הבית מרובים בין שהיה אדם אחד.

creates a succeeding structure of enhancement upon the basic מצוה of וביתו נר איש, in which each level of lighting builds upon and supplements the previous level. He maintains that by kindling more lights per family, more people will be able to light and personally connect to the מצוה of חנוכה. The Rambam implies that the הידור of the lights is "the more lights, the better." רמב"ם points out that although he teaches otherwise, the tradition in Spain was that of having only one set of candles per household.

C.

In returning to the Talmud, the Gemara proceeds to list two sets of reasons as to why בית הלל maintains "מוסיף והולך" and why בית שמאי teaches "פוחת והולך."

אמר עולא: פליגי בה תרי אמוראי במערבא, רבי יוסי בר אבין ורבי יוסי בר זבידא. חד אמר: טעמא דבית שמאי - כנגד ימים הנכנסין, וטעמא דבית הלל - כנגד ימים היוצאין. וחד אמר: טעמא דבית שמאי - כנגד פרי החג, וטעמא דבית הלל - דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין. (מסכת שבת דף כא:)

offers two respective reasons for the disparate rulings. בית שמאי he says, has the number of lights correspond to the days of חנוכה yet to come. According to בית הלל, however, the number of lights lit corresponds to the number of days which have already passed.

רבי יוסי בר זבידא explains that בית שמאי bases his interpretation on פרי החג, that the number of lights decrease just like the bull sacrifices offered on סוכות. הלל's ruling is based on the principle of מורידין ואין בקדש, in sacred matters we only ascend in sanctity. Both of these symbolic reasons are based on biblical principles. The Gemara in מסכת מעלין בקדש ואין צט עמוד א speaks of the idea of מורידין:

שמעלין בקודש ולא מורידין, אחד של זהב בפנים שעליו לחם הפנים תמיד. ומנא לן דאין מורידין? אמר רבי, דאמר קרא: "ויקם משה את המשכן ויתן את אדניו וישם את קרשיו ויתן את בריחיו ויקם את עמודיו." [שמות מ: יח] ומנלן דמעלין? אמר רבי אחא בר יעקב, דאמר קרא: "את מחתות החטאים האלה בנפשותם ועשו אותם רקועי פחים ציפוי למזבח כי הקריבום לפני ה' ויקדשו ויהיו לאות לבני ישראל." [במדבר יז: ג] בתחילה תשמישי מזבח, ועכשיו גופו של מזבח. (מנחות דף צט.)

Here the Gemara lists three examples in the Torah from which we learn the rule to ascend in sanctity and not descend. The first example deals with the לחם הפנים; the bread would be transferred from tables of adequate quality to the gold שלחן which rested inside the sanctuary of the משכן. The other two places from which we are taught מורידין ואין בקדש deal with the order of הקמת המשכן and מחתות עדת קרח, בית שמאי, according to רבי יוסי בר זבידא, located an alternate biblical precedent to support his argument of "פוחת והולך." As discussed in פרק כט, on סוכות there were a total of seventy bulls sacrificed. On the first day, thirteen were given in the קרבן מוסף; from then on, each day the number decreased by one so that by שמיני עצרת there was only one more bull left to be sacrificed.

Parenthetically, it is interesting to note the strong connection between סוכות and חנוכה. Not only are these two holidays the two best examples of הידור מצוה, but in ספר המכבים, found in the Apocrypha, it says that in the year of the story, חנוכה had been delayed, and it was only after חנוכה

that the festival of סוכות was celebrated. Some suggest, therefore, that what was done on סוכות, בית שמאי applied to the rules of lighting the חנוכה candles.

The Gemara then finishes off this סוגיה by quoting רבה צידון on a story about two elders in the city of בר בר חנה:

אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: שני זקנים היו בצידון, אחד עשה כבית שמאי ואחד עשה כדברי בית הלל, זה נותן טעם לדבריו - כנגד פרי החג, וזה נותן טעם לדבריו - דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין. (מסכת שבת דף כא:)

One man practiced like בית שמאי, his reason also being כנגד פרי החג, and the other one performed his enhancements in accordance with בית הלל for the reason of מעלין בקדש ואין מורידין.

Perhaps these explanations given by רבי יוסי בר אבין as to the reasons behind בית הלל's and בית שמאי's customs are also the underlying reasons as to why מהדרין מן המהדרין and תוספות רמב"ם understand מעלין בקדש ואין מורידין for the reason of מעלין בקדש ואין מורידין, because every day we add more candles to increase the beautification of the מצוה. תוספות, who also agree with בית הלל, follow the logic of the first set of reasons: כנגד ימים היוצאין. As usual, the majority of the Jewish population follows the rule of בית הלל. However, as proven by the story in the Gemara, there were a few who followed the other opinion of בית שמאי as well.

D.

After concluding that בית הלל's custom is the leading opinion, we return to the debate over the correct level of הידור between רמב"ם and תוספות. The Talmudic commentary, רבינו יחונן, follows רמב"ם's interpretation. Conversely, מאירי, רא"ה, and ר"ן all concur that תוספות's practice is the correct custom to follow. מאירי clearly states in his comments that he agrees with בעלי תוספות:

אבל לדעתנו אינו כן, שמאחר שאתה מדליק לחשבון בני הבית אף הרואים יאמרו שכך וכך בני הבית יש שם, ולא ירגישו בתוספת, ומעתה אין הדור אלא בכך וכן המנהג. (בית הבחירה מסכת שבת דף כא):

in ר"ן mentions the oddity that Spain follows the opinion of תוספות, the German rabbis, and not the ספרדי rabbi, רמב"ם. Interestingly, ר"י and ר"ש do not express any opinion on the matter at all; rather, they simply restate the Gemara. רבינו יעקב בן הרא"ש sides with תוספות but leaves no reason as to why:

וכמה נרות הם? בליל א' מדליק א' מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך א' בכל לילה, עד שבאחרונה יהיו שמנה.
ואפילו אם רבים בני הבית לא יעשה יותר. (טור אורח חיים הלכות חנוכה סימן תרעא)

טור, also states in his commentary יוסף קראו, his agreement with תוספות's opinion, but does not explain himself:

ונראה שהעולם שנוהגים להדליק בלילה הראשונה נר אחד ומוסיף והולך בכל לילה עד שבאחרונה הם שמנה, ואפילו בני בית הרבה, אינם עושים יותר דעתם כדעת התוספות, דאי כהרמב"ם למה אינם עושים כמהדרין מן המהדרין. (בית יוסף אורח חיים סימן תרעא)

The ערוך, in his other work, שלחן ערוך, states once again that he is in acceptance of תוספות's custom. However, here too he leaves his reason unknown:

כמה נרות מדליק? בלילה הראשון מדליק אחד, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך אחד בכל לילה עד שבלייל האחרון יהיו שמונה. ואפילו אם רבים בני הבית לא ידליקו יותר. (שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות חנוכה סימן תרעא סעיף ב)

It seems as if everyone adopts the custom of תוספות and barely anyone sides with רמב"ם. However, in his commentary on the שלחן ערוך, רבי משה איסרליש, states an alternative opinion:

וי"א דכל אחד מבני הבית ידליק, וכן המנהג פשוט; ויזהרו ליתן כל אחד ואחד נרותיו במקום מיוחד, כדי שיהא היכר כמה נרות מדליקין. (הגה שם)

רמ"א explains that the אשכנזים, who follow רמב"ם, should make sure to distance each person's candles from the others in an attempt to satisfy תוספות's critique of having too many confusing lights in the window. Following this רמ"א, בית חדש, a commentary on the טור, explicitly states his support of the Rambam:

מנהג שלנו כדעת הרמב"ם ומנהג ספרד כדעת התוספות. (ב"ח אורח חיים סימן תרעא)

ט"ז, better known as רבי דוד הלוי, in his commentary on the שולחן ערוך, quoting his father-in-law, the ב"ח, go as far as to say that this is the only case where אשכנזים follow the Spanish פוסק and ספרדים follow the Franco-German ones.

ובכאן יש חידוש במנהג שהספרדים נוהגין כתוס' כמ"ש והאשכנזים כרמב"ם וזה לא מצינו בשאר מקומות. (ט"ז אורח חיים סימן תרעא סעיף קא)

However, in response to ט"ז, Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, in his book המועדים בהלכה לקט שושנה from Satu-Mare, published in 1938, where the author notes that there are actually several places where רבי יוסף קראו rules according to תוספות while רמ"א follows רמב"ם.

In a fascinating article published in *Chavrusa* 41:2, *Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the Hanukkah Menorah*, Rabbi Jacob J. Schachter references a historical explanation of why this cross cultural transference occurred from Rabbi Yehezkel Kazenellenbogen.

מישראל שבאו לספרד הי' מנכון דוכסין ושרי' לפ"ז היה לאל ידם להדליק בחוץ והא בהכרח לעשות היכר כמ"ש התו' גלל כן מנה' היה שרק בעל הבית דולק ומוסיף והולך אף שאחר זה בעו"י תקפו עליהם הצרות מנהג אבותם בידם כפי שנהגו בהיותן על אדמתם אדמת קודש

בירושלים. משא"כ אנחנו לצעירי הצאן שבאו לצרפת ואשכנז תחלת
ביאתנו הי' בגלות וטלטול ולא היה לאל ידינו מעולם מארצות האלו
להדליק בחוץ ואז יש לעשו' כסברת הרמב"ם לעשות כמהדרין
והמהדרין מן המהדי' שכל א' דולק ומוסיף והולך מטעם מעלין בקדש.
(שאלות ותשובות כנסת יחזקאל שאלה יז)

In his book, *שאלות ותשובות כנסת יחזקאל*, Rabbi Yehezkel Kazenellenbogen suggests that since the ספרדים had lived in comfort and security in Spain, they were able to light חנוכה candles outdoors, without fear of any hostile neighbors. Since they were lighting outside, the ספרדים were obligated to light only one additional candle each night so that it would be perfectly apparent which night of חנוכה it was. In fact, רמב"ם himself says that the custom in Spain was to light one set of candles per household—the position of תוספות rather than his own.

Rabbi Kazenellenbogen explains further that in France and Germany, the Jewish living conditions were more insecure. Thus, the intimidated Jews lit inside their homes, and felt comfortable beautifying the מצוה of חנוכה candles for themselves by lighting many more candles.

E.

The case of *hiddur mitzvah* on Chanukah is thus fascinating not only for the formal legal issues involved, but also due to the ways in which customs about which opinion to follow transcended their normal geographical boundaries. The interplay seen here between Jewish law and Jewish history is one that always yields interesting results.

Pious Impressions: A Cursory Glance at *Hasidei Ashkenaz* Avinoam J. Stillman

What exactly is a *hasid*? The term *hasidut* is translated as piety, which is the strict observance of one's religion. Pietism is a movement within a religion that espouses a semi-elitist religiosity, with a focus on the inner, rather than the outer modes of spirituality. In the Talmud, *Hasidim Rishonim*, or "Early Pious Ones" are often cited as spiritual role models. The term today generally refers to the mystical movement founded by the Baal Shem Tov in 18th-century Eastern Europe. Centuries before, however, there was an altogether different, although in some respects similar, group of *Hasidim*. German Pietism, or *Hasidut Ashkenaz*, refers specifically to a small group in medieval Franco-Germany, or Ashkenaz, in the late 12th and early 13th century, who according to Rabbi Dr. Haym Soloveitchik, were "characterized by an idiosyncratic ideology and a radical social and religious agenda."

Their philosophy had several distinctive components. Most radical of these was, perhaps, the doctrine of *retson ha-Bore*, literally the "will of the Creator." *Retson ha-Borei*, in the thought of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, is a code of behavior that exceeds and transcends normative Halacha. *Retson ha-Borei* is not always synonymous with Halacha, and on occasion can even run contrary to Halacha. The *Hasidei Ashkenaz* introduced "hundreds of novel demands, making bold claim to divine mandate," according to Dr. Soloveitchik. A *hasid* is expected to fulfill *retson ha-Borei* as well as Halacha. The *retson ha-Borei* is often unknown and therefore difficult to consistently perform.

Love of God was another theme stressed by *Hasidei Ashkenaz*. For *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, love of God should fill one so there is no room for sin. *Hasidei Ashkenaz* believed that one who truly loves God will feel no urge to have physical pleasure. The only concern that matters to them is the service of God.

Hasidei Ashkenaz also emphasized prayer. They emphasized that one should take special care in the pronunciation of the words of prayer. They subjected the text of the *siddur* to the same minute scrutiny that we apply to Torah or Talmud. For example, the number of letters in each prayer had importance and was often used in *gematriyot*. Melodies were endorsed to enhance prayer. For simple Jews who may not have known Hebrew, they recommended prayer in the common language, for if one does not understand what one is saying, there is no purpose in praying.

Penance, or *teshuvah*, was another major focus of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*. They maintained that life is filled with sometimes impossible moral challenges, but that repentance is always possible. They added asceticism, denial of physical pleasures, to the process of *teshuvah*. *Hasidei Ashkenaz* advocated asceticism in general life, because they believed that enjoying life constitutes giving in to one's physical desires. They believed that "the reward is proportional to the pain." Nevertheless, as authentic interpreters of Jewish tradition, they renounced sexual asceticism. Their espousal of asceticism, however, appears comparable to similar monastic tendencies among contemporaneous Christian groups.

Hasidei Ashkenaz maintained that miracles and the supernatural revealed truths about God that could not be revealed by routine natural and social occurrences. They made extensive study of demons and angels, as they thought that through them one could gain a better understanding of God. There are even references to werewolves in *Sefer Hasidim*, the central work of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*. This interest in the supernatural may be attributable to the social climate of medieval Christian Europe.

Hasidei Ashkenaz, and especially the prominent Kalonymus family, were the inheritors of Kabbalistic traditions from Italy. Their tradition of Kabbalah, which was authoritative in Ashkenaz, explained the nature of the Godhead, God's interface for interaction with the world (the

Kavod), and the inner meanings of prayer. They not only transmitted their traditions, they expanded and added ideas to them. They were also greatly interested in Saadia Gaon's philosophical interpretation of *Sefer Yetzirah*.

Hasidei Ashkenaz had many social teachings concerning the welfare of the poor and charity. They maintained that the rich only have more money than the poor so that they may give charity. Thus, they supported a graduated system of taxation that would tax the rich more than the poor. They believed that the ideal economic and social state was one of total equality, and that economic inequality is the result of sin. They would often criticize Jewish lay leaders, which caused tension between them and the "Jewish Establishment" of that time. *Hasidei Ashkenaz* placed an emphasis on the family as the basis for a life of *hasidut*. They paid considerable attention to matchmaking, with love and family lineage playing important roles.

The seminal work of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* is *Sefer Hasidim*, principally authored by R. Yehudah the Hasid. It is a guide to living the life of a *hasid* which continues to be studied today. Dr. Haym Soloveitchik has argued that *Sefer Hasidim* is divided into two parts written by different authors and that the first part is a normal ethical work, whereas the second part reflects the unique point of view of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*. Other important writings are *Sefer ha-Rokeach*, a Halachic text, and *Sodei Razayya*, a mystical, esoteric book, both composed by R. Elazar Rokeach; and *Shir ha-Yichud*, a theological poem written by members of the Kalonymus family. Some congregations recite a selection from the poem, colloquially referred to as *An'im Zemirot*, weekly, and the entire *Shir ha-Yichud* is recited by many communities on the night of *Yom Kippur*.

Dr. Soloveitchik has advanced the view that although the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* did influence others with their received Kabbalistic traditions, their original and more radical philosophies, such as *retson ha-Borei* and their social

teachings, had virtually no influence. It would, however, seem that there is much to be learnt from *Hasidei Ashkenaz*. Jews of all stripes could surely benefit from increased emphasis on precise and impassioned prayer. While an espousal of asceticism might be excessive, surely a reduction in materialism could only be positive. I hope that this superficial survey of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* will inspire readers to research more about this fascinating group, and perhaps implement some of their philosophies in their spiritual lives.

This survey was originally presented, in a different form, as a report for Rabbi Jon Bloomberg's Jewish History course. The following works were consulted in the preparation of this survey:

- Bloomberg, Rabbi Dr. Jon, *The Jewish World in the Middle Ages* (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 2000).
- Soloveitchik, Rabbi Dr. Haym, "Piety, Pietism, and German Pietism: *Sefer Hasidim* I and the Influence of Hasidei Ashkenaz", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* XCII, Nos. 3-4 (January-April, 2002) 455-493.
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