



# DEGEL

**תורה וחכמת ישראל מקהילת עלי ציון**

**TORAH AND JEWISH STUDIES FROM ALEI TZION**

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## Notes from the Editor

Welcome to the second issue of *Degel*. The inaugural edition, published last Rosh Hashana displayed just some of the talent present in our community and was well received. I hope this edition will confirm first impressions, not only by maintaining the standard of the Rosh Hashana issue, but by doing so with a completely new set of authors. My thanks go to them, Tammy Youngerwood for her design and setting, Sandy Tapnack and Jemma Jacobs for proofreading the articles, Ben Vos, Joel Stempel and Anthony Bodenstein for their fundraising activities and everyone who placed a greeting.

*Many argue that Jewish religious labels are simplistic, unhelpful and divisive.*

One element of my last *Notes* that attracted attention was the attempt to explore what it meant to be a Modern Orthodox Religious Zionist kehilla. You can read Bobby Hill's letter on this subject in this issue. I tried to do this without attempting a comprehensive definition, but by describing some of the ways in which this hashkafa might manifest itself in practice: Hallel on Yom Ha'atsmaut, holding a Simhat Bat, and so forth. Amongst other feedback, I heard two opposing objections; some felt I had not gone far enough, while others felt I had gone too far!

A number of people argued that I should have tried to define Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionism fully and rigorously. An equal and opposite reaction came from those who disliked any attempt to define Modern

Orthodox and Religious Zionist, because they objected to labelling or pigeon-holing the kehilla its members. Many argue that Jewish religious labels are simplistic, unhelpful and divisive. It is this sentiment that has led to the growth of trans-denominational or post-denominational Judaism. This is a major intellectual challenge to a community that does define itself in denominational terms, as Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionist.

The debate is not a new one. As long ago as 1915 Oswald John Simon attacked what he called 'the folly of religious labels'.<sup>1</sup> He derided terms such as 'conservative' or 'liberal' as 'obscure, unreal, stereotyped and emptied of all philosophical and spiritual value'. 'Why', he appealed 'cannot a Jew be content with just saying humbly and reverently "I belong to the holy faith and people of Israel by conviction as well as by blood. God help me to be worthy of this tremendous trust which has come to me"'

When we look at how Jews have used religious labels OJ Simon seems to have a point. Different people have used the same term in different and often contradictory ways, and used different terms to describe the same ideas. In 1934 the Vice-President of the United Synagogue, Robert Waley Cohen described Rabbi Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg, the Seridei Eish, as 'ultra-orthodox'.<sup>2</sup> Yet today, in light of his commitment to modern scholarship and his teshuvot on mixed singing and the celebration of Benot Mitsva, he is considered one of the spiritual fathers of Modern Orthodoxy.

The same Robert Waley Cohen protested at around the same time that his brand of orthodoxy in Anglo-Jewry was being overtaken by ultra-orthodoxy. He cited as evidence the pressure to close shops at the time when Shabbat began on a Friday afternoon, however early, rather than close them at six o'clock.<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that anyone today

would claim that orthodoxy was compatible with keeping businesses open until well into the hours of darkness on a Friday.

If we turn to our own labels of choice, we can find examples of their use far removed from our religious philosophy. In 1897 Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler preached a sermon entitled *Religious versus political Zionism*.<sup>4</sup> It was by no means an appeal for a Mizrahi as opposed to a secular Zionist approach. The ‘religious Zionism’ Adler advocated was no more than an adherence to the traditional belief in the Messiah and continued prayer for his coming and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Adler ruled out any practical measures associated with Herzl’s programme. By this definition Neturei Karta qualify as religious Zionists.

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### *A Jew is first of all a Jew, sans phrase.*

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As for ‘Modern Orthodox’, Rabbi Oscar Fasman, former Rosh Yeshiva of the Hebrew Theological College in Chicago, reports that in the 1940s the term was used in America to describe synagogues that were basically traditional but where there was mixed seating. To confuse matters further, synagogues which retained the mehitsa were called ‘traditional’.<sup>5</sup>

So much for the pitfalls involved in using religious labels, but should they be discarded as completely without merit? In 1938 Herbert Loewe, the Reader in Rabbinics at Cambridge stated his view, which, more than seventy years later, stands up extremely well:<sup>6</sup>

‘Labels are a great convenience: they prevent luggage from going astray. But labels and luggage are not synonymous: if the luggage gets lost and the labels, sans luggage, are delivered, the passenger is not unreasonably discontented. Labels, therefore, are admittedly of the highest importance, but the sphere of their importance is strictly circumscribed. The point that I wish to make is that “labels” are not religion and must not be mistaken for religion.

[Nevertheless labels]...are of fundamental importance for safeguarding and delimiting the religious life, but with that life they are not

coterminous. A Jew is first of all a Jew, sans phrase. If, further, he styles himself ‘Orthodox’ or ‘Liberal’, he should regard the adjective as referring to that aspect of Judaism which he and his friends desire to emphasise, not as separating him and his friends from other Jews. The adjective is domestic: its purpose is to keep his special duty before his eyes, not to endow him with a mark of superiority.’

In that spirit, *Degel* presents its second edition comprised of articles dedicated to the study of the Torah and Jewish life.

In the fiftieth year since the death of the State of Israel’s first Chief Rabbi, R. Warren Kaye presents an annotated translation of a short essay by Chief Rabbi Yitshak HaLevi Herzog on Shimon Hatsaddik. R. Herzog discusses the complex relationship between Torah and Greek wisdom. In that spirit Tikva Blaukopf fuses insights of the Vilna Gaon and parallels in Athenian Tragedy to come to a better understanding of Sefer Yona.

R. Herzog was both Modern Orthodox and a Religious Zionist. Simon Levy explores the complex relationship between these hashkafot through their historical development and in their current form. Religious Zionism is just one expression of the love for the Land of Israel that has burned in the heart of the Jewish people for millennia. The Rav discusses the attitude of one of the great Jewish thinkers of recent centuries, R. Nahman of Breslov, to Erets Yisrael, and finds themes that the great thinkers of Religious Zionism, notably Rav Kook, would later develop.

Chief Rabbi JH Hertz told the congregation at the Bayswater Synagogue on shevi’i shel Pesah 1926: ‘Judaism embraces the whole of life...Judaism is far more than a creed or a theology...Judaism is a religious civilization – a spiritual culture aglow with a passion for righteousness. It has its own language, literature, history, customs and social institutions.’<sup>7</sup> Guided by that broad vision we present here Jewish studies in their fullness. One the one hand, Yair Blumenfeld traces the mitsva of zekher yetsiat mitsrayim and its understanding from the Mishna to the Aharonim. Charlotte and Yonni Cohen present an essay in the theology of prayer that is both scholarly and personal.

Surveying other aspects of Jewish life, Nathan Woodward examines the enduring value of Sholem Aleichem’s fiction and especially of the Tevye stories on the great Yiddish

author’s one hundred and fiftieth birthday. Tevye is at heart a mystic forced to work for a living. The same could not be said of the masters of commerce Ben Vos discusses in his analysis of the Jewish impact on British business.

Many of the articles in this edition are concerned in one way or another with rescue and redemption: Shimon Hatsaddik’s salvation of traditional Judaism in the face of the Greek challenge. The deliverance of Nineveh from destruction by an unwilling Yona. The longing for Erets Yisrael of R. Nahman and the Religious Zionists. Tevye’s escapist day dreams and our hopes expressed in prayer. The Jewish people’s condition as an exiled nation of outsiders, enabling some of its members to shake up the commercial status quo. The memory of our Redemption from Egypt, which we trust will soon be overshadowed by one that is even greater. A fitting theme for what I hope will be for all a hag kasher vesameah.

— BEN ELTON

## Endnotes

1. *Jewish Chronicle* 3 September 1915, 26
2. M Shapiro, *Between the Yeshiva world and Modern Orthodoxy* (1999), 134
3. B Homa, *A fortress in Anglo-Jewry* (1953), 14-15
4. JC 15 October 1897, 13
5. OZ Fasman, ‘Historical reminiscence: After fifty years, an optimist’ *American Jewish History* 69:2 (December 1979), 162
6. H Loewe, ‘Introduction’ to *A Rabbinic Anthology* ed. CG Montefiore and H Loewe, (London, 1939) lix-lx
7. JH Hertz, *Affirmations of Judaism* (Oxford 1927), 35

## חג כשר ושמח

RAV AVI AND DEVORAH SCHARF  
& KEHILLAT ALEI TZION  
WISH THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY  
A HAPPY AND KOSHER חטפ.

The Aarons Family	Jemma Jacobs
The Bergin Family	Gabby and Guv Lebens
Anthony Bodenstein	The Levy Family of Kings Close
Abigail and David Citron	Daniel Livshin
Rachel and Elliot Cohen	Devora, Moishe Dovid, Tzivia and Avi Spitzer
Ben Elton	Rachel, Robbie and Eliav Stafler
Daniel Elton	Anna and Danny Steel
The Katten Family	Corinne, David, Lior, Eli, Jesse and Kayla Tapnack
Susie, Eliot, Rina and Sara Kaye	Sandy Tapnack
Judy Glasser	Ben Vos
Lucinda and Martin Glasser	Syma and Henry Weinberg
Gemma and Alastair Goldrein	Abigail Wood
The Goldshneider Family	Sarah, Nathan, Sophie and Benjamin Woodward
The Gross Family	The Yellon Family
Lauren and Neil Hamburger	Tammy, Daniel, Adiel and Elisha Youngerwood
Ayalah, Ashley, Meital and Limor Hirst	

### PERSPECTIVES

## *The Journey of Reb Nahman to Erets Yisrael*

Rav Avi Scharf

In 1798, at the age of 26, Reb Nahman of Breslov set off on a journey to Erets Yisrael. It was a mystical journey born of secret motivations and filled with remarkable events.

Reb Nahman's great grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Hassidic movement, also set off on a journey to the Land of Israel but never merited to complete it. Reb Nahman, on the other hand, did reach the Land and, according to his own account, achieved all of his objectives. Using accounts of his statements and actions during and subsequent to the journey, I will explore the reasons for this journey and its meaning for him, and his understanding of the nature of Erets Yisrael. We can also learn from Reb Nahman's understanding of his journey wider lessons about the process of redemption, the return to Zion in our days, and the contribution by those who are not religious to the redemption.

*We can also learn from Reb Nahman's understanding of his journey wider lessons about the process of redemption, the return to Zion in our days, and the contribution by those who are not religious to the redemption.*

### Deciding to go

Reb Nahman was in Kaminetz when he decided to go to Erets Yisrael.

'When he came from Kaminetz he said words of Torah on Shabbat on the pasuk "My soul is clinging to You". He praised this devar Torah, and said "if this is what happened when I came from Kaminetz, how much greater would be my words of Torah when I come from Erets Yisrael."<sup>1</sup>

The journey to Kaminetz was itself a great wonder, as it came as the result of an instruction from Heaven.

'Before he journeyed to Erets Yisrael he was in Kaminetz. His journey to Kaminetz was remarkable. He suddenly picked himself up from his house and said "I have a journey to take". He travelled from his house on the road to Mejibick and said he did not know where he was going. He travelled to Mejibick where he received a message from heaven that he needed to travel to Kaminetz, and so he did.<sup>2</sup>

### Reasons for the journey – two questions

We know something of why Reb Nahman undertook the journey:

'It was heard from him on Pesah, before he journeyed from Medivich to Israel, that he would like to journey to Israel in order to keep all 613 mitsvot. He wanted to observe all the mitsvot dependent on being in the Land, as well as those which could be kept in the Diaspora, *keeping them on a spiritual level and after that keeping them properly in a physical manner*. We heard from him several times that he had a number of reasons

to travel to Erets Yisrael, and in addition he had hidden ones, which he did not reveal at all. For everything he did was not for only one reason, but for tens of thousands of reasons. In the case of the journey to the Land of Israel there was great ‘mesirat nefesh.’<sup>3</sup>

Reb Nahman’s explanation that his desire to journey to Erets Yisrael was in order to be able to keep all of the mitsvot ‘on a spiritual level’ and then ‘in a physical manner’ is surprising, because being in the Land of Israel allowed Reb Nahman to observe the mitsvot dependent on the Land not just spiritually but physically. Our first question is therefore, what does Reb Nahman mean when he says that being in the Land will allow him to keep all mitsvot in a spiritual manner? The answer to this question depends on understanding what Reb Nahman thought he would gain by spending time in the Land.

‘I heard that he said before his journey to Erets Yisrael that he wanted to travel there in order to reach a higher level of wisdom; because there are various levels of wisdom. The lower level of wisdom, he already possessed, and he wished to attain the higher level of wisdom. We heard from him that the moment he walked four amot in the Land of Israel, he immediately achieved all he desired from his journey. I heard from him about the great happiness he felt the moment he arrived in Erets Yisrael and that his desires were fulfilled.’<sup>4</sup>

How do you achieve that wisdom by walking four amot in the Land of Israel and not by studying the Torah? We are clearly dealing with wisdom that is not acquired in the regular manner but in a different way.

‘When he said to Rabbi Yudel that he wanted to journey to Israel, Reb Yudel blessed him and then said to him, “Rebbe, you probably want to travel to the Land of Israel to do something great there.

**“...I will merit the achievements in the Land of Israel through the means of holy attire, whereas here in the Diaspora I can achieve them only without attire.”**

It should be the desire of God to assist you to accomplish what you desire”. He [Reb Nahman] shook his head. He said, ‘I could accomplish those things I want to accomplish in the Land of Israel right here by prayer and supplication alone, and would not need to journey to Erets Yisrael. The only difference is that *I will merit the achievements in the Land of Israel through the means of holy attire, whereas here in the Diaspora I can achieve them only without attire.*’<sup>5</sup>

What does Reb Nahman mean when he says that in the Land of Israel he will achieve the wisdom through the means of attire and in the Diaspora without that attire? It would make more sense to say that an understanding without attire is greater, so the understanding that is acquired in the Land of Israel should have been described as without attire and the one in the Diaspora as with attire. Our second question is therefore, what did Reb Nahman mean and why did he want to achieve the knowledge *with* attire?

## Greatness through lowliness

‘I heard in the name of our Rebbe, may his memory be blessed, that before one comes to greatness one needs to first fall to lowliness. In Erets Yisrael is the greatest greatness. For that reason one needs to fall to the lowest lowliness. The Baal Shem Tov could not come to the Land of Israel, because he could not bring himself to that low level. He [Reb Nahman] was able to come to Israel by first passing through lowliness, to which he was able to bring himself through his great wisdom. By means of that lowest lowliness, he merited the greatest greatness.’<sup>6</sup>

Why did Reb Nahman think it was necessary to pass through lowliness in order to achieve greatness? Perhaps when a person experiences lowliness he is able to free himself of the ways of thought he is accustomed to. Children are able to change their minds. They do not feel they have to defend the position they held in the past. Alternatively, lowliness allows you to aspire to greatness and enables you to appreciate that greatness once it is achieved. Whatever the reason, as we shall see, Reb Nahman descended into lowliness as he travelled towards the Land of Israel.

## Setting off and suffering

‘And he said “every step of my journey to Erets Yisrael will be with mesirat nefesh [self sacrifice]”. He said “I want to travel immediately; it does not matter how, even without money. Anyone who wants to have mercy upon me will give me money because this journey is so urgent, it should not be delayed in any way.” He journeyed immediately from his house on 18 Iyyar.’<sup>7</sup>

It is significant that Reb Nahman’s journey began on 18 Iyyar, which is Lag B’Omer and the day of the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai. Reb Nahman discussed the greatness of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai and of the Zohar in the introduction to his book *Likutei Moharan*.

Reb Nahman chose to suffer on the journey more than necessary.

‘Reb Nahman said to the man who was travelling with him “I warn you not to reveal who I am and not to tell anything at all about me if anyone asks”. When they arrived at the city, one of the two people who had travelled from Erets Yisrael to their house immediately recognised the man who was travelling with our Rabbi and asked him: “What are you doing here?” He replied, “I am travelling with this young man to the Holy Land”. He asked him, “Who is this person?” He replied that his travelling companion had a permit from a representative of the Austrian Emperor and he did not want to reveal to him who he really was, as our Rabbi had warned him.’<sup>8</sup>

Reb Nahman’s secrecy about his identity led to speculation and ill treatment, which Reb Nahman accepted with humility. Reb Nahman’s attitude was perhaps derived from the command by Mordekhai to Esther that she should not tell of her nation and her place of birth. But there was another reason, connected to Reb Nahman’s desire to pass through lowliness in order to achieve greatness.

‘He allowed himself to be treated in a disrespectful manner. He told the person he journeyed with that this suffering was to enable them to come to the Land of Israel; you cannot come to the Land except by means of lowliness. The disrespect was in order to allow him to come to the Land of Israel.’<sup>9</sup>

## Descent into lowliness

For Reb Nahman, the lack of respect he experienced was essential to the process of achieving the lowliness necessary to reach Erets Yisrael. Reb Nahman also took positive steps to achieve the lowliness he desired.

‘He used to do all sorts of immature things in Istanbul. He would walk barefoot, without a belt or a hat. He would walk in the market like youths who run frivolously there and would start fights by joking around as young people do. He would call one “Frenchie” and call another person a different name.

‘Afterwards, plague broke out in his courtyard, and he had to go to Reb Ze’ev’s inn. Reb Ze’ev prepared a grand meal for him and treated him with great honour. Our Rabbi did several things then that went against the will of Reb Ze’ev. However, Reb Ze’ev’s great love for the Rabbi led him to overlook this, even though he thought the behaviour was very strange. Whenever Reb Ze’ev was leading the prayers on Shabbat, our Rabbi would be eating because he had prayed at an earlier time. So while Reb Ze’ev was praying, Rabbi Nahman would be eating his meal; and so it was on Friday night, on Shabbat morning for shaharit, and at seuda shelishit. When Reb Ze’ev would sit down to seudah shelishit, our Rabbi would have already finished Grace after Meals and would order the man who was with him to look and see if there were any stars in the sky. He would immediately say maariv, make havdala and come into Reb Ze’ev’s house just as he was starting seuda shelishit.

‘As soon as our Rabbi would enter without his hat or belt, Rebbe Ze’ev immediately received him

with great honour, said Grace after Meals right away, said maariv, made havdala and spoke with our Rabbi for practically the whole night. There was a great love between them, even though our Rabbi did all sorts of childish things.’<sup>10</sup>



R. Nahman of Breslov's chair

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***After he returned from the Land of Israel, the intensity of his great wisdom grew deeper and deeper in ways never heard or seen before.***

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Reb Nahman acted in this immature manner in order to achieve the lowliness he sought, as is stressed at the beginning and the end of this paragraph:

‘Our Rabbi had so accustomed himself to acting immaturity that he was unable to break the habit easily when he arrived in Erets Yisrael. He wanted to discard this behaviour and had to use great strength to break these immature habits. After he returned from the Land of Israel, the intensity of his great wisdom grew deeper and deeper in ways never heard or seen before. It is known that when one goes from one level to another there must be descent before elevation. He therefore made himself into a simple person. In his whole life, he never rested on one level, but was constantly rising from level to level. Because of this, his was much higher and deeper.’<sup>11</sup>

Reb Nahman used his descent to lowliness on the way to the Land of Israel and the hardship the journey involved, to move forward and higher for the rest of his life. This achievement of greatness through lowliness is at the core of the meaning that the visit to the Land of Israel held for Reb Nahman, as we shall see.

## **Arrival in Erets Yisrael, elevation and descent**

‘They arrived erev Rosh Hashana at the holy city of Haifa. They stood near Mount Carmel opposite the cave of Eliyahu. In the early morning the entire nation recited selihot with great joy. Afterwards they said shaharit and then they all went to the holy city of Haifa; men, women and children.

‘And then our holy Rabbi entered. He had arrived at the place which he had had a burning desire

and longing to visit. It would be impossible to describe the profound joy he felt when he entered Erets Yisrael and stood on her holy soil. He was ecstatic because he achieved all that he wanted immediately upon walking four amot in the Land of Israel. Right after midday they went to the mikve and then to the synagogue, and they remained there until nightfall. When our Rabbi came to his inn he was filled with profound joy. He repeatedly told the person who accompanied him, “you should be extremely happy that you had the merit to accompany me here”. He asked him to read all the notes which the people from back home gave to him to take to the Holy Land. They ate there the Yom Tov meal with much joy. They then retired for the night. In the morning, they went to the synagogue. When they returned from the synagogue there arose within him great worry and anxiety and he did not utter a word to anyone.’<sup>12</sup>

We can see here one rise to greatness following a fall into lowliness, but another, deeper fall was to come.

‘On Hol Hamoed Sukkot all the people went with Reb Nahman to the cave of Eliyahu Hanavi. All the people were happy, dancing and singing, but he was not happy at all. He sat with a broken heart in a very subdued manner. The sadness lasted from Rosh Hashana until Succot.’<sup>13</sup>

This unhappiness continued throughout Hol Hamoed Sukkot. On Simhat Torah, Reb Nahman did not want to take part in Hakofot and sat with his head down. Reb Nahman wanted to travel back to the Ukraine immediately after Simhat Torah. After the climax of achieving his goal there was a fall. Perhaps this fall was intended to enable him to reach another peak. If so, what was this subsequent peak? I want to suggest that Reb Nahman believed that after this fall he reached a higher level still, the level of the avot themselves, and felt he was able to keep mitsvot in their essence.

## **Keeping mitsvot in their essence**

By accident, as they began their journey home, Rebbe Shimon and Reb Nahman boarded a Turkish military ship. On board this ship, amid the deepest worries about his

future, Reb Nahman began his climb to the next spiritual summit he sought to conquer.

‘It is impossible to describe the magnitude of the danger that confronted them during their return. They were on a war ship that was full of Ishmaelites and were just two Jews alone. The way of the Ishmaelites, who were particularly warlike, was to capture Jews and sell them in distant places as slaves. Our Rabbi was very fearful of this and started to think of himself and what he would do if they brought him to a place where there were no Jews and sell him there. Who would know? He was most distressed. How would he be able to fulfil the mitsvot of the Torah there?’

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***“...I merited the ability to keep the whole Torah in a manner that even if I were sold to an Ishmaelite in a foreign country, and he sent me to be a shepherd; even if I did not know when it was Shabbat or Yom Tov and had no tallit and tefillin or sukka, nevertheless I could have fulfilled the whole Torah.”***

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‘He began to think about this until he came to an understanding that he would be able to serve God, even if he was unable to perform the mitsvot, because he had obtained the same devotion that our patriarchs had to mitsvot before the giving of the Torah – where they observed all the mitsvot even though they did not perform them literally. This is how Rabbi Nahman came to terms with how he would be able to observe the mitsvot if he were in captivity.

‘When he came to this understanding, God helped him, and on 14 of Nissan the ship reached a large city that stood on an island in the sea. It was the city of Rhodes. They understood that this was a city with Jewish people and they were very happy because they would be able to buy matsa and wine for Pesah. They realised, however, that the captain

and the Ishmaelites would never allow them to enter the city because they wanted to capture them, and possibly sell them.’<sup>14</sup>

‘When he came back from the Land of Israel he said, “in this way I have kept the whole Torah in all matters. I merited the ability to keep the whole Torah in a manner that even if I were sold to an Ishmaelite in a foreign country, and he sent me to be a shepherd; even if I did not know when it was Shabbat or Yom Tov and had no tallit and tefillin or sukka, nevertheless I could have fulfilled the whole Torah.”’<sup>15</sup>

Reb Nahman was comforted by his belief that even if he were unable to carry out the mitsvot physically he would be able to fulfil them in their essence because he had reached the level of the avot, who kept the mitsvot spiritually though they did not perform the physical actions through which we perform them today.

I suggest that Reb Nahman wanted to achieve this level of observance of the mitsvot because this type of observance, spiritual but not physical, is relevant to those generations where many people do not keep the mitsvot physically. It is possible that Reb Nahman was trying to find the essence of Judaism aside from the physical observance of mitsvot so that he could provide spiritual sustenance for such people.<sup>16</sup>

This answers our first question. By going to Erets Yisrael, by descending and then ascending, Reb Nahman was able to fulfil mitsvot spiritually, even if he were prevented for the time being from observing them physically. He could achieve them first spiritually and then physically.

What was special about the Land of Israel that enabled him to do this?

## **The true nature of the Land of Israel**

‘He said that when he was in the Land of Israel the important people there told him about when they came from different countries of the world and settled in the Land of Israel: “Before we came to Israel we could not imagine that the Land of Israel actually existed in this world.” Because of the way the Land of Israel is discussed in sacred texts, they thought that it existed in a different world.

Because of the holiness of the Land of Israel that is mentioned in the holy books. The Land of Israel is a reality in this world, and is like all other countries. The soil in the Land of Israel seems to be like the soil in any other country. There is no difference between the Land of Israel and other countries.

‘Nevertheless, it is so holy, that, “blessed is the one who walks four amot in the Land” as our sages have said. Our Rabbi told us this because there are those who are mistaken and think that we recognise a tsaddik, or anything else that is holy, based on its appearance, and who think it should look different. That is not the case; the tsaddik appears to be like all other people, though he is totally different from other people. Likewise, the Land of Israel is truly different from all of the other countries though it looks the same. The Rabbi said that although on a physical level it appears that there is no difference between Erets Yisrael and the other countries, one who believes in its holiness can notice a difference.’<sup>17</sup>

According to Reb Nahman, the holiness is not expressed externally, but is internal. We read in Devarim 11:12: ‘The Land that the eyes of the Lord your God are upon’ and in Shemuel 1 16:7, ‘Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’. Taken together these pasukim teach that we need to see the world in the way that God looks at the world; its internal rather than external aspects. Reb Nahman saw the special and essential holiness in the Land of Israel, which was able to bring him to the level of the avot and sustain him even after he returned.

## The sustaining power of the journey

Memories of the journey to Erets Yisrael revived Reb Nahman even when he was at his lowest ebb.

‘Sometimes the tsaddik is a truly simple person. There is much to tell but I cannot put it all in writing. Nevertheless I will write what I can. This devar Torah was said on Shabbat Nahamu in Oman close to his passing. At that time, he moved into a new apartment where he eventually died. He liked that apartment as it was spacious and there was a breeze in the garden. He moved in soon before Shabbat Nahamu.

‘Many people gathered together, and newcomers came to be with him during the holy Shabbat. On Friday night he came from his room to the room where the gathering was taking place. He was very, very weak; he almost had no strength to speak. He immediately said kiddush and afterwards sat by the table and did not go back to his room as he was accustomed. He sat and started to speak. He spoke weakly and slowly and was very tired.

‘He said “Why do you travel to me? I don’t know anything at all. When I say words of Torah there is a reason to come to me, but now why are you coming? I don’t know anything. I am just simple, completely simple”. He said twice, three times that he did not know anything and that he was a simple man. Then he said that what gave him vitality at that moment was the fact this he was in the Land of Israel. From this conversation, he began to explain how he sustained himself on the journey from Erets Yisrael. After finishing his explanation he was extremely happy and commanded us to sing a zemer there and then before the washing of the hands. Although he was sometimes so weak that we would not sing at all, now he commanded us to sing immediately and started singing along. He spoke with great happiness and charm. He sat through the whole meal with great strength.

‘He shouted from the depths of his heart “Don’t give up on yourself! We saw the salvation of God and His wonders and how He has mercy on the people of Israel”. At first he [Reb Nahman] really did not know but from that state of not knowing he came to the great level of being able to reveal such a deep matter.’<sup>18</sup>

Reb Nahman was able to find a source of life by recalling his visit to the Land of Israel and began to say the drasha which is brought down in the Kutai Maharon 2:78, which discusses the simplicity of the tsaddik. After he completed his discussion he was tremendously happy and was able to call out ‘don’t give up on yourself’. Once again he moved

***“..He shouted from the depths of his heart ‘Don’t give up on yourself!’”***

from lowliness to greatness as a result of his connection to the Land of Israel and its special properties.

## The true tsaddik

To understand how this process worked, and the role of Erets Yisrael in that process, we need to examine what Reb Nahman taught about the nature of the true tsaddik and his connection to Torah.

‘The essential part of life is the Torah, as it says “you shall have life and shall long endure” (Devarim 30:20). One who separates from the Torah is like one who separates himself from life (Zohar Lekh Lekha). If so, how can one distance oneself from the Torah for even a short time? Yet, it is impossible to be connected to the Torah day and night without a break. Even a person who is on a high level has to take breaks from time to time from spiritual endeavour. It is necessary to stop sometimes to engage in business and to attend to the needs of the body. But if it is impossible to be connected and engaged in the study of Torah all the time, and Torah is the source of life, what will sustain us when we are not connected with the Torah?

‘The true tsaddik sustains his life during the time he is a simple man from his journey to the Land of Israel. This is true of the person who is learned, but is not studying at the time, and the truly simple person who is not learned at all, but has yirat shamayim. He received the source of life from Torah, just as all people, including the nations of the world receive their life from Torah. Truly simple people need a great, simple man from whom to take their spiritual sustenance. Through him, they will receive the light of the Torah. At the time of his simplicity, the tsaddik also receives his spiritual sustenance from that which maintained the world before the giving of the Torah. Before the Torah was given, the world existed through the grace of God because there were no mitsvot through which the world could be sustained. This is what is meant when it says [in birkat hamazon] “His grace nourishes the whole world”. That grace also sustains the tsaddik when he is not engaged in Torah.

‘This is called “a free gift” because a person with no merits, and the tsaddik when he is a simple person,

can receive it. As the Talmud says in Pesachim about the twenty six verses of “ki leolam hasdo”, “they correspond to the twenty six generations” [before the Torah was given]”. At that time there was no Torah and humanity was only involved in settling the world and derekh erets. As our sages said “Greater is derekh erets, which predated the Torah by twenty six generations”. The world existed then through the grace of God.

‘Of course, the Torah existed before it was given, because the Torah is eternal. But it was hidden. The Ten Commandments were hidden in the ten statements through which the world was created. The Torah is hidden in every spoken word, in every work or action, whether it is a person chopping wood or any other work, At the time the tsaddik is separated from the Torah and is a simple person, he receives his spiritual sustenance from the aspect of Torah which existed before the Torah was given.

‘The source of the holiness of the Land of Israel is the ten statements through which the world was created. The tsaddik is therefore able to sustain himself in the time of his simplicity from his visit to the Land of Israel, from the Torah that is hidden in the world, in Erets Yisrael. In order to provide spiritual sustenance to all the simple people and the nations of the world, the great tsaddik must himself descend to simplicity and find his own source of life in the Torah hidden in creation. From that, all of the simple people can receive their source of life.

‘That is why even a person on the lowest level, in the bottom of the pit, should not give up hope... He should try to hold on to whatever he can because even he can return and find life from the Torah through the tsaddik. Hold on to whatever you can because there is no room for despair. There is still hope to return to God. For that reason, we should ask God to merit to come close to the true tsaddik.’<sup>19</sup>

The true tsaddik Reb Nahman describes is, of course, himself. Reb Nahman went through a period in which he could find no happiness or inspiration, even from the Torah. During these hard times he was sustained by his journey to Erets Yisrael. He used his own experience of lowliness to sustain those Jews and non-Jews for whom

lowliness is the normal state as a result of their distance from Torah. His experience of a detachment from Torah and his reconnection with it enabled him to serve the whole world. In the process of restoring his connection he created a bond to the deep and hidden parts of Torah, the parts we do not see.

The whole Torah is encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, which are themselves hidden in the ten statements with which the world was created. This hidden Torah was present in the world before the Torah was given on Sinai. Living in the world, and performing even mundane activities in the Land of Israel allows one to access the Torah. That is the *Torah with attire* that Reb Nahman said he would find on his journey. It is the Torah that is found in any worldly activity undertaken in the Land of Israel, because there the spiritual and the physical fit perfectly, like a set of clothes. There, day to day life creates a connection with the ten statements of creation, the Ten Commandments and the Torah.

Simply by living out his physical life in the Land of Israel, for example by walking around, Reb Nahman achieved great heights in the *Torah with attire*, the Torah present in apparently mundane activities in Erets Yisrael. When he returned to the Diaspora, where the spiritual is more distant from the physical, Reb Nahman had to engage once more with the *Torah without attire*. This answers our second question.

## Torah, hope and the Land of Israel

It is therefore always possible to forge a link with Torah, and there is no place for hopelessness or despair, even when a person feels distant from God. There is always the ability to revive oneself and return to God through engagement with the world, and in particular with the Land of Israel. This has profound implications for how Reb Nahman might consider secular Jews who are involved in

*It is therefore always possible to forge a link with Torah, and there is no place for hopelessness or despair, even when a person feels distant from God.*

building up Erets Yisrael. Reb Nahman saw the holiness hidden within Land of Israel. The Land is holy just as the Jew is holy. Both derive their holiness from the grace of God. A Jew may neglect mitsvot, but while he is occupied in building up Erets Yisrael he is connecting himself with the Torah hidden in creation. In fact, his actions can elevate him to the level of the avot because he is tapping into the spiritual core of Torah and mitsvot, keeping mitsvot in their spiritual essence and accessing the Torah without attire.

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## Endnotes

1. Haye Moharan 130
2. Shivchei HaRan 1
3. Haye Moharan 133
4. Haye Maharan 134
5. Haye Moharan 135
6. Haye Moharan 140
7. Shivchei HaRan 7
8. Ibid., 9
9. Ibid., 10
10. Ibid., 12
11. Ibid., 13
12. Ibid., 15
13. Ibid., 18
14. Ibid., 22
15. Haye Moharan 142
16. This may have been possible only after his return from the Land of Israel, the land which expresses how God's choice of His people is not dependent on their behaviour, as Rav Kook explains in the introduction to Shabbat Haarets and letter 555
17. Likutei Moharan 2: 116
18. Sihot Haran 153
19. Likutei Moharan Tannina 78



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## JEWISH HISTORY

# Chief Rabbi Yitshak HaLevi Herzog on Shimon HaTsaddik

Translated and Edited by Rav Warren Kaye



*Rabbi Yitshak Halevi Herzog (1888-1959) was born in Lomza, Poland and moved to England at the age of nine. His father, Rabbi Yoel Herzog, came to Leeds to be a Rabbi. Yitshak never attended yeshiva but excelled in rabbinic scholarship under the guidance of his father.*

*He received his semicha from Rabbi Yaakov David Werner (Ridvaz) who proclaimed him one of the world's outstanding Talmudists. He attended the Sorbonne, in France, to study Oriental languages and received his doctorate from the London University. His thesis, which made him famous in the Jewish world, was on The Royal Purple and the Biblical Blue – Tekhelet.<sup>1</sup> He served as a Rabbi in Belfast 1916-19 and in 1919 he was appointed Rabbi of Dublin. He went on to be the Chief Rabbi of Ireland 1921-36. R. Herzog was an ardent Zionist and a founder of Mizrahi in Great Britain and Ireland. After refusing the Rabbinate of Salonika in 1932 he accepted an invitation, in 1936, to succeed Rabbi Avraham Yitshak HaKohen Kook as Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine. In 1948 he became the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel. He remained in this position until his death in 1959. This year marks fifty years since he left this world.*

*This essay comes from Essays presented to JH Hertz, Chief Rabbi, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, I. Epstein, E. Levine and C. Roth (ed) (London 1942). The two Chief Rabbis did not always see eye to eye, nevertheless R. Hertz considered appointing R. Herzog to the London Beth Din in 1934, and R. Herzog said in his hesped for R. Hertz*

*‘with the passing of my dear colleague, not only the Empire but the whole of Jewry stands grievously bereaved. A leader by birth, Dr Hertz delivered his message and strove for its realisation with unstinted devotion and unflinching courage’. This essay is another sign of the esteem in which R. Herzog held R. Hertz.<sup>2</sup>*

A Boraita states:

‘“And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I loathe them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God.”

‘...“and have not loathed them” in the times of the Greeks, when I gave them Shimon Hatsaddik, the Hasmonean and his sons and Matityahu the High Priest to save them.’<sup>3</sup>

Much ink has been spilt regarding the dating of Shimon HaTsaddik. Our sages place him at the time of Alexander the Great (356 – 323 BCE). This would imply that Shimon was very young at his historic meeting with Alexander the Great reported in Yoma 69.<sup>4</sup> Much of his lifetime was during the time of Lagus (fourth century BCE).<sup>5</sup>

His magnitude, piety and holiness are apparent in a number of accounts in the writings of Hazal and from the accolade of Tsaddik attached to his name.<sup>6</sup>

***The Rabbis placed [Shimon HaTsaddik] on a par with the Hasmoneans as a champion and defender of Judaism in a time of danger.***

## Shimon HaTsaddik and the Hasmoneans: on a par?

From the boraita above it appears that the Rabbis placed him on a par with the Hasmoneans as a champion and defender of Judaism in a time of danger. The Apocryphal work, Ben Sira, fails to emphasise this point.<sup>7</sup> The renovations to the Temple and the erection of a wall around the city following its destruction were indeed important and righteous acts but do not equal the actions of the Hasmoneans who saved the entire Jewish people.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Shimon HaTsaddik saved the Temple from destruction by the Kutim at his meeting with Alexander the Great, raises his status and sets his actions nearer those of the Hasmoneans. But there is surely more here than meets the eye in the parallel between the historical role of Shimon HaTsaddik, the High Priest, and the High Priesthood of Matityahu and his sons who saved Israel.

## Greeks and Jews

A famous Jewish author once stated that if the Sages in Israel at the time of the Greeks had abandoned the translation of the Torah into Greek to others and had concentrated on translating the works of Plato and Aristotle into Hebrew, then their achievements and influence on Judaism would have been much more important and fruitful. But the opposite is true. Had the Sages occupied their time translating the works of Plato and Aristotle into Hebrew during this period of the resuscitation of the Oral Law they would have caused the desolation and the drying up of the spring of Judaism. The spiritual strength of Israel would have waned. From where would sufficient strength to rise and fight against the destructive current of the Hellenistic culture in the days of Matityahu and his sons have been mustered? Judaism would have descended into spiritual non-existence. The sages were not at liberty to allow this to happen!

***The Rabbis related positively and with respect to general philosophy, and specifically to the people of Greece.***

Within Greek culture two distinct streams are evident: First, a philosophical stream, known in Rabbinic literature as ‘Greek wisdom’; secondly a pleasure-seeking, hedonistic stream which should be known as ‘Greek impurity’. It was the second stream of Greek culture which poisoned part of the Jewish aristocracy in the days of Yosef the tax collector and brought about the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes.<sup>9</sup> In partnership with wicked Jews he strove to destroy not the Jews, but Judaism.

The question that one must ask is: did Greek wisdom at any time make any inroads into Israel amongst Jewish intellectuals, philosophers and ethicists? It seems to me that the answer is no. The second, hedonistic, stream of Greek culture is indeed evident in Israel during the Hellenistic period – this is clear from the existence of unethical, evil people possessed by their inclinations, impure hedonists who imported Greek culture into Israel. There is some evidence of the scholarly Greek philosophers who studied and researched that which is behind nature and who form a type of cross breed (kilaim) of Torah and Greek wisdom in God’s vineyard. However, these people by and large were to be found in Alexandria, Egypt. It was about their influence that a student of Shimmon HaTsaddik warned:

‘Sages, be wary in your words lest you be culpable and exiled and you will be exiled to a place of acrid water and your students will drink and die and God’s name will be profaned!’<sup>10</sup>

In Israel, it appears, Greek wisdom did not find a nest nor did it build a house.

I have already written about the relationship between Greek wisdom and the Torah scholars of Erets Yisrael in pamphlets and historical periodicals in England and America. The general picture that I have from my research is that on the one hand the rabbis related positively and with respect to general philosophy, and specifically to the people of Greece – they considered them to be fulfilling an important role in impregnating the dark world of idolatry with some light. On the other hand, they despised the study of what is behind nature – namely, the attempts to unravel the riddles of the world with our human, inferior knowledge. This attitude did not concern the sciences, like medicine, mathematics, astronomy and botany as these are subjects which the rabbis were regularly involved in.<sup>11</sup>

What was the turning point at which Greek wisdom, broke into Erets Yisrael and began to desecrate the spiritual

focal point of the Jewish people in Erets Yisrael? This occurred during the time of Alexander the Great and more specifically during the period of his invasion of Erets Yisrael. Why was this the case? Alexander the Great was a close student of Aristotle, the genius of Greek philosophy. Aristotle was an admirer of Jews and Judaism, even though his knowledge of both of them was so minimal as to be insignificant. Alexander was a great supporter and admirer of Greek philosophy and was liked by the Jews to the extent that they named all the children born in the year he entered Erets Yisrael 'Alexander'.

## The achievement of Shimon HaTsaddik

These were causes that could have led to a flood of influence of Greek metaphysics on the intellectuals, philosophers and ethicists, on 'the wise and clever people' in their holy land and especially over the younger cadre of students.<sup>12</sup> This flood would have shaken the foundations of Judaism, the belief in Torah from Heaven, in prophecy, creation ex nihilo, in Divine Providence and in the eternal value of the practical commandments. It did not. Why? I think that this great and holy man whose face radiated glory and splendour, who brought the powerful Alexander the Great to bow down to him and to recognise his splendour and holiness, his purity and his wisdom, his simplicity and his honour – in the eyes of the entire nation. Shimon, to whom the entire nation granted the accolade 'Tsaddik', who attracted admiration and support, stood in the breach as a messenger from on high preventing the influence of Greek wisdom, and saved the Torah, Tradition and Judaism. He was the member of the Great Assembly who advocated 'establish many students.'<sup>13</sup> He taught that the three founding pillars of the world are Torah, avoda and gemillut hasadim<sup>14</sup> – this is the programme, the agenda of Israel – on three things the world stands: on the Torah, on avoda and on gemillut hasadim.<sup>15</sup>

Faithful to the historical line of his teachers he established, strengthened and defended the pillar of Torah, which he placed at the forefront because without Torah in Israel there is nothing. At the time when Greek wisdom and metaphysics could potentially uproot Judaism, Shimon HaTsaddik established thousands of students in Erets Yisrael. He intellectually sustained exceptional young talented students of Jerusalem and in the cities of Yehuda and provided food and sustenance for the heart and

brain, sanctified, purified and cleansed their hearts and feeling with the ethics of the Torah, prophets and sages. He sharpened their minds with the wisdom of the Torah. In this way he deflected the attack and influence of Greek wisdom and he armed the Hebrew heart and brain to be a force to be reckoned with in the days to come against the second type of Greek culture – in the Hellenistic period – which is termed correctly as Greek impurity.

## The greatness of Shimon HaTsaddik

Shimon HaTsaddik, therefore, is equal in stature to the Hasmoneans in the struggle. Furthermore, one could argue that the dangers to Judaism in the days of Alexander the Great were greater than that in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. If we take a closer look it becomes clear that this is indeed the case as Greek wisdom was potentially a greater threat than Greek impurity. Greek impurity is diametrically opposed to the essential nature of the Jewish nation, the soul of the people. It was not capable of spreading to the entire nation. It failed to conquer the good hearted and the scholarly and were it not for the strong support it received from the wicked ruler, Antiochus, it would not have been as successful as it was – which is not the case regarding the first type of Greek culture.

### *The dangers to Judaism in the days of Alexander the Great were greater than that in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.*

Between Greek culture and Judaism there was much common ground. The extent of this common ground is evident by the fact that Aristotle, who received from a distance some concepts of Judaism from the Jews in his land, described the Jewish nation as 'a nation entirely of philosophers.'<sup>16</sup> Specifically because of this, there was great danger in the days of Rabbi Shimon HaTsaddik, the high priest, and it was he who saved the soul of the nation, then and for future generations.

Therefore the rabbis taught

‘“and have not loathed them“ in the times of the Greeks, when I gave them Shimon HaTsaddik and the Maccabees.’<sup>17</sup>

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## Endnotes

- In his dissertation R. Herzog shows that the theory of the Radzyner Hasidim was incorrect.
- London Metropolitan Archives ACC 2712/15/1161; I. Epstein (ed) *Joseph Herman Hertz: In memoriam* (London 1947), 37
- BT Megilla 11a
- Yoma 69a
 

והתניא: בעשרים וחמשה [בטבת] יום הר גזרים [הוא], דלא למספד. יום שבקשו כותיים את בית אלהינו מאלכסנדרוס מוקדון להחריבו ונתנו להם. באו והודיעו את שמעון הצדיק. מה עשה? לבש בגדי כהונה, ונתעטף בבגדי כהונה, ומיקירי ישראל עמו, ואבוקות של אור בידיהן, וכל הלילה הללו הולכים מצד זה והללו הולכים מצד זה עד שעלה עמוד השחר. כיון שעלה עמוד השחר אמר להם: מי הללו? אמרו לו: יהודים שמרדו בך. כיון שהגיע לאנטיפטרס זרחה חמה, ופגעו זה בזה. כיון שראה לשמעון הצדיק, ירד ממרכבתו והשתחוה לפניו. אמרו לו: מלך גדול כמוך ישתחוה ליהודי זה?

אמר להם: דמות דיוקנו של זה מנצחת לפני בבית מלחמתי. - אמר להם: למה באתם? - אמרו: אפשר בית שמתפללים בו עליך ועל מלכותך שלא תחרב יתעוך גויים להחריבו? - אמר להם: מי הללו? - אמרו לו: כותיים הללו שעומדים לפניך. - אמר להם: הרי הם מסורים בידיכם. מיד נקבום בעקביהם ותלאום בזבני סוסיהם, והיו מגררין אותן על הקוצים ועל הברקנים עד שהגיעו להר גרזים. כיון שהגיעו להר גרזים חרשוהו, וזרעוהו כרשינין. כדרך שבקשו לעשות לבית אלהינו. ואותו היום עשאוהו יום טוב.

The boraita states: on the 25 Tevet is the day known as the day of Mount Grizim on which one is not permitted to eulogise. It is the day on which the Kutim requested of Alexander the Macedonian permission regarding the destruction of the Temple and he granted it to them. Those who were apprised of this peril came and informed Shimon HaTsaddik of the decree.

What did he do? He donned priestly garments and wrapped his head in priestly vestments and set out to meet Alexander accompanied by some of his most prominent people in Israel. They took lit torches in their hands and all night long these were approaching from this side and those were approaching from that side until the light of dawn arose.

Once the light of dawn rose and Alexander saw the Jewish delegation he said (to the Kuti informers) who are these people? They answered him: it is the Jews who have rebelled against you. As he reached Antipatres, the sun shone forth and they met up with each other. As soon as Alexander saw Shimon HaTsaddik he alighted from his chariot and bowed down before him. Those who were with Alexander said to him: shall a great king like you bow down before this Jew?! He replied that an image in the likeness of this man gains victory before me on all my battlefields. He then turned to the Jews and said: why have you come? They replied: is it possible that with regard to the very house in which we pray for you and for your empire that it should not be destroyed – idolaters mislead you to destroy it? He said to them: who are these schemers who would mislead me so? They said: it is these very Kutim who stand before you. So he said to them behold they are given into your hands to punish them as you see fit. Immediately they pierced the Kutim in their heels and suspended them from the tails of their horses and dragged them over the thorns and thistles until they reached Mount Grizim. They ploughed it and planted it just as the Kutim had sought to do to the House of our God. They made that day into a festive day.

See also Megillat Taanit Kislev 21

- Lagus was the reputed father of Ptolemy, the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty.
- Mishna Avot 1:2, Tosefta (Lieberman) Nazir 4:7, Sota 13:7, Megillat Taanit (Lichtenstein) Scholion "Kislev 21, Vayikra Rabba (Vilna) parsha 13
- Rashbats Magen Avot 1:2
- Ben Sira 44:1 – 50:24
- Ben Sira 50:2-3
- H. Goldwurm, Y. Friedner, *History of the Jewish People: The Second Temple Era* (1982), 56
- Mishna Avot 1:9
- R. Herzog is here drawing a distinction between science, on the one hand, and metaphysics - 'the study of what is behind nature' – on the other.
- Devarim 4:6
- Mishna Avot 1:1
- Mishna Avot 1:2
- R. Binyamin Lau regards Shimon HaTsaddik as the watershed between the old world and the new world.

Shimon HaTsaddik bridges the gap during the period of the end of prophecy in Israel and the rise of Greek culture. Saul Lieberman in *Greek in Jewish Palestine* explains how logic such as *gezera shava* influenced the world of Torah learning as prophecy disappeared. R. Lau describes how this new type of learning shook the world of Torah.

Shimon regarded himself as responsible for moving the generation from the old to the new. This is the background to the statement in Avot 1:2 that the world stands on three legs: Torah – accepting the Torah and its authority; *avoda* – the work in the Temple of the priests and Jerusalem; *gemillut hasadim* – his concern for other ideas that had entered the world, in the light of the many Nazirites and sects who removed themselves from normal life. There is no *gemillut hasadim* in a world of separation and Nazirites. Shimon tried to stop the influence of the new.

16. Theophrastus (372-288BCE), he was Aristotle's student and successor at the Lyceum.

17. Megilla 11a

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## TANACH

# Yona's Three Day Journey: Greek Tragedy and the Gaon of Vilna

Tikva Blaukopf

The eighteenth century Lithuanian luminary, the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) proposes an allegorical exegesis of Sefer Yona. The Gra does not frame his interpretation as 'allegory', but simply states it is a remez, 'hint'.<sup>1</sup> In summary, the peshat or 'simple exposition' of Yona is that Yona the prophet-protagonist is sent by God to Nineveh to tell the people to repent. Yona runs away in order to evade physically the location of God's verbal instruction. Having boarded a ship, he and his shipmates endure a threatening storm at sea and after a peculiar interaction with the sailors, he is thrown into the waters by the sailors in order to appease the deity they hold responsible for this havoc. Yona falls straight into an allotted fish where he spends three days and three nights before he is expelled onto dry land to advance the specifics of God's mandate.<sup>2</sup> The rest of the narrative concerns his interactions with himself, God and the people of Nineveh. The Vilna Gaon's exegesis is that God sent the neshama – soul – to this world to rectify the world (just like a navi is sent to rectify the people). And not only did the neshama not rectify it, but corrupted itself also. Afterwards, it is sent out a second time in a reincarnation to fix [itself and the world].<sup>3</sup> Yona is seen as the neshama.

## One can read death and re-creation into Yona's descent and ascent.

I will discuss some of the ways in which one can view Yona's actions and thoughts before, during and after the fish episode. I will use the Vilna Gaon's interpretation as a spring-board for the re-examination of Yona's identity throughout these three stages and I will be focussing

heavily on the use of the three day journey in this text as a vehicle for transition. In the elucidation of this transition and how one can read death and re-creation into Yona's descent and ascent, I will be looking at a Greek work from fifth century Athens, Euripides' Alcestis. I will try to demonstrate how an allegorical reading of Alcestis' three day journey in and out of the underworld can assist in a re-evaluation of Yona himself and our appreciation of the use made of the text.<sup>4</sup>

## Sleep and descent

When Yona falls asleep on the ship, the word used is 'vayeiradam'. Why is this word used as opposed (and in addition) to the more usual 'vayishan' or 'vayishkav'? Indeed, why is it that Yona has to fall asleep – we are not told that the other sailors do? How intrinsic is this particular type of falling asleep to the narrative? I suggest that the root r-d-m (or as it appears in Proto-Indo-European 'drem' meaning 'to sleep') signifies a certain type of deep sleep which enables Yona to emerge a different person.<sup>5</sup> The word 'vayardem' shares the same root as 'tardema' – a falling asleep that is so deep because it is needed for the re-creation of the person. This word occurs six times in the Tanakh – and each time it is used one can associate it with a certain sort of transition.

The archetypal tardema can be seen with Adam at Bereshit 2.21:<sup>6</sup>

וַיִּפֹּל הָאָדָם עַל-הָאֲדָמָה, וַיִּישָׁן

And God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept.

Adam falls into a tardema and it is from this that emerges the antidote to his envisaged loneliness (he does not express himself as lonely, but the reason given for Hava's moulding is the benefit of companionship). This result is achieved through Adam being rendered into a state in which he is seemingly unconscious of his surroundings and transplanted from the experience of Gan Eden. In his tardema his 'ezer kenegdo' can be provided for him.<sup>7</sup> Therefore one can see in his falling asleep a transition which enables his own identity to be affirmed. By Woman existing, Adam can therefore be Man.

In addition, one can see Ibn Ezra's (1092-1167) treatment of tardema in Bereshit:

אמר ר' משה הכהן, כי תנומה פחותה משינה, ושינה פחותה מתרדמה ויפרש, הנה לא נומהינום ולא יישן (תהל: קכא, ד) אין צריך להזכיר לא יישן. ואני אומר, כי מלת שינה כוללת הת והתרדמה והעד (שאמר הכתוב ויישן ולא וירדם) וישנו עד עולם (ירמ: נא, לט).<sup>8</sup>

'R. Moshe HaKohen said, "since a doze is less than a sleep, and sleep is less than a deep sleep"...

The Ibn Ezra goes on to state that he does not agree with the interpretation I am using of tardema, but he does provide a source (R. Moshe HaKohen) who does, demonstrating that tardema can be seen as hierarchically on a higher level than standard 'sheina'.

In Yona 1:5 we read

וַיִּוָּנֶה יוֹנָה בְּרֶגֶל הַיָּם וַיִּשָׁכַב, וַיִּרְדָּם

Yona falls into a deep sleep and it is from that which he is aroused by the boat's captain and interrogated as to his identity.<sup>9</sup> The captain asks: 'מה-לךָ נרדמ, how can you sleep?' a question showing that the captain too is focussed on Yona's tardema as an object of primary significance.

## The narrative of Yona is a hint, in the Gra's words, to the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul.

The sailors ask Yona five questions. Yona answers with five points; primarily that he is an Ivri. (Yona: 1.8-9)

ח וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו--הַגִּידָה-נָא לָנוּ, בְּאִשֶּׁר לָמִי-הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ: מִה-מְלֹאכְתְּךָ, וּמֵאַיִן תְּבוֹא--מִה אֶרֶץְךָ, וְאִי-מִזֶּה עִם אֶתֶּה.

8. Then said they to him: 'Tell us please, for whose cause this evil is upon us: what is your occupation? and where do you come from? what is your country? and of what people art you?'

ט וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵיהֶם, עֲבָרִי אֲנִכִּי; וְאֶת-הָאֱלֹהִי הַשָּׁמַיִם, אֲנִי יִרְא, אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה אֶת-הַיָּם, וְאֶת-הַיַּבֵּשָׁה.

9 And he said unto them: 'I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who has made the sea and the dry land.'

We see that Yona has already begun to see. He tells the sailors to cast him into the sea because he is the guilty origin of the storm, the polluting member.

If one works on the model of Adam's tardema, then one would expect Yona to have woken up 'a wiser man', but how does him being cast into the waters as an offering (וַיִּזְבְּחוּ-זֶבַח) fit into this model? I propose that this descent is, as the Gra explains, an introductory descent of the neshama into its body.

When Yona descended to the hold of the ship, this seemed to be an active descent, though not one that could ensure safety; it was rather a descent of resignation. If וַיִּוָּנֶה יוֹנָה הַיָּם are the inner depths of the ship, and perhaps the sea itself, then such a yerida could imply an approach to the very edge of the sea. The Gra understands the sea as representing this world and dry land the next world. Therefore, we see the neshama on the brink of the two worlds. The narrative of Yona is a hint, in the Gra's words, to the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. This relationship is the basis of Jewish practice, which consists of physical activity for spiritual effect.

Yona is swallowed by a fish and spends three days and nights in its belly. While in the fish, he interrogates his own mortality and searches for meaning in his existence.

ב וַיִּוָּתֵּל יוֹנָה, אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים, מִמְעֵי הַדָּגָה

2 Then Yona prayed to the Lord his God out of the fish's belly.

ג וַיֹּאמֶר, קְרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֶל-ה'--וַיַּעֲנֵנִי; מִבֶּטֶן  
מִשְׁבָּרֵיךְ וַיִּגְלֵדְךָ, שָׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי.

3 And he said: I called out of my affliction unto the Lord, and He answered me; out of the belly of the nether-world cried I, and You heard my voice.



Roman sarcophagus depicting Yonah being thrown into the sea

ד וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִצֹּלָה בְּלִבְבַּי יָמִים, וַנְּהַר יִסְבְּבֵנִי; כָּל-  
מִשְׁבָּרֵיךְ וַיִּגְלֵדְךָ, עָלַי עָבְרוּ.

4 For You did cast me into the depth, in the heart of the seas, and the flood was round about me; all Your waves and Your billows passed over me.

Only once he has found meaning is Yona ejected from this womb, demonstrating that this was part of the purpose for him being there. The Yona who is expelled from the fish is not the same Yona who entered. Yona expelled, is according to the Gra the neshama being sent out a second time to rectify itself and the world. Before this three day period, Yona was not ready to take on this task, rather we see him effect an escape of sorts, demanding that the sailors throw him overboard, presumably to drown, choosing death over life. This is the neshama wrestling with its task and not succeeding. After the three days, we still see Yona grappling with his role, but we see him having understood that the task is his, not to reject but to undertake, even if he is not favourably inclined towards it.

א. וַיְהִי דְבַר-ה' אֶל-יוֹנָה, שְׁנִית לְאֹמֶר

1 And the word of the Lord came unto Yona the second time, saying:

ב קוּם לְךָ אֶל-נִינְוָה, הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה; וּקְרָא אֲלֶיהָ  
אֶת-הַקְּרִיאָה, אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי דֹבֵר אֲלֶיךָ.

2 'Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and make to it the proclamation that I bid you.'

ג וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה, וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל-נִינְוָה--כְּדִבְרֵי ה'

3 So Yona arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

There is an assertion by Yona that he was ready to die, but God saved him.

ז לְקַצְבֵי הַרִים יִרְדֹּתִי, הָאֲרָץ בְּרַחֲמֶיהָ בְּעַדֵי לְעוֹלָם;  
וַתַּעַל מִשַּׁחַת חַיִּי, ה' אֵל-י.

7 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars closed upon me for ever; yet have You brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

Thus Yona has cemented his role as prophet-protagonist as a result of the three day ordeal.

## Three days

There are various other examples of events happening after three days and I posit that the element of transition of identity and re-creation of being is present within them all. Here is a selection:

Shemot, 15: 22-23: 'They journeyed three days in the desert and came to Mara.' Bnei Yisrael, enter a desolate aridity in which the formulation of their nationhood will be played out. Moshe has shown himself to be the leader, yet at Mara, there will be a conflict.

Shemot, 19:15-16: 'Be ready for the third day... On the third day in the morning there was thunder and lightning...' Here, Bnei Yisrael went from being the slaves who have left Egyptian bondage, to being a people primed for nationhood. This change in self identification started with the plagues, yet, it seems, a three day process is also necessary to complete the procedure.

Bereshit, 22.4: 'On the third day Avraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.' This takes place as Avraham approaches Har HaMoria for the purpose of Akeidat Yitshak. These three days complete the development of Avraham as the ultimate eved Hashem. Indeed, we also see in Bereshit 15:12 that tardema is also used with reference

## *The Maharal considers the number three to contain within it a transcendent quality, which takes a process and pushes it forward.*

to Avraham, 'and the sun went down and a great sleep fell upon Avraham.'

(וַיִּהְיֶה הַשָּׁמֶשׁ לְבוֹא, וַתִּרְדָּמָה נְפֹלָה עַל אַבְרָם)

This is the sunset of the neshama.

Esther, 4.15: 'Three days, night and day I and my maids will fast also.' This is not a physical journey, but the preparation needed by Esther in terms of purification of herself and absolution of herself to God is clear.

The Maharal of Prague (1520-1609) in his commentary on Pirkei Avot, proclaims three is a powerful unit:

Three is a portentous number in Judaism. Moses was the third child in his family. The Israelites began the three-day process of preparing themselves to receive the Torah on the third of Sivan. God divided the Jews into three groups with different roles: the Kohanim, the Leviites, and the rest of the Jews, Yisrael...

From this perspective, we can begin to examine the significance of the number three. The Maharal tells us to imagine a link chain. When you hold it up, the first link touches the second one. The second one touches both the first link and the third one. The third one touches the second one and not the first. Thus the third link is the first in the series that does not have any connection to the first link. The number three thus symbolizes something new, but not disconnected.<sup>10</sup>

The Maharal considers the number three to contain within it a transcendent quality, which takes a process and pushes it forward. For example, Moshe, as the third child in his family, took up the monotheism of Avraham, but developed it further. Indeed, the Maharal on Pirkei Avot notes that, 'many of the teachings of mussar come to us in threes, because the number three includes the

point, the counterpoint, and the midpoint. (Thesis, antithesis, synthesis, if you will.) The Rabbis want to lead us to perfection by focusing on improving an element at one extreme, then on the opposite extreme, and finally focusing on perfect balance in the middle.'<sup>11</sup>

Thus far, we have looked at Yona and his three day journey and how one may understand them in the Tanakh framework. We have seen how three in and of itself is a number resonating with progression, separation and renewal. Euripides' *Alcestis* offers a particularly interesting parallel to this discussion.

## Euripides' *Alcestis*

*Alcestis*, written by the Greek tragedian Euripides in fifth century Athens (438 BCE according to scholars, making it Euripides' earliest dated work), is a problematic play. In recent years academics have argued over its labelling: tragic, comic, satyr, prosatyr or tragicomic. This is not within the realm of this article and I shall consider it a tragedy for the purposes of this discussion; its genre is not of paramount importance for the present.

The play concerns itself with the royal couple Admetus and his wife Alcestis who rule the kingdom of Pherae, Thessaly. The time for Admetus' death has arrived. Previously, the god Apollo had come to serve his punishment for rebellion against Zeus by acting as cattle-minder in Admetus' palace. Admetus had been kind to him, Apollo repays this favour by delaying death on the condition that Admetus choose someone to die in his stead. Admetus cannot find anyone, neither kin nor kind, apart from his loyal wife who offers herself up for him. The offer is accepted and Alcestis dies on stage.<sup>12</sup> Bereft, her family begin mourning, but as chance would have it, Heracles the hero comes to visit. With him come the trappings of joviality and cheer – unwelcome in a house of mourning. Yet Admetus' house is famed for its hospitality and Admetus lets Heracles into his palace. Heracles finally discovers why its inhabitants are behaving oddly through the stropky outburst of a tearfully wronged slave girl and volunteers to go and rescue Alcestis (a previous amour of his anyway) from the underworld. He does so and after a three day stint in the world of shades, Alcestis is re-established as wife and queen.

I will try to demonstrate that Alcestis' three day journey in the realm of the dead is a vehicle for transition. Alcestis

### *Alcestis' three day journey in the realm of the dead is a vehicle for transition.*

upon exit, is not the same as Alcestis upon return. She has changed within the framework of the role that is allotted to her. Alcestis' name comes from the Greek 'Alke', meaning courage: a manly characteristic and not one with which a woman would necessarily wish to associate herself. Previous to the action of the play, Alcestis is known in myth as thinking for herself not particularly headstrong, but not a vapid weakling either.<sup>13</sup> Here, she seems to take a proactive step to join death – as it is the very thing that will aid her family. Alcestis' ultimate concern is keeping her family intact. Even in death, she is 'united in grief' with her family.<sup>14</sup> Alcestis, in offering herself as a 'spousal' sacrifice, partially abnegates her identity as desperate housewife and grants a depth and verification to the aptness of her name. This instance is the apex at which Alcestis' potential is translated into realisation. Previously a cipher, now Alcestis has become someone substantial in deed and in word.

We can read into this story a further enlightening allegorical exegesis. Admetus reigns over a kingdom on the threshold of the Underworld. Phrae is at the brink of where souls enter for death. One can see Admetus, as the favoured king to whom gods offer kindnesses, as Death himself. His epithet is 'the Hospitable' and indeed, who is more hospitable than Death? Admetus can be seen as the adamantine figure whom nothing can damage. As such, in dying, Alcestis is offering herself to her husband.<sup>15</sup> Whatever past she had, her life has been recreated in the hands of her husband and ruler, Admetus. The Erinyes (Furies) once complained to Apollo that in favouring Admetus he had blurred, if not removed, the demarcation between mortals and immortals. Apollo had been sent to Admetus because of a grave sin he had committed against Zeus (killing the Cyclopes in revenge for the death of his own son Asclepius). Apollo had been sent for a spell of death.

The handling of the Alcestis myth varied, and not all ancient authors followed Euripides' approach. We do not have an extant Latin version, but we are told of the tragedian Accius' (170-86 BCE) rendition of Alcestis' ascent from Hades, 'cum stiderat retracta rursus inferis' –

when she had screamed out as she was dragged back from the world below. This is enough to tell us that Euripides' version is not an inevitable one. We do not see this unwillingness in Euripides' Alcestis figure. She is happy to take the hand of her saviour Heracles.

The story is riddled with leitmotifs and curious complexities, a few of which I feel are answered by reliance on an allegorical reading. For example, the 'paradox of the story is that, while a woman who would die in her husband's stead would be the best of wives, the loss of so good a woman would render desolate and unliveable the remaining life she made possible for her husband. When his wife is restored to him at the end by the intervention of Heracles, Admetus has recovered not only her but also a more just appreciation of ordinary mortal existence', and, I would suggest, of his wife.<sup>16</sup> If one sees Alcestis as being part of a world through death, then the paradox is resolved. In Thornton Wilder's retelling of *Alcestis*, he gives the modest Herdsman the apt words 'I have always seen that there are two kinds of death: one which is an end; and one which is a going forward.'<sup>17</sup>

### **New light on Yona**

Through examining Alcestis' character formation and how it has been remoulded as a result of her 'death', I have tried to shed some fresh light on Yona and his journey. I am in no way putting the two texts on a par, but rather using an understanding of one character's journey to enhance understanding of another.

Both Yona and *Alcestis* have enjoyed repeated retellings. Yona was rendered into a medieval morality play, *Alcestis* into pantomime, opera and ballet.<sup>18</sup> Eager minds have appropriated each for their own purposes. Curious here, in reference to this discussion, is Stelios Haralambopoulos' film *Hades* which looks at descents and ascents from the underworld in a political light. The political manipulations of Yona are many and largely unrealised.

The Chorus, which in the history of Greek theatre used to have religious significance, promises Alcestis immortality in verse (a song which Admetus refuses to listen to).<sup>19</sup> On Yom Kippur, we grant Yona immortality as we use his life's story as the permanent turning post for each waning and waxing year. The Gra taught that Yona's journey reflects that of the neshama doing teshuva in this world. At *Alcestis* 773-802 we are told that 'no-one knows whether he will be

alive tomorrow and so must make good use of today.'

The katabasis/yerida (descent) is a common leitmotif. Both Yona and Alcestis take theirs with varying degrees of choice. One makes steps to use it for altruistic purposes to save her family, the other is forced into it by a guided turn of events. Each of the characters I have examined endures his or her katabasis for the sake of others and emerges on anabasis (ascent) more reconciled to the allotted role. The liminality of these characters is nowhere better appreciated by us than at that most suspenseful moment of *minha* on Yom Kippur, when we are already well embarked on our descent into ourselves, hoping that salvation may come. The story of Yona, says the Gra, is the story of every Jew's life, its struggle, descent and rebirth.

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### **End Notes**

1. OED 1382 Wyclif, used as a 'description of a subject under the guise of some subject of aptly suggestive resemblance'. I am using the term 'allegory' as a shorthand for WHAT?
2. Allotted on the sixth day of Creation as well as the other miracles (Bilam's donkey etc). Mishna Avot 5.
3. cf Shir HaShirim 6:9
4. I will not quote from the Zohar directly as part of my close-reading, but certain aspects of my analysis will use kabbalistic themes.
5. S Levin, *Semitic and Indo-European* (1995)
6. We learn that the first time a word appears in the Humash, it is paradigmatic and a signifier for following occasions.
7. 'one who helps in accordance with his need'
8. אבן עזרא בראשית שיטה אחרת - פירוש פרק ב
9. I am unsure whether he chooses to fall asleep or whether the tardema is placed on him.
10. Ts. Heller, 'Sivan, the mystical power of three', www.aish.org
11. www.torah.org, Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky
12. That Alcestis dies on stage is strange in itself and has provoked the genre debate. Greek tragedy did not have characters dying on stage.

13. She sets a competition for her hand. Both Heracles and Admetus compete. Admetus wins with the help of a god.

14. Cf the most opposite example of Andromache who kills her progeny.

15. Yona, in entering the world of the fish is offering his life to God.

16. D. Kovacs, *Euripides' Alcestis*, Loeb edition

17. T. Wilder, *The Alcestiad or A Life in the Sun*, 1955

18. Christian catacombs of Rome have many surviving images, including depictions of Yona and of Hercules returning Alcestis from the underworld but they do not make any connection between the pictures. <http://campus.belmont.edu/honors/catacombs/catacombs.htm>

19. Either Admetus refuses because he as Death cannot grant life, or because he will have no part in preventing her dying for him.

HALACHA

# Understanding the obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt

Yair Blumenfeld



The splitting of the Red Sea by Swiss artist Jost Amman (1539-1591)

## You shall remember the day you left the land of Egypt all the days of your life

The first chapter of Tractate Brakhot discusses the obligation of reciting Kriat Shema twice a day. The last Mishna in this chapter states the well known statement of Rav Elazar ben Azariya, also included in the text of the Hagadda.<sup>1</sup>

”מזכירין יציאת מצריים בלילות. אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה, הרי אני כבן שבעים שנה, ולא זכיתי שתיאמר יציאת מצריים בלילות, עד שדרשה בן זומא: שנאמר ילמען תזכור את יום צאתך מארץ מצריים, כול ימי חיידך” - ימי חיידך, הימים; יכול ימי חיידך, הלילות. וחכמים אומרים, ימי חיידך, העולם הזה; יכול ימי חיידך, להביא את ימות המשיח”

The Mishna discusses the obligation of mentioning Yetsiat

Mitsrayim on a daily basis. Both ben Zoma and the Hahamim elaborate the verse

ילמען תזכור את יום צאתך מארץ מצריים, כול ימי חיידך.<sup>2</sup>

‘In order that you shall remember the day you left the land of Egypt all the days of your life’ as requiring us to remember the Exodus from Egypt during the day, which is done through reciting the third paragraph of the Shema.<sup>3</sup> However, ben Zoma explains that the extra word ‘kol’ comes to include the remembrance even at night, whilst the Hahamim explain that it represents the idea that even in the days of Mashiah we will remember the Exodus from Egypt.

## Makhloket between ben Zoma and the Hahamim

We will focus first on the nature of the requirement to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night according to ben Zoma.

The preceding Mishna discusses the requirement to recite two Brakhot before and two Brakhot after the reading of the Shema.<sup>4</sup> In Ma’ariv, one of these two brakhot is Ga’al Yisrael, which discusses the redemption from Egypt. The Ra’avad quoted within the Rashba points out that the brakha of Ga’al Yisrael was being said before ben Zoma had concluded that the Exodus must be remembered at night.<sup>5</sup> As such, the Ra’avad concludes that the Hahamim agree that there is a requirement to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night, but only on a Rabbinic level. Ben Zoma disagrees with this approach and contends that the obligation is a Biblical obligation as can be seen from explaining the verse ‘kol yemei hayekha’.

## According to ben Zoma there is a Biblical obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night.

The Rashba argues with the Ra’avad and says that before ben Zoma presented his opinion, the nusah of the tefilla would have been different and would not have included a brakha of Ga’al Yisrael. As a result of ben Zoma’s revolutionary understanding of the word ‘Kol’ the brakha of Ga’al Yisrael was introduced to follow the third paragraph of the Shema which mentions yetsiat mitsrayim. The Hahamim could learn the ‘kol’ differently and would therefore not require the third paragraph of the shema to be recited at night and would also have a different nusah of the brakhot that follow the shema.

The Makhloket between the Rashba and the Ra’avad can be understood as to whether the Hahamim require remembering the Exodus from Egypt at night on a Rabbinic level or not at all. The Ra’avad would hold that the Hahamim believe that the Exodus must be remembered but only on a Rabbinic level, whilst the Rashba understands that the Hahamim hold that there is no obligation. Both agree that according to ben Zoma there is a Biblical obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night.

Now that we understand the different opinions on how to understand the makhloket between ben Zoma and the Hahamim, we will focus on the views of the poskim on the halakha.

## The Rosh and the Rif

The Rosh and Rif, do not quote either the opinion of ben Zoma or the Hahamim in their writings on Brakhot. Rav Yechezkel Landau (otherwise known as the Nodah B’Yehudah, a prominent rabbinic authority in Prague in the 1700’s) notes this point and understands that both the Rif and the Rosh agree in principle with the view of the Hahamim, as understood by the Rashba, that there is no obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night.<sup>6</sup> With regards to why they do not explicitly say so, the Nodah B’Yehudah explains that they felt it unnecessary because they both quote the halakha in accordance with

Rav Yehoshua ben Korkha. Rav Yehoshua ben Korkha, quoted in the next Mishna, says that the recitation of the third section of the shema is only obligatory during the day just as the mitsva of tsitsit is *only* obligatory during the day.<sup>7</sup> The implication is that Rav Yehoshua ben Korkha agrees with the Hahamim that there is no obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night. Thus, the Rosh and Rif who rule according to Rav Yehoshua ben Korkha would also agree that there is no obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night.

Before proceeding further, we should note a that the obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt by day, which everyone agrees is a Biblical commandment, is unconnected with the recitation of the third section of Shema by day. That third section must be read by day because it mentions tsitsit, and thereby all mitsvot that the tsitsit represent. Just as tsitsit are worn during the day, so the third section of the Shema is read during the day.<sup>8</sup>

## The Rambam

The Rambam begins the halakhot of Kriat Shema with the requirement to recite the Shema twice a day, once in the morning and once at night.<sup>9</sup> He then details which three paragraphs constitute Kriat Shema. The third halakha continues as follows:

אף על פי שאין מצות ציצית נוהגת בלילה, קוראין אותה בלילה, מפני שיש בה זכרון יציאת מצריים; ומצוה להזכיר יציאת מצריים ביום ובלילה, שנאמר ילמען תזכור את יום צאתך מארץ מצריים, כול ימי חיידך. וקריאת שלוש פרשיות אלו על סדר זה, היא הנקראת קרית שמע.

Rambam notes that even though the third paragraph of the Shema is recited in the day due to the fact that all the mitzvot are mentioned through the commandment of tsitsit, and tsitsit are only obligatory during the day, which would imply the third paragraph too need only be read during the day, nonetheless, the paragraph should also be recited at night due to the remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt which is included within the paragraph.<sup>10</sup> This is because remembering the Exodus from Egypt both during the day and at night is a Biblical commandment.

It appears, therefore that the Rambam follows the view of ben Zoma in that there is a Biblical requirement to remember the Exodus from Egypt every day and night

### *The Hahamim and ben Zoma agree that there is a Biblical obligation at night but they differ on the source of the obligation.*

and rejects that of Rav Yehoshua ben Korkha who does not mention the obligation at night.

In order to reconcile the Rambam with the majority view of the Hahamim, the Nodah B'Yehudah explains that R. Elazar ben Azariya's statement quoted in the Mishna ולא זכיתי can be understood in two ways. The first is one of 'victory' in a dispute over the Hahamim because he is now able to find a source for remembering the Exodus from Egypt at night. This is how the Rosh, the Rif and the Rashba understand the Mishna.

The second understanding would be that the words refer to the 'merit' of finding a proof from Scripture and thereby a sufficient source for the obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night. This would imply that the Hahamim and ben Zoma agree that there is a Biblical obligation at night but they differ on the source of the obligation. Ben Zoma is of the opinion that the verse from Devarim is sufficient to learn the obligation (this understanding could fit with the opinion of the Ra'avad). The Rambam may have understood our Mishna in this manner and as such would conclude that even the Hahamim agree that there is a Biblical obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night.

According to this second approach to the Mishna, if the Hahamim did not learn the night-time Biblical obligation from the verse in Devarim where did they learn it from? Additionally, if the Rambam is in accordance with both ben Zoma and the Hahamim why does he bring the verse of למען תזכור, which indicates that he follows ben Zoma and not the Hahamim?

Rav Yosef Karo alludes to a source other than Devarim which the Hahamim could have used as the basis for their opinion. 11 Shemot 12:51 states that the departure of the Bnei Yisrael from Egypt

וַיְהִי בַעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם,

And it was in the middle of that day that God brought the Bnei Yisrael out from Egypt.

This shows that the redemption from Egypt occurred during the day. However, the beginning of this redemption took place at midnight through the death of the Egyptian firstborns. As such, the original redemption can be seen to have occurred at both day and night, providing a possible reason for the Hahamim to conclude that there is an obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt during the day and at night.

Whether the Rambam is stating the halakha in accordance with ben Zoma or both ben Zoma and the Hahamim, the Rambam clearly understands that remembering the Exodus from Egypt as a Biblical obligation. However, in the Sefer HaMitsvot of the Rambam the mitsvah of remembering the Exodus from Egypt is neither mentioned nor counted as one of the 613 Biblical commandments. Why does the Rambam not count this mitsva as a Biblical commandment in Sefer Hamitsvot when he appears to do so in the Mishneh Torah?

The question could be further extended to the Sefer HaHinukh and all other classic sefarim which have counted the 613 mitsvot. Even though the Gemara appears to understand the obligation as d'oraita (Biblical) none of the scholars who counted the 613 mitsvot include the mitsva of zekhirat mitsrayim.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the question is strongest against the Rambam who explicitly states that the zekhira is a mitsva d'oraita. Therefore we will focus on analysing the Rambam. Some of the explanations may also explain the understanding of the other sifrei hamitsvot. Many Aharonim discuss this question, and presented here are three different approaches.

### Mitsvot DeRabanan

The Or Sameah notes this discrepancy within the Rambam and provides his solution.<sup>13</sup> The verses preceding the key verse in Devarim<sup>14</sup> mention the mitsvot of the Korban Pesah and matsa and conclude with the statement:

”למען תזכור את יום צאתך מארץ מצריים, כול ימי חיך.”

The use of the word למען – in order – implies that the previous statements and obligations are performed in

order that the Exodus from Egypt is remembered. Rashi (ad loc) understands the verse in the same manner and states that through the commandments of Passover one will remember the Exodus from Egypt. It seems peculiar that this verse is explained by ben Zoma as serving to impose a daily and nightly Biblical obligation of remembering the Exodus from Egypt, when the simple reading and context of the verse would not appear to be commanding anything, merely to be stating the natural result of following other commandments.

The Or Sameah therefore suggests that this is the reason why the Rambam does not list remembering the Exodus from Egypt as one of the 613 commandments. To explain how the Rambam can call the obligation Biblical in Mishneh Torah when he does not include it in Sefer HaMitsvot, the Or Sameah suggests the following.

There are two types of Rabbinical commandments; one solely created by the Rabannan like Kriat Megilla and Ner Hannuka. On the other hand there are obligations created by the Rabannan which are based on understanding the ratson Hashem – will of God. For example, we know that when a man dies leaving sons and daughters, the sons inherit from their father but not the daughters. However, the Gemara in Ketubot 52b states that in certain circumstances a daughter can inherit certain parts of her father's estate even if she has brothers, due to a conflicting Biblical obligation. The source of this conflicting obligation is cited by the Gemara as Jeremiah 29:6, which highlights the importance of marrying off daughters and making them eligible through offering assets to bring to the marriage.<sup>15</sup> This obligation is certainly not quoted from the Torah (generally obligations sourced from Nevi'im and Ketuvim are not considered Biblical) but nonetheless the Gemara understood from Jeremiah that this is what God desires – marriage and procreation. Therefore the daughter can inherit against the explicit Biblical commandment to ensure that this desire of God can be achieved.

A similar approach can be taken to remembering the Exodus from Egypt. Several of the commandments that we perform on a daily basis are done in order to remember the Exodus, including tefillin, tsitsit and kiddush. The commandments of Passover itself are also performed in order to remember the night/day we left Egypt. Raban Gamliel himself notes how all the commandments of Seder night are all associated with the slavery and freedom.<sup>16</sup> The use of למען תזכור shows that God's will is that we should

remember the Exodus from Egypt. The Tannaim created an obligation to achieve this will of God by instituting the mitsva to remember the Exodus once or twice a day. Understanding that some mitsvot created by the Rabbanan are in accordance with the will of God and are therefore considered mitsvot d'oraita can explain why the Rambam implies yetsiat mitsrayim is a Biblical commandment in the Mishneh Torah but does not count it in his enumeration of the 613 mitsvot.

### Sippur Yetsiat Mitsrayim

Another way of explaining the Rambam is through understanding another mitsva brought down by the Rambam, that of Sippur Yetsiat Mitsrayim. The Rambam states:<sup>17</sup>

”מצות עשה של תורה לספר בניסים ונפלאות שנעשו לאבותינו במצריים, בליל חמישה עשר בניסן--שנאמר 'זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם' (שמות יג,ג), כמה שנאמר 'זכור את יום השבת' (שמות כ,ז). ומניין שבליל חמישה עשר--תלמוד לומר 'והגדת לבנך, ביום ההוא לאמור: בעבור זה' (שמות יג,ח), בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך.”

The mitsva requires that on 15th Nissan one is obliged to discuss the wonders and miracles that God performed for our fathers as they left Egypt.

This mitsva is also listed in the Sefer HaMitsvot of the Rambam as a positive commandment to be fulfilled on the night of 15 Nissan.<sup>18</sup> What is the difference between the mitsva of Sippur Yetsiat Mitsrayim, which the Rambam counts as a mitsva d'oraita and remembering yetsiat

*What is the difference between the mitsva of Sippur Yetsiat Mitsrayim, which the Rambam counts as a mitsva d'oraita and remembering yetsiat mitsrayim, which the Rambam does not count as a mitsva d'oraita?*

mitsrayim, which the Rambam does not count as a mitzva d'oraita?

Rav Hayim Soloveitchik of Brisk identifies three differences between the two obligations:<sup>19</sup>

1. The obligation of Sippur requires more depth through questions and answers than a simple zekhira, which only requires a mention (and according to some poskim even thought will suffice).<sup>20</sup>
2. Zekhira is commanded every day whilst Sippur is only commanded once a year.
3. Zekhira can be performed by oneself whilst Sippur ideally requires a group of people including children.

The two mitzvot are performed differently and have different requirements but ultimately they both focus on yetziat mitsrayim and recognising God's kindness in freeing us from slavery.

The Minhat Hinukh states that the source of the Rambam's source for the mitzva of sippur is a verse in Shemot<sup>21</sup>:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-ה' הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר  
יִצְאֲתֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבַּיִת עַבְדִּים

The verse includes the word 'zakhor' – remember – in the imperative and is understood as a commandment to all Bnei Yisrael to remember the Exodus from Egypt. The Rambam understands that the remembrance should occur on 15 Nissan. (A similar usage of 'Zakhor' in the imperative is found regarding Shabbat, from which we learn the mitzva of Kiddush).<sup>22</sup> However, Rashi quoting the Mekhilta, understands that this verse should be used to teach us the need to remember the Exodus of Egypt on a daily basis.

Yet Rashi knew the Mishna in Brakhot, which learns the commandment not from Shemot but from Devarim. Further, Rashi in Devarim understands that verse with reference to the previous obligations, matsa and Pesah and does not mention either zekhira or sippur yetziat mitsrayim, again, against the understanding of the Mishna in Brakhot.

To strengthen the question, on further analysis the Mekhilta is not as explicit as Rashi implies. It simply quotes the Mishna in Brakhot and the verse from Devarim. Rashi therefore seems to be departing from the Mekhilta to understand the verse in Shemot as being the source of

the obligation. Why does Rashi understand the Mekhilta in this way?

Perhaps we could explain that the mitzvot of zekhira and sippur are part of the same mitzva. The Torah commands us 'zakhor' – remember. No descriptions or details are included in how this remembrance should occur and this is up to the Rabbanan to determine based on their understanding of the verses in the Torah.

According to the Rambam the Rabbanan understood from the verses in Shemot that this is performed on 15 Nissan.

Another understanding of the commandment 'zakhor' could be to remember the Exodus on a daily basis, as understood by the Mekhilta and quoted by Rashi. In determining how the obligation should be performed ben Zoma and the Hahamim used the verse in Devarim as a basis in laying down the details of the mitzva.

The differing use of the verse by Rambam and Rashi, presents two ways in which the verse could be understood. They are also not mutually exclusive, as ultimately zekhira and sippur could be two ways in fulfilling one mitzva d'oraita.

The Rambam introduces the Sefer HaMitsvot with a series of rules called 'sheroshim'. These rules outline how the Rambam has counted the 613 mitzvot and reasons for the inclusion or exclusion of certain types of mitzvot. In Shores Bet, the Rambam notes that commandments learnt from drashot are not included as separate mitzvot. An example brought is that of honouring one's older sibling. The Gemara learns from the vav in 'kaved et avikha v'et imekha' that one must also honour an older sibling.<sup>23</sup> As this obligation is learnt from a drasha it is not counted as separate mitzva.

We could understand a similar idea regarding the verse וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-ה' הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יִצְאֲתֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם. The Torah commands that a remembrance must occur. By expounding connected verses Hazal explain that is done on 15 Nissan through the mitzva and specific requirements of sippur. However, as well as the obligation of sippur there is also an obligation to remember on a daily and nightly basis, which is learnt out through a drasha on another verse. As this is through a drasha the Rambam focuses on what he considers to be the main obligation – that of sippur, and counts that as the mitzva d'oraita in Sefer HaMitsvot. The commandment of zekhira, which is learnt through a drasha is not counted separately but

considered a part of the mitzva of sippur.<sup>24</sup>

This could also explain why some sifrei haMitsvot (e.g. Sefer HaHinukh) count the mitzva of sippur but not zekhira.

The problem in this approach is that the Rambam does not refer to or mention the mitzva of zekhira as part of the mitzva of sippur in Sefer HaMitsvot. Similarly, the Rambam does not refer to or mention the mitzva of zekhira in Hilkhhot Hametz U'Matsa. If the two mitzvot were in fact two aspects of one overarching mitzva one would expect the Rambam to make reference to zekhira. This explanation therefore remains problematic.

## Kriat Shema

The final approach in explaining the Rambam is brought down in the name of R. JB Soloveitchik.<sup>25</sup>

R. Soloveitchik points out that the only reference in the Mishneh Torah to remembering the Exodus from Egypt is in Hilkhhot Kriat Shema. Why is there no mention by the Rambam of this mitzva anywhere else?

Kriat Shema as understood by the Rambam focuses on three different aspects of Judaism. The first paragraph focuses on recognising God's existence and unity. The second paragraph focuses on reward and punishment, whilst the third focuses on performance of mitzvot. In summary, the purpose of Kriat Shema can be summarised as being 'kabalat ol malkhut shamayim.' – accepting and recognising God's kingship.

R. Soloveitchik understood that the obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt can also be understood as kabalat ol malkhut shamayim. The verse in the third section of shema which notes the Exodus is:

אֲנִי ה' אֶל-יְכֹם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִצְרַיִם  
לְהִיוֹת לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי ה' אֶל-יְכֹם

The verse begins with 'I am the Lord your God' and then continues 'who brought you out of Egypt to be your God'. The phrase of אֲנִי ה' אֶל-יְכֹם is expounded in a different context in Rosh Hashana 32a where the Gemara learns the obligation to recite Malkiot in the mussaf prayers on Rosh Hashana, the essence of which is the acceptance of God's kingship over the world.

## R. Soloveitchik understood that the obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt can also be understood as kabalat ol malkhut shamayim.

We can therefore see that the phrase אֲנִי ה' אֶל-יְכֹם asserts the kingship of God over the world. With the juxtaposition of this phrase to the Exodus we can see that the Exodus itself could be considered part of fulfilling this requirement of understanding and accepting God's kingship.

The mitzva of remembering the Exodus from Egypt recalls a symbolic time in the history of the Jewish people. It was at this point that the Bnei Yisrael recognised God's existence through the plagues, leading to the creation of the Bnei Yisrael as a people ('goy mikerev goy'). Each time we remember this event we accept the kingship of God anew. The Rambam therefore includes remembering the Exodus from Egypt in Hilkhhot Kriat Shema and understands the mitzva to be a part of Kriat Shema and therefore not counted, as it is all part of the ultimate mitzva of kabalat ol malkhut shamayim which the Shema exemplifies.

## Conclusions

We have seen how the mitzva of zekhirat yetziat mitsrayim is understood by the Rishonim and then attempted to resolve the apparent contradiction in the Rambam whereby zekhirat yetziat mitsrayim is considered a Biblical commandment in Mishneh Torah, yet not included in Sefer HaMitsvot. The approaches presented either classify the mitzva as a Biblical commandment deduced by the Rabbanan through a drasha, or as part of the Biblical commandment of either sippur yetziat mitsrayim or Kriat Shema.

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## Endnotes

1. Brakhot 12b
2. Devarim 16:3
3. Rashi 12b
4. Ibid.
5. Commentary on Brakhot 12b
6. Tsalch Brakhot 12b
7. Brakhot 13a
8. Sha'agat Aryeh Siman 12, Kesef Mishneh Hilkhhot Kriat Shema 1:2
9. Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Kriat Shema, 1:1-3
10. See Sha'agat Aryeh Siman 12, Kesef Mishneh Hilkhhot Kriat Shema 1:2
11. Kesef Mishneh, Hilkhhot Kriat Shema, 1:3
12. Brakhot 21a. The only sefer to count this mitsva is Sefer Mitsvot Katan: 110.
13. Hlikhot Kriat Shema 1:3
14. Devarim 16:1-3
15. 'Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.'
16. Haggadah shel Pesah
17. Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Hametz U'Matsah, 7:1
18. Mitsvat Aseh 157
19. Footnote in Shiurim L'zekher Avi Mori, Chelek Aleph
20. Sha'aget Aryeh Siman 13
21. Mitsva 21; Shemot 13:3
22. See Rashi Shemot 20:7
23. Ketubot 103a
24. Introduction to Pri Megadim on Hilkhhot Kriat Shema alludes to this approach.
25. Shiurim L'zekher Avi Mori, Chelek Aleph

## HASHKAFKA

# *The Amida: What do we stand for?*

Yonni Cohen

I taught a class in a north-west London heder, on the Amida.<sup>1</sup> The students were 11-12 years old, fast approaching their Bar and Bat Mitsvot. Some already attended non-Jewish secondary schools and most of the others were soon to move to them. Their knowledge of Hebrew had not yet reached a level where they could understand the Amida so I asked them each to select one of the brakhot, to look at its English translation and then explain its meaning to the class. These children were intelligent. A couple of them ingeniously laid plans to take me off the topic and they definitely always had an answer for why they were talking to each other so loudly. Yet, half of the class could not explain their chosen brakha because of difficulty with the style of English in the Siddur. I have not told this story in order to criticise the heder, the regular heder teacher, the students or their parents, (that would be too simplistic, too divisive) but rather to draw attention to a regrettable situation whereby many of these children were coming to the end of their formal Jewish education and preparing to go far beyond that level in their secular education. Judaism may soon feel childish to them, a relic of their youth, because they will retain the understanding of Jewish matters of an 11-year-old, an age at which they are likely to face fundamental religious challenges, in this case, understanding our central prayer, the Amida.<sup>2</sup>

Prayer in general and the Shemona Esrei in particular is a worthy topic requiring lifelong investigation; we would be unlikely to believe anyone who claimed to have mastered it. We grow, we experience new things and it can be argued, (and it will be here) that our prayer must reflect the new directions we take and the new challenges we face in God's world. This episode at heder motivated me to try to understand better how to approach and experience the Amida. Even those who understand the plain meaning

of the words, have other challenges with the Amida. This article will attempt to investigate some of those challenges and specifically how to approach the Shemona Esrei with the appropriate personal, communal and national mindset.

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*Prayer must reflect the new directions we take and the new challenges we face in God's world.*

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## Avraham's example

We can begin to develop our appreciation of the Amida by understanding its name. On a basic level, the word 'amida' comes from la'amod, 'to stand', because we stand when we pray it, but the deeper meaning conveyed by the name Amida can be understood as 'making a stand'. The Talmud in Brakhot, states that each of the daily prayers was introduced by one of the patriarchs. Avraham instigated shaharit.<sup>3</sup> The Talmud uses the pasuk 'And Avraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before God' (Bereishit 19:27) as a proof text, interpreting the word 'stood' as an indication that Avraham was engaged in prayer. Different words for prayer are used for Yitshak and Ya'akov, but the very fact that the Talmud understands the term amida as indicating prayer is significant, as is the fact that this is the name that has become the common term for the Shemona Esrei. Why is this? We must look at the context of the pasuk in which Avraham is described as 'standing up'.

Avraham had just asked God not to destroy Sodom if he found a certain number of righteous people there. God finally consented to sparing it if only ten righteous people



Original painting by Hillel Broder, based on a photograph taken in Lask, near Lodz in Poland, in 1937

were to be found. The pasuk cited by the Talmud (Genesis 19: 27) describes him as standing in the same place where he had stood before God to plead on behalf of Sodom and Gomorra, but now he is looking at the destroyed cities below. Avraham is standing up for his moral values. He does not order God around, he pleads with Him. There is no reason why we cannot follow the teaching of the Mishna that 'one should not get up to pray except with humility' while still attempting to mirror the behaviour of Avraham who made a stand in defence of Sodom.<sup>4</sup>

We can use the Shemona Esrei to reaffirm our own principles before God. We do not have to feel ill at ease with asking for things we want if those requests are in order for us to be an eved Hashem (servant of God). We are facing God and Tefilla opens our channel to Him. By praying for our personal and national requests we are not lowering ourselves by drawing away from the spiritual realms. Rather we are using the opportunity while standing before God, to develop a personality refined enough that we only pray for the right things. Thus, being wholly honest when we stand before God is a positive approach, one which can help us to build ourselves.

## Depersonalising prayer

Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz took a controversial approach to prayer. He argued that everyone prays the identical formal prayers because prayer in our services 'is not intended to serve as an outlet for the thoughts and feelings of man'. He explained that an example of personal prayer can be drawn from Tehillim where we have a 'prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before God'. He saw this form of prayer as permissible outside of our formal prayer structures, but like any act which has not been prescribed, its religious value is 'limited'. According to Leibowitz, the only possible definition of kavana (correct concentration) in the Amida is 'focusing on the fact that you are commanded to pray by God'.<sup>5</sup> He explained his approach by saying that prayer is 'a token of man's cleaving to God by serving him' rather than 'an impudent demand that God change the world's regularity'. He thus strongly opposed the practice of adding personal and communal petitions and kavanot (mystical declarations of intention) to our formal prayers. As a result, he later calls non-obligatory prayers, such as the prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel 'ludicrous and insipid'.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, Professor Leibowitz's ideas draw, in some sense, on the ideas of earlier and widely accepted authorities. There is a tradition of removing physical and practical day-to-day matters from prayer and seeing the act of prayer as purely spiritual. Ramban (Nahmanides, 1194-1270), advises his son in *Igeret Haramban* to 'remove all worldly matters from your heart at the time of prayer, and prepare your heart before the Omnipresent; purify your thoughts and think about each word before you utter it... and your prayer will be pure, clear and clean, said with concentration, and it will be acceptable before the Omnipresent.' R. Hayim of Volozhin (1749-1821) goes much further when he states in *Nefesh Hahayim*: 'The heavenly messenger told R. Yosef Caro [author of the *Shulhan Arukh*] to be very careful not to think of any thought during the time of prayer, even thoughts of Torah and mitzvot, except for a mental image of the word of the prayer itself as it is written.' R Hayim explained that this is a proven method 'to eliminate vain thought and improve purity of concentration'. He sets this out as a remedy for ensuring purity of thought and concentration.<sup>7</sup>

## Prayer must combine simplicity and intensity.

### Making prayer personal

Despite this old and respectable tradition of keeping prayer in the spiritual realm, there are other voices. The Hafets Hayim, believes that

'Before saying each brakha of the Amida, one should think about a request from God relating to the brakha and a reason to praise God relating to the brakha'.<sup>8</sup>

The view of the Hafets Hayim was that prayer must combine simplicity and intensity. In the *Mishna Berura* he wrote that 'a person should not focus on the holy names and kabbalistic ideas; rather he should pray in a simple manner with the intent of understanding the heart'.<sup>9</sup>

R. SR Hirsch (1808-88) brought a homiletic understanding of the etymology of the word tefilla to support his argument that we must bring ourselves into the prayer. The word tefilla is derived from the root p-l-l, familiar to us in the hitpa'el conjugation as hitpalel, 'to pray'. R. Hirsch states that hitpalel 'originally meant to deliver an opinion about oneself, to judge oneself, or an inner attempt at doing so'.<sup>10</sup> Thus we can see tefilla and the Amida in particular as a chance to pour ourselves into prayer in order to reflect on our own motivations and emotions. Then we will be more aware of how we really stand up when we are at a higher level with God.

In *Musar Avikha*, R. Avraham Yitshak HaKohen Kook brings further evidence to show that we must bring ourselves, our perceptions and our knowledge into our prayer: 'The Rabbis deduce that the words in the Shema, 'uleavdo bekhool levavkhem' [you shall serve God with all your heart] refer to avoda shebelev [worship in the heart], which is tefilla. Therefore, tefilla is the essence of work/ worship and one can only pray with the suitable awe of God once the concepts and ideas surrounding prayer are close to ones heart.' He continues 'if you do not know the dynamics of a human [ma'alat nafsho], how can you pray with full desire that you will be granted discernment, understanding and wisdom? ... one must clarify with themselves what they are lacking in terms of discernment,

understanding and wisdom ... in order that they can pray from the full depths of their heart that they shall be granted that which they are lacking.' Similarly, 'if you do not understand the dynamics of the people of Israel, how can you fully pray for their redemption?' He concludes that 'tefilla is a big check for man to see if he is truly purifying his soul according to the will of his Creator'.<sup>11</sup>

According to R. Kook we must bring ourselves into the prayer. It is missing a precious opportunity, to recite the Amida with the sole motivation of fulfilling the mitsva of prayer. For most people, having the notion of fulfilling the mitsva of prayer as the only thought in one's mind would also seem overly theoretical and vague. We must strive to know how we feel about tefilla and about ourselves during tefilla.

## The origins of prayer, and their relevance

This task of bringing ourselves into the fixed framework of the Amida can be helped by appreciation of the traditions that are the foundations of modern prayer. It can be argued that our tefilla today is a blend of the numerous times when characters in Tanakh call out to God from the depths of their hearts, and also as a continuation of the korbanot (sacrifices). Several examples of heart-rending cries to God, from both individuals and the people as a whole, appear in the story of yetsiat mitsrayim (the Exodus from Egypt) and are particularly appropriate at this time of year. For example, Shemot records that the Jewish people cried out to God for freedom: 'A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out (vayize'aku) and their cry for help (shavatam) from the bondage rose up to God.<sup>12</sup> God heard their moaning (na'akatam).'

This type of request-based prayer is found in the petitionary section of the Amida in which we make requests on behalf of ourselves, our people and our world. Further, our heritage of spontaneous calling out to God is one reason why our hearts can move away from the exact meaning of the words and turn to our personal concerns..

The link between the other foundation of our prayer, the korbanot, is elucidated in the Talmud: 'Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "they instituted the prayers to correspond to the sacrifices".<sup>13</sup> The obligatory nature of sacrifices, together with the halakhic requirements for

***Time is tight. We must use prayer as a time for self-reflection and putting every aspect of our personal, communal and national life in an ancient yet relevant religious Jewish framework.***

their performance and timing, has given our prayer its structure.

If we see the Amida as a union of the sacrificial service and spontaneous prayer then much of the Amida concerns man praying to God, and trying to make a relationship. In our lives today in London, and, b'ezrat Hashem, in an energetic modern Israel, we cannot afford to use prayer only as a chance to touch purity for a short time. Time is tight. We must use prayer as a time for self-reflection and putting every aspect of our personal, communal and national life in an ancient yet relevant religious Jewish framework.

## **The sacred, the mundane and the distracting**

The type of requests in the Amida are practical and earthly. 'Barekh aleinu et hashana hazot' is a request for a good harvest and the prerequisite rain for that harvest. The Amida was written at a time when agriculture was at the centre of the economy. The part of our tradition which emphasizes focusing our thoughts in the Amida on the physical sphere may make one balk at asking God that the managers of companies in which one has invested may continue to pursue a sound business strategy, or at beseeching God for consumer confidence to pick up.

But we do not have to be Puritans. We are not angels, devoid of emotion and choice; we are living, feeling people, individual and unique. Why do we need to pretend at the most pivotally spiritual moments of our day that matters which have been concerning us for most of the working day do not matter? What is important is that we follow the brakha of barekh aleinu to its conclusion and see that a key phrase at the end of the brakha is sabeinu mituvekha, 'satisfy us from your goodness'. When we ask for financial

well-being and success, we are asking God that what we are given or what we earn will be enough to satisfy us, and also that we may be satisfied by success rather than compulsively wanting more. We are asking for God's help with our finances in order to be able to put some of our life energy into other areas so that we can have a more holistic approach to life, rather than living on a subsistence level. No element of our lives ought to be blocked out.

The fact that there is such a plethora of views on how to pray serves to underline just how rounded the approach to prayer ought to be. There are completely different views on how to evoke concentration in the Amida, from staying still to swaying wildly.<sup>14</sup> The idea of being open and baring all before God in the Amida can be given an extra nuance by appreciating different viewpoints on how to deal with a lapse in concentration. R. Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-c. 1340) (The Tur) stated that 'if another thought comes into one's mind in the middle of his prayer, he should be quiet until the thought goes away.'<sup>15</sup> In contrast, R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira (the Piasezener Rebbe, 1889-1943) argued that the best way to maintain kavana during the Amida is not by saying 'do not be distracted and do not think about something else, but by focusing positively on an idea that is relevant and allowing it to ease out the unwanted thought.'<sup>16</sup>

## **Prayer and public life**

I have tried to show the need to bring one's whole being into tefilla, on the personal level. I want to look now at how we 'make a stand' as a kehilla and the value of that stand. The Talmud insists that every synagogue must have windows.<sup>17</sup> R. Kook derives from this that prayer can only unfold when we appreciate our environment: 'windows afford visual contact with the worshipper's wider vista.'<sup>18</sup> Tefilla is exactly that: a ready-made 'wider vista', a framework for the key issues that Jews throughout time should concern themselves with. It almost seems impossible that a Jew today could say the brakha, 'teka bashofar', and not appreciate that God has helped our people return to its land in a totally unprecedented way and not ask God that all Jews, returning to Israel from different countries with different cultures, should integrate more harmoniously with a spirit of tolerance and acceptance. I suggest that failing to connect the words of our prayers with their national application is the equivalent of pulling the blinds down over the synagogue's windows.

We learn much about the ideal Jewish approach to public life and leadership from the Exodus, for instance in the growth of Moshe's character as reflected in his personal prayers. We see a beautiful transition between Moshe's first and last recorded prayers. At the burning bush Moshe tried to avoid taking on a leadership role, asking God to send someone else to lead the people to freedom. God has just told him what his role will be, and Moshe's response is deeply honest; he lays his emotions and fears out to God and says 'Please, God, send someone else instead of me.'<sup>19</sup> He cites practical problems: 'Who am I that I should go to pharaoh and that I should take the children of Israel out to Egypt?' and 'but they will not believe me and they will not heed my voice for they will say, God did not appear to you.'<sup>20</sup> Even though God immediately showed Moshe his anger, perhaps we can still learn from Moshe that we must be fully open with God. After this experience, the connection between Moshe and God deepens. However, on a public, national level, Moshe has arguably not reached the ideal yet, as he does not run immediately back to Egypt without thought of how he will be received. By contrast, at the time of his last request to God, just before his death, he is overcome with the selfless desire to ensure the wellbeing of his people. In this poignant prayer Moshe shows us the ideal way to think about oneself in reference to Am Yisrael;

'God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly who shall go out before them and come in before them... and let the assembly of God not be like sheep who have no shepherd.'<sup>21</sup>

Here, Moshe wants to ensure that the people is in safe hands. He is about to die but is able to concern himself with matters other than his own immediate situation. Between his first and last prayer, we see the blossoming of a relationship built on honesty and humility and a transition to an unrivalled nation-centric perspective.

Moshe's courageous leadership was in a very public role. It could be expected that the Egyptians would hate him and see him as a traitor. The Torah tells us differently: 'God granted the people favour in the eyes of Egypt; moreover, the man (ish) Moshe was very great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh and in the eyes of the whole people.'<sup>22</sup> R. Neriya, founder of the B'nei Akiva youth movement, explains that even ordinary Egyptians were able to appreciate Moshe's human greatness. God affected the way the Egyptian people viewed Am Yisrael, but they could see for themselves the greatness of Moshe.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps they saw how clearly Moshe was standing up for

what he believed in when struggling to secure the people's freedom. He was the public face of our people and the pasuk quoted above says he was respected as an ish, a man. They respected the traits of humility and steadfastness that he displayed on a public level. He was ready to negotiate but was not scared to do what he needed to do to free his people.

## **Personal applications**

Can we really justify making a direct parallel between Moshe's experience and the way we should campaign for justice today on the public level? Moshe's actions during the Exodus are an intense and exalted source from which to gain inspiration in our everyday life. Around Hendon in January this year, Jews were discussing whether they should go to various demonstrations in defence of Israel and peace. People were asking themselves and others the same basic questions: will it really make any difference if I go? Surely the world will say, 'so what, another Jew trying to defend Israel, what's new?' The response could be a series of counter-questions: is it not enough to affirm our practical commitment to Israel's cause by demonstrating?

***Life is given meaning and vitality by our uncertainty about causes and effects. This insight lies at the heart of the Amida.***

Is it not enough to let fellow Jews at the demonstration feel how much we care? Is it not enough for people in Israel to see that there are people here who support their rights? Alei Tzion can and does stand up publicly as a community for what it believes in. We must hope and pray that our public support of Israel and peace will be heeded by 'the nations' as a sign of our steadfastness and morality. As with all of our actions in life, we cannot know their full effects on ourselves and others, yet we must continue.

Life is given meaning and vitality by our uncertainty about causes and effects. This insight lies at the heart of the Amida, in the Kedusha. The Kedusha is based on visions of the spiritual realm that were granted to Isaiah and Ezekiel. The Kedusha is primarily a reflection of God's kavod—His glory or transcendence. Kedusha contains two key words: kadosh, 'holy', and kavod: the pesukim that are

used in all our variations of Kedusha are ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole world is filled with His glory’ and ‘His glory fills the universe.’<sup>24</sup> Kavod appears in both pesukim. The significance of kavod lies in the human realisation that God’s glory surrounds us and exists within the human instinct to try to reach God, even though this is an impossible, lifelong task.

In the Kedusha, we catch a glimpse of what happens in these higher realms, yet are left without the answer we so desperately want. In the Kedusha of Shabbat Musaf, the angels ask ayeh mekom kevodo?, ‘where is the place of his glory?’ The answer we give is baruch kevod Hashem mimekomo, ‘blessed is the glory of God from His place.’<sup>25</sup> Even here, in the holiest prayer, we are not given the answer. We cannot locate God and we cannot truly understand Him. The Talmud states that ‘no one knows where God’s abode is.’<sup>26</sup> The closest we can do is try to connect to God and His way, the Torah. As God explained at the burning bush ‘ehyeh ma she’ehyeh’, ‘I shall be as I shall be.’<sup>27</sup>

What we do know is that it is in our power to ‘make a stand’ privately in prayer between us and God, and publicly by standing together in Kedusha, appreciating God and the holiness of everything in His world. Fortified by our private stand in prayer, we can make our stand too in the public sphere.

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## Endnotes

1. I am grateful to R. Avi Scharf, Devorah Scharf, Dr Raphael Zarum and Lindsay Taylor Guthartz for alerting me to many of the sources and ideas I discuss in this article.
2. English can be a barrier and knowledge of Hebrew must be developed rather than relying on translations. Just as much of the depth of a Biblical concept is lost in translation into English, so too much of the depth of the words chosen by the Anshei Keneset Hagedola is lost if it is not known how the words chosen to be used in the Amida are connected to concepts and events in Tanakh – a context that gives the words specific meaning.
3. Brakhot 26b

4. Mishna, Brakhot 5:1
5. Y. Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State*, (Harvard, 1997) 31-2
6. Ibid., 34
7. R. H Volozhiner, *Nefesh Hahayim*, 2:13
8. R. YM Kagan *Shem Olam*
9. R. YM Kagan, *Mishna Berura*, 98:1
10. R. SR Hirsch, *Horeb* (trans. I Grunfeld) (London, 1962), 472
11. R. AY Kook, *Musar Avikha* (Jerusalem, 2005), 3
12. Shemot 2:23-24
13. Brakhot 26b
14. R. Moshe ben Yosef Trani *Igeret Derekh Hashem*, end: ‘one should make some movement of his body before the conclusion of every brakha to remind himself to concentrate’; R. Menachem di Lunzano, *Derekh Hayim*: ‘shaking during prayer disturbs concentration while standing without any movement enhances concentration.’
15. R. Ya’akov ben Asher, *Arba’ah Haturim*, Orakh Hayim 98
16. R. KK Shapira, *Hovot Hatalmidim* (Jerusalem, 1996), 91
17. Brakhot 34b
18. R. AY Kook, *Olat Ra’aya*, 259-60
19. Shemot 4:13
20. Shemot 3:11 and 4:1. It is interesting to compare this move away from responsibility to Cain trying to avoid responsibility after killing his brother by saying to God, ‘Hashomer ahi anokhi’ (Bereishit 4:9), ‘Am I my brother’s keeper.’ With Moshe, there is fear and honesty, with Cain, callousness.
21. Bamidbar 27:16
22. Shemot 11:3
23. R. MTs Neriya, *Ner Lemaor*, 184, 11:3, Parashat Bo
24. Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 3:12 respectively
25. E Munk, *The World of Prayer*, (New York, 1953) vol.1 95-101
26. Hagiga 13b
27. Shemot 3:14

## HASHKafa

# Modern Orthodoxy – Religious Zionsism: One Hashkafa or two?

Simon Levy

I describe myself as a Religious Zionist, in contrast to many of my contemporaries who define themselves as either Modern Orthodox, or both Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionist. I have found that these two terms are often used interchangeably. Many people seem to assume that there is no difference between the two ideologies, and even our own community of Alei Tzion describes itself as Modern Orthodox Religious Zionist. This essay will examine the complex nature of these two ideologies, and ask the why they are so often linked and whether it is right to do so.

## Origins of Modern Orthodoxy

To define contemporary Modern Orthodoxy, it is essential to understand the birth of this ideology. As R. Reuven Bulka writes, ‘The Hasmonians were Modern Orthodox when they fought on Shabbat, thus avoiding almost certain annihilation. Hillel was Modern Orthodox when, aware of the threat to the economic fabric of the Jewish community, he enacted legislation anchored in the Torah to protect the poor and rich. The sages were Modern Orthodox when they realised the threat to the survival of the Oral Law, the Torah Shebe’al Peh, and against the prevailing norm, allowed the Oral Law to be committed to writing.’<sup>1</sup> Or as Shmuel Singer has written ‘were R. Sadia Gaon and R. Hai Gaon heretics when they attempted to synthesise Judaism with the ideas of Plato and harmonise philosophical rationalism with Torah thought? Was Maimonides a disbeliever when he wrote the Moreh and insisted that it is the religious duty of the Jew to study the wisdom and culture of the secular world? Was Abraham Ibn Ezra outside the pale because he insisted that one can only truly know God by intensive study of the sciences? Was R. Menachem Meiri worthy of rejection because he

championed the study of Greek Philosophy as a religious obligation? The answer to all these questions is clearly “No”. We are in very good company.’<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary Modern Orthodoxy has its philosophical roots in the Haskala, the Jewish parallel to the Enlightenment, which swept across much of Western Europe in the eighteenth century. The Maskilim, the followers of the Haskala promoted ‘coming out of the ghetto’, not just physically, but mentally and spiritually in order to assimilate amongst Gentile nations. Many earlier Jewish philosophers had already strongly advocated not only a physical exit from the ghetto, but also an emotional and mental departure from the traditional Jewish approach. This was a complete antithesis to the traditional mindset of passivity and inaction, represented by such eminent rabbis as Rav Shalom Dov Baer Schneersohn and Rav Joseph Baer Soloveitchik and this clash ensured a radical reaction to the rise of the Religious Zionist movement.<sup>3</sup>

The emergence of the Reform Movement was one of the first outcomes of the Jewish Enlightenment. Moses

*New ideas and a more accessible wider society, both in intellectual and cultural terms, eventually permeated Orthodox Jewish circles where its effects proved explosive and changed the face of Judaism.*

Mendelssohn's (1729–86) philosophical writings and his career as the 'German Socrates' had shown hitherto unsuspected possibilities of integration and acceptance of Jews among non-Jews. A large focus of his efforts was spent on reintegrating Hebrew into the Jewish mindset, to displace Yiddish. This explosion of new ideas and a more accessible wider society, both in intellectual and cultural terms, eventually permeated Orthodox Jewish circles where its effects proved explosive and changed the face of Judaism.

Modern Orthodoxy was developed in the philosophies of R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) and R. Esriel Hildesheimer (1820-1899). Whilst R. Hirsch is widely known amongst both Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, R. Hildesheimer is less well known, but arguably has more in common with Modern Orthodoxy today.

## R. Samson Raphael Hirsch and R. Esriel Hildesheimer

R. Hirsch held that Torah im Derekh Erets allows a real and substantial connection between Judaism and the world; 'Judaism is not a mere adjunct to life: it comprises all of life... in the synagogue and the kitchen, in the field and the warehouse, in the office and the pulpit... with the pen and the chisel.'<sup>4</sup> He wrote also of his gratitude towards the Enlightenment, stating that 'I bless Emancipation, when I see how the excess of oppression drove Israel away from human intercourse, preventing the cultivation of the mind, limited the free development of the noble side of character.'<sup>5</sup> Another pillar of R. Hirsch's philosophy is that the wisdom of the world consists of science as well as literature and philosophy, but that 'any powerful inconsistency and conflict between Torah and culture must be filtered out.'<sup>6</sup> Whilst R. Hirsch's central arguments are undisputed, some Hirsch scholars continue to argue that Modern Orthodoxy in the twenty first century has little in common with his original ideas. I will discuss this further later, but one would find it harder to sum up the impact of R. Hirsch more succinctly than to say he was the architect of Judaism for the modern world.<sup>7</sup>

The philosophy of R. Hildesheimer is easier to define. He believed that Jewish education must teach Jews how to deal with modernity in all its aspects.<sup>8</sup> To this end, his philosophy of Cultured Orthodoxy advocated 'unconditional agreement with the culture of the present day; harmony between Judaism and science; but also

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unconditional steadfastness in the faith and traditions of Judaism.<sup>9</sup> As such, R. Hildesheimer put into practice certain concrete actions, including education for both men and women, comprising both religious and secular studies, co-operation with non-Orthodox leaders on common issues, an attachment to the Land of Israel and working with the non-Orthodox on its behalf.<sup>10</sup>

It is also worth noting that while R. Hildesheimer became famous for founding his seminary in Berlin in 1873, his initial effort to do so in Hungary failed, due to the fierce opposition of Hungarian traditionalists. Once he moved to Berlin, his attempts were successful and he garnered much support from the local community.<sup>11</sup> The Berlin seminary took great pains to operate along similar lines to the non-Orthodox seminaries, such as Zachariah Frankel's in Breslau and Abraham Geiger's in Berlin.<sup>12</sup> R. Hildesheimer was particularly proud of his high academic standards, and he was keen to mention that the quality of the Jewish Studies that his scholars pursued would lead to a Kiddush Hashem on a national level.<sup>13</sup>

R. Hildesheimer's seminary only differed from the non-Orthodox seminaries in terms of dogma. R. Hildesheimer and his faculty were confident that an impartial examination of the evidence would support their conclusions. The Hildesheimer seminary advocated the study of modern day Biblical scholars, as well as the study of Arabic as a tool in the philological study of Hebrew. As a result of this, R. Hirsch himself concluded that this approach was heretical and could not be considered Orthodox.<sup>14</sup> R. Hirsch nevertheless held R. Hildesheimer in the highest esteem. In time, at least some of Hirsch's followers made peace with the Berlin seminary and its study of Wissenschaft des Judentums (Science of Judaism – academic Jewish studies), an activity that R. Hirsch had previously condemned.

## Foundations of Religious Zionism

The period after the Haskalah which saw the rise of Modern Orthodoxy also witnessed the beginnings of modern Religious Zionism.

Although a return to Zion by natural means had been advocated by some of the Medieval commentators, and later by the Vilna Gaon, there had been little in the way of concrete action.<sup>15</sup> In the nineteenth century, a doctrine of activism and initiative began to emerge amongst certain rabbinical leaders that revised dominant views of the Messianic Age. The predominant view was that the Messianic Age would only emerge through supernatural forces and any efforts to force that Redemption were pointless and contradicted a Torah world view.<sup>16</sup> These traditionalist voices became more emphatic in response to the emergence of the new philosophy of Religious Zionism, and focused more heavily on the heavenly character of the Redemption, a little discussed aspect until this point.

The first approach to Zionism was therefore outright rejection of any new ideas, and a strong belief in the tradition of passivity and not 'forcing the end'. In complete contrast, the new movement of Hovevei Tzion, 'Lovers of Zion' (later called Hibbat Tzion) led at the outset by R. Yehuda Alkalai (1798-1878) and R. Tsevi Hirsch Kalischer (1795-1874), believed in a gradual settlement of Israel as a step towards redemption. In his momentous work *Derishat Tzion*, R. Kalischer wrote that the salvation of the Jews can only come around through self-help.<sup>17</sup> The main steps that these two rabbis advocated were the return to Israel, agricultural work and the revival of Hebrew as the language of the Jews. We can already see at this point a link between this and the philosophy of both R. Hildesheimer and R. Hirsch, who both maintained that the re-emergence of Hebrew was of critical importance.

R. Alkalai's synagogue was frequented by the grandfather of Theodore Herzl, who was undoubtedly influenced by the idea of the 'renewed glory of Jerusalem'. Many modern scholars have surmised that Herzl was positively influenced by his grandfather's Rav,<sup>18</sup> and that political Zionism emerged long before Herzl. R. Kalischer showed his links with the Modern Orthodox world when studying and writing about Jewish philosophy; he even studied non-Jewish philosophers. His one wish to was to instil a more active ideology within the Jews of the time, and he campaigned for the collection of money and the formation of a Jewish military to protect the agricultural settlements.

*Derishat Tzion* was received rapturously, particularly in Eastern Europe, where Jews had not been through any type of Enlightenment, and these ideas gave them hope of a better life.<sup>19</sup> Many in Eastern Europe could think of no greater idea to internalise the banishment of passivity than the act of 'rebuilding our precious land'. These rabbis were therefore the first proponents of **גאולת ינו צמיחת גאולת ינו**, a combination of an active lifestyle in rebuilding the Land of Israel with the belief that this would be the first stage in the Redemption process.

## The Three Oaths

It is necessary at this point to dwell briefly on the famous Gemara in Ketubot. The Gemara, discussing a portion of the tribe of Ephraim who left Egypt prematurely and were destroyed, states 'What were these three oaths? One that Israel not ascend the wall (or as a wall), one that the Holy One Blessed be He adjured Israel not to rebel against the nations of the world, and one that the Holy One adjured the idolaters not to oppress Israel too much.'<sup>20</sup> Most Religious Zionists who have considered these three oaths have concluded that this Gemara has always been viewed as purely Aggadic and never posed a direct halakhic barrier to aliya and active Zionism. Professor Breuer writes that 'Traditional Jewish thought understood the three oaths as landmarks for the people in exile, not as proscriptions addressed against those who wished to go up to Zion...we have not found the three oaths explicitly cited as an ongoing halakha...The question of the three did not arise as a practical halakhic one.'<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that there were some Medieval commentators (notably Megillat Ester, Maharal, Ribash, and Pnei Yehoshua) who prohibited various actions, ranging from individual aliya (Megillat Ester) to mass aliya (Ribash).<sup>22</sup>

***This turning of traditional interpretations on their heads is typical of the theologians of the Religious Zionist movement.***

R. Alkalai and R. Kalischer succeeded in using the three oaths discussed in Ketubot 111a, and in particular the 'prohibition against ascending as a wall' to justify their own ideology. R. Alkalai writes that this is in fact the

exact method of Redemption. The prohibition for the Jewish People to ascend as a wall (seemingly a proof for traditional passivity) is a proof that 'the Holy One wishes the Redemption to take place in a dignified and orderly manner' (now a proof for an active return to Zion as part of a process to bring the Messiah).<sup>23</sup> This turning of traditional interpretations on their heads is typical of the theologians of the Religious Zionist movement, who had many sources to contend with when establishing their philosophy.

Although this idea was to re-emerge in the writings of R. Avraham Yitshak HaKohen Kook, it had very limited influence at the time. Other rabbis at the time who supported Hibbat Tzion purposely distanced themselves from the Messianic nature of Religious Zionism. The Netsiv was the most famous of these, and expressed in no uncertain terms his reservations about Messianic Zionism, stating that 'all the talk had only begun because the Gaon (R. Kalischer) thought the light of redemption had begun in his day; but in our own time, in which we are subjugated in the Exile and subject to new edicts, we must not bring up any idea of Redemption in connection with the settlement of the land.'<sup>24</sup>

## R. Yaakov Yitsahk Reines and Mizrahi

A different approach to that of Rabbis Alkalai and Kalischer was taken by R. Yaakov Yitshak Reines (1839-1915), who founded Mizrahi (Mercaz Ruhani – 'spiritual centre'), the Religious Zionist movement. He wrote that 'Redemption in itself is above nature and human effort'<sup>25</sup> and sought through all his workings to make a separation between Zionist activity and Messianic hope. In 1900 he authored a letter with other rabbis where he wrote 'that anyone who thinks the Zionist idea is somehow associated with the coming of the Messiah... is clearly in error. Zionism has nothing whatsoever to do with the question of Redemption. The entire point of this idea is merely the improvement of the condition of our wretched brethren.'<sup>26</sup>

There were therefore two types of Religious Zionism. The first, Messianic Religious Zionism, faced momentous adversity from its very inception, summarised succinctly by the Jewish novelist Perets Smolenskin when writing to members of Hibbat Tzion. 'If you strive to establish



R. Yitshak Yaakov Reines's yeshiva in Lida

colonies in the Land of Israel, may you go from strength to strength...But if you say your intention is to clear the way for the Messiah you will be attacked by both the believers and the enlightened.'<sup>27</sup> The other type, so called compartmentalised Religious Zionism, sought to separate completely the idea of building the State from Messianism. Ironically, as we will see, Messianic Religious Zionism became the prevailing and popular version, despite its initial unpopularity and the Zionism of the Netsiv and R. Reines, eventually took a backseat. We should note R. Reines' connection with Modern Orthodoxy philosophy; he opened a yeshiva in Lida that coupled secular studies with Jewish studies, but he was ostracised by most of his contemporaries and the yeshiva struggled.<sup>28</sup>

Although removed from the mainstream of Religious Zionism we should note the Nes Tziona movement that blossomed inside Volozhin yeshiva towards the end of the yeshiva's lifespan. The Netsiv himself was devoted to the Hovevei Tzion movement, but in a letter that he wrote to the committee, he excused himself from not being more active as he had dedicated himself heart and soul to his yeshiva. This served to generate interest within the hallowed halls of learning, and it was not long before seven members of the yeshiva met to form a society called Nes Tziona, and composed the oath of allegiance to the society. 'In the name of our Holy Land and in the name of all that is dear to us I am swearing this oath of allegiance to be faithful to our society's purposes and to make every effort to accomplish the idea of settling Erets Yisrael.' The second society that was formed inside the yeshiva (Netsah Yisrael-1891) went even further, having as its raison d'être the dedication of its members to the goal of settling the land. Amongst these illustrious scholars was none other than Hayim Bialik, who wrote, 'It is important... to establish among the Volozhin students a permanent "plant nursery" for Lovers of Zion.'<sup>29</sup> They planned to establish a settlement in Israel for religious youngsters, which would

be a showpiece of morality and religious ethics. When Volozhin shut in the winter of 1892, the students dispersed and these societies came to an end.<sup>30</sup>

## Connections between the fledgling Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionist movements

Before we move to the modern day descendants of these two fledgling movements, we must consider the links between the two historical movements. As we have seen above, both divisions of the Religious Zionist camp placed Modern Orthodoxy at the very forefront of their ideologies. R. Reines founded a yeshiva that coupled secular studies with traditional sources, but the more impressive link concerns R. Kalischer and R. Alkalai. These two rabbis, leaders of the movement 'Harbingers of Zion', gained their impetus from the very event that opened the way for Modern Orthodoxy, namely the Enlightenment. R. Alkalai wrote with direct reference to the Enlightenment that 'the spirit of the times has freed all the inhabitants of the earth to live where they wish and granted them freedom to travel...the spirit of the times summons every people to reclaim its sovereignty and raise up its language; so too does it demand of us that we re-establish [Zion], the centre of our life, and raise up our holy language and revive it.'<sup>31</sup> Just as R. Hirsch and R. Hildesheimer used ideas generated in the Haskala to form their idea of what would become Modern Orthodoxy, the fledgling Religious Zionist movement could not have succeeded without it.

*Just as R. Hirsch and R. Hildesheimer used ideas generated in the Haskala to form their idea of what would become Modern Orthodoxy, the fledgling Religious Zionist movement could not have succeeded without it.*

While the leaders of early Religious Zionism were strongly connected to the streams of thought building Modern Orthodoxy, Modern Orthodoxy's own founders were split in their approach to Zionism. R. Hildesheimer was a

supporter of settling the Land of Israel and was a supporter of Hovevei Tzion, maintaining a connection with the non-Orthodox to achieve this aim.<sup>32</sup> However, R. Hirsch was certainly not a believer in Zionist aims. He wrote 'during the reign of Hadrian when the uprising led by Bar Kochba proved a disastrous error, it became essential that the Jewish people be reminded for all times of an important, essential fact, namely that [the people of] Israel must never again attempt to restore its national independence by its own power; it was to entrust its future as a nation solely to Divine Providence.'<sup>33</sup> In *Horeb*, R. Hirsch also wrote that 'this destruction [of the Temple] obliges us to allow our longing for the far away land to express itself only in mourning, in wishing and hoping; and only through the honest fulfilment of all Jewish duties to await the realisation of the hope. But it forbids us to strive for the reunion or possession of the land by any but spiritual means.'<sup>34</sup>

## Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism today

We have seen the historical origins of Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism; what of their fortunes today? Alas, both philosophies barely exist in a viable organised state in Britain. Bnei Akiva is the only recognised Religious Zionist movement, given the demise of Mizrahi. However, the United States boasts arguably the foremost Modern Orthodox institution in the world today, namely Yeshiva University.

This venerable institution is based upon the ideology of Torah uMada, and the debate over the philosophical underpinnings of this principle is still vibrant today. The leader of the Hirschian community in New York, R. Shimon Schwab claimed that R. Hirsch had been appropriated by the left-of-centre Modern Orthodox movement, and these people had 'changed his image from that of a vigorous fighter for Torat Emet to an ... apologist for a watered down version of convenient Judaism.'<sup>35</sup> Chaim Waxman responded by highlighting two forms of Modern Orthodoxy. One he labels as behaviourally Modern Orthodox, those whose 'freedom of choice' with regards to practice and belief, whilst never articulated theoretically, is as evident as any other people who are selectively religious. This portion, undoubtedly the majority of those who define themselves as Modern Orthodox, can be excused further discussion. The other

type is the ideologically Modern Orthodox, and it is with this group that we are concerned.

## R. Hirsch's inheritors

R. Hirsch believed in a complete integration of Torah and secular studies, as Mordechai Eliav writes, Hirsch 'made every effort to achieve a complete blending and an organic integration between Torah learning and general studies.'<sup>36</sup> Mordecai Breuer expands on this and says that R. Hirsch meant Torah im Derekh Erets 'to be more than a physical integration but rather a chemical blending so that Torah and culture (both) achieve complete identity.'<sup>37</sup> This is the guiding principle of today's ideological Modern Orthodoxy.

### *R. Hirsch believed in a complete integration of Torah and secular studies.*

Just as with R. Hirsch, an argument has emerged as to the founding principles of Yeshiva University. R. Aharon Rakeffet, a teacher of mine and a well known and beloved talmid of R. JB Soloveitchik states that 'Revel (the founding President) was only concerned with guiding the Yeshiva successfully thorough American life...and the college was a necessity if the Yeshiva was to retain its brightest graduates.'<sup>38</sup>

R. Heschel Schachter has argued differently, namely that Revel believed that 'there is an intrinsic relationship between them (Torah and secular studies)'.<sup>39</sup> R. Norman Lamm, YU's Chancellor, writes that the 'motivating mission of Torah Umadda must be to reunite and restore an original harmony.'<sup>40</sup> According to this view, YU's ideology is very close to Eliav and Breuer's interpretation of R. Hirsch's thought.<sup>41</sup> However, it is impossible to extend that statement and assert that Yeshiva University follows Hirschian philosophy in its entirety.

Some Hirschians argue that Neo-Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy are in disagreement on several issues, but all agree that a major difference concerns institutional independence.<sup>42</sup> Neo-Orthodoxy, the movement directly descended from R. Hirsch's Frankfurt community, 'could not countenance recognition of a non-believing body

representative of the Jewish People'. R. Hirsch was a firm believer in segregating his community, the ideology of *Austritt*. As a result, followers of R. Hirsch (and indeed R. Hirsch himself) opposed Mizrahi and wide involvement on communal affairs, whereas Modern Orthodoxy has largely embraced Zionism. It is here that a seismic break occurs between Modern Orthodoxy and R. Hirsch, and it forces us to look to the other proponent of Modern Orthodoxy, R. Hildesheimer, to provide a philosophical and ideological source for a Modern Orthodoxy that co-operates with the non-Orthodox, including non-religious Zionists. R. Hildesheimer's actions and beliefs, such as his seminary, his promotion of Jewish Education for women, his connection to Erets Yisrael and his co-operation with the non-Orthodox allow us to identify R. Hildesheimer as the founder of contemporary Modern Orthodoxy, which has largely embraced Zionism.

## The Impact of R. Kook

R. Avraham Yitshak HaKohen Kook was a fundamental linchpin in the history of Religious Zionism. He forced the Religious Zionist movement to the forefront of the Jewish world. His teachings are the subject of hundreds of books, but for the purposes of our discussion, I will set out only a basic sketch of his philosophy.

R. Kook's first Zionist aspirations appear in his essay written just after the first Zionist Congress of 1897. He wrote, 'we must dismiss those who say that we cannot hope for the salvation of Israel except through palpable miracles. The Messiah is not the driving force behind the historical process, but rather its outcome.'<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, in this pamphlet R. Kook called for the creation of the Sanhedrin, in order to allow Erets Yisrael to become the religious centre of Judaism. He was later to retract this idea, but only for tactical reasons, as he wrote 'no-one will be willing to listen to this idea; we will be attacked from every quarter.'<sup>44</sup>

R. Kook clearly set out his main ideological positions, namely Utopian Zionism and a rejection of Secular Zionist ideology. It was with the latter in mind that R. Kook attacked the 'decree' of the first Zionist Congress. This Congress was rumoured to have formulated their motto as 'Zionism has nothing to with religion'. R. Kook attacked this motto with a real vigour, writing that, 'The decree ... is harsher than the decrees of Pharaoh and Haman. It spreads the terrible, black wings of death over our tender,

lovely, young national sentiment...This perverse statement is the poison within [Zionism] that is destroying it and turning it into an empty vessel filled with a spirit of destructiveness and strife.'<sup>45</sup> The irony is that the slogan was formulated at the urging of R. YY Reines, who, as we have seen, wished to separate Messianism and Zionism. The decree was never issued and Herzl himself was careful to disassociate himself from any such remarks when he wrote, 'We must not drive the Zionist rabbis away. Let us not discourage them, even if we have no intention of handing them the leadership.'<sup>46</sup>

### *[Rav Kook] forced the Religious Zionist movement to the forefront of the Jewish world.*

This somewhat uneasy connection with Herzl re-emerged just after R. Kook made aliya in 1904, when Herzl passed away and R. Kook delivered a hesped for him. Despite being vilified by the haredim of Jerusalem, R. Kook managed to combine praise and reproach for the Zionist leader. R. Kook compared Herzl to the times of Mashiah ben Yosef, the Moshiah who is the harbinger of Mashiah ben David. This Mashiah will help the Jewish People to the ultimate geula, but will ultimately die in the battle that clears the way for Mashiah ben David. R. Kook wrote, 'in our time, like the footsteps of Mashiah ben Yosef, comes the Zionist vision. We may consider this man to have been the harbinger of Mashiah ben Yosef, in terms of his role in achieving the great aim of national rebirth in the material sense. This emphasis on the material dimension...prevents spiritual elevation. Yet the various forces will all end up submitting to the light of the Torah and the knowledge of God.'<sup>47</sup>

A well known feature of R. Kook's life is his refusal to join the Mizrahi movement, and some consider this to be a failing of R. Kook's ideology, but in fact R. Kook's opposition to the Mizrahi movement was based upon its separation of Religion and Zionism. He berated 'this disgraceful declaration that religion is totally irrelevant to Zionism' and wrote that indecision and compromise...will not triumph in so dynamic an enterprise as our national regeneration.'<sup>48</sup> R. Kook was more inclined to follow the Agudah and referred to it as 'The central instrument of the ingathering that would fortify the spirit of the pioneers of our...revival.'<sup>49</sup> When the Agudah became anti-Zionist, he

wished to start another movement called Yerushalayim, 'to establish a political forum whose message to Jewish and gentile audiences will proudly elucidate our Divine title to the Holy Land.'<sup>50</sup> Despite establishing offices in Britain, Switzerland, Holland and USA, the movement collapsed in 1921 due to the lack of a practical leadership.<sup>51</sup>

From 1897 R. Kook's Messianic Zionism was already apparent and his other famous hiddush was about to emerge. In contrast to most rabbis of the time who dismissed the Secular Zionists as heretics, R. Kook wrote that, 'the brazen ones of this generation, those who are wicked on principle – these are the lights of tohu.'<sup>52</sup> In *Orot HaKodesh* he wrote that, 'the cleansing of the world through the generations...as well as the gradual improvement of social relationships and the broadening of the sciences has greatly refined the human spirit.'<sup>53</sup> When talking about the First World War, R. Kook went even further to say that 'atonement must come: a general clearing away of all...foundations of civilization, with... their evil pollution and poisonous venom. All culture that takes pride in the ring of its lies must be wiped out, to be replaced by a realm of transcendent holiness.'<sup>54</sup> This theme was continued by R. Tsvi Yehuda Kook after the Shoa when he wrote that the Holocaust was 'the angry blow of the Lord's hand aimed at removing us from the nations and their worthless culture.'<sup>55</sup>

R. AY Kook, in a theme that would be copied by all his successors, asserted a difference between the actions of the secularists. R. Kook believed that whilst the secular Zionist may not understand his actions, and may indeed commit heinous sins, his actions are imbued with an inherent holiness. R. Kook was the first to condemn society as a whole for its wayward nature. R. Kook wrote of a distinction between the nefesh and ruah, drawing on Kabbala. In a brilliant passage in *Orot*, R. Kook wrote that 'The nefesh (representing the spontaneous and corporeal) of Jewish atheists fervently committed to the revival of Israel in its homeland in the era of Messiah's footprints outshines that of the pious who belittle the national revival and desire for territorial sovereignty. However, the ruah of these devout and observant who fail to identify with the community's social requirements and national aspirations surpasses that of the spiritual misguided national activists. Just as all wine contains sediment so the sinful form part of society; and just as the sediment sustains the wine, so the gross passion of the wicked enhances the vibrancy of life...'<sup>56</sup>

Thus we can see that R. Kook's writings contain two main

features. The first is a sharp focus on the Messianic aspect of Zionism, and an acknowledgement that the events he was living through are the ‘birth pangs of the Messiah’ as seen in his eulogy to Herzl. The second feature is the inclusion, and indeed the reliance, upon secular Zionists to build the state in conjunction with the Religious Zionists.

## The Approach of Rabbi JB Soloveitchik

In his seminal piece, *Kol Dodi Dofek*, in which he discusses the State of Israel, R. JB Soloveitchik made his feelings towards the State very clear when he said, ‘The mission of the State of Israel is ...the elevation of a people (Am) to the rank of a holy congregation (Edah) and the transformation of shared fate to shared destiny.’<sup>57</sup> R. Soloveitchik decried the State of Israel’s lack of religiosity and expresses regret that had more religious Jews ‘shaped the spiritual image of the Yishuv, our situation would be entirely different.’<sup>58</sup> He wrote that, ‘the Mizrahi movement is a great movement which saved Orthodox religious Jewry from being forgotten in history as far as restoration and reconstruction of the Land of Israel is concerned. If not for the Mizrahi, we would have lost much. Whatever is true should not be denied. I might at times be critical of certain methods which may be employed by the Mizrahi leadership in Erets Yisrael - now they are called Zionism Dati’im Mafdal - but al mishkavi balayot as I see my life in retrospect and reminisce about events and experiences, and recollect certain incidents; I begin to realize how basic the Mizrahi philosophy was. Hashgaha has confirmed the truth of the Mizrahi outlook on the world. If not for Mizrahi, we would have been condemned by history to absolute anonymity. The Mizrahi wrote a glorious chapter in binyan ha’arets...’<sup>59</sup>

The links between R. Soloveitchik and R. Kook are strong (interestingly, both are referred to simply as ‘the Rav’ by

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***The Mizrahi movement is a great movement which saved Orthodox religious Jewry from being forgotten in history as far as restoration and reconstruction of the Land of Israel is concerned.***

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their followers); both sought to create a more utopian Jewish Society through the population of the Erets Yisrael and a more widespread observance of the Torah and its values. However, R. Soloveitchik did not subscribe to a Messianic attitude of the Zionist enterprise, and could be more ideologically linked to R. Reines.<sup>60</sup> A proof for this would be his famous response during a Teshuva Drasha that security needs should govern any negotiation about the Land of Israel.<sup>61</sup>

Having looked at the Zionism of the great leader of Modern Orthodoxy, R. Soloveitchik, we are left with the other side of the equation, was the great Religious Zionist R. Kook Modern Orthodox? An interesting starting point is the address that R. Kook gave at the opening of Hebrew University in 1925. ‘This university must function at a level where it will cause God, the Jewish people and the Land of Israel to be publicly sanctified and not profaned in any manner – whether by the administration, the teachers, or students. And this applies in particular to those who will teach Judaic studies-from the book of books, Tanakh (the light of our life) to the breadth of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud and all of their branches, as well as the wisdom of Israel and its history. These must be people who, in addition to their great knowledge in their respective fields, will be completely committed to the faith of Israel in their views, in their feelings and in the way that they conduct their lives. This will indicate a “happiness of heart” and the greatness of the purified expression of the intellectual disciplines.’<sup>62</sup>

R. Kook also spoke about the beauty of other cultures, most famously about his experiences in London in World War One. ‘When I lived in London I used to visit the National Gallery, and my favourite pictures were those of Rembrandt. I really think that Rembrandt was a tsaddik. Do you know that when I first saw Rembrandt’s works, they reminded me of the legend about the creation of light? We are told that when God created light, it was so strong and pellucid, that one could see from one end of the world to the other, but God was afraid that the wicked might abuse it. What did He do? He reserved that light for the righteous when the Messiah should come. But now and then there are great men who are blessed and privileged to see it. I think that Rembrandt was one of them, and the light in his pictures is the very light that was originally created by God Almighty.’<sup>63</sup> These amazing sources show that R. Kook was inclined to what today is called Modern Orthodoxy; he was even publicly vilified for attending the opening of the University by haredi

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***R. Kook believed that the study of secular subjects would enable Erets Yisrael to flower further and allow the country to flourish in a modern society.***

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rabbis. R. Kook believed that the study of secular subjects would enable Erets Yisrael to flower further and allow the country to flourish in a modern society.

Whether or not R. Kook believed in Torah uMada to the same extent as R. Soloveitchik and Yeshiva University is unclear, but we can see that both the non-Messianic Zionism of Yeshiva University and the Messianic version of R. Kook value all wisdom, both Torah and wider culture.

## Religious Zionism Today

There are two wings to Religious Zionism today. I will look first at the ‘liberal’ wing of Religious Zionism. The leadership consisted of Moshe Unna and Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and was located in the Religious Kibbutz Federation. The modern day dovish Religious Zionist movements such as Meimad have their ideological roots in this organisation. Shlomo Fischer states that, ‘In contrast to the collective organicism that characterises the Emuni (right wing Religious Zionist) way of thinking, the liberal wing adopts a way of thinking that focuses upon the individual and his rights and benefit. They approach the issue of Erets Yisrael and the conflict with the Palestinians through the lens of the security needs of the Israeli State and individual Israeli citizens, the desire to avoid bloodshed and the rights of the Palestinians, not through the lens of the realisation of collective national destiny.’<sup>64</sup> Fischer also writes that this liberal Religious Zionism was easy to understand when he made aliya, in contrast to the more opaque nationalist Religious Zionism. His discussion concludes that this may be connected to the Diaspora’s close affiliation with a more liberal Modern Orthodoxy. I would argue that whilst liberal Religious Zionism may still exist, mostly amongst recent immigrants to Israel, and some of those yet to make aliya, it is a dying ideology. There is a strong correlation between religious observance and hawkish political views, while the coalition of Meimad

and the Green Party (having run on the Labour list for years) for the recent election in Israel resulted in them gaining no seats at all in the Knesset.

The nationalist Religious Zionist movement is in a much healthier state. The Emuni community emerged in the 1970s, and specifically followed the conquest of Yehuda and Shomron in the 1967 war. The Emuni community is characterised first and foremost by a belief in Greater Israel. R. Tsvi Yehuda Kook, the spiritual head of this community wrote that ‘part of the Redemption is the conquest and settlement of the land. This is dictated by divine politics, and no earthly politics can supersede it.’<sup>65</sup> This belief was further cemented when he wrote, ‘The State of Israel is Divine... Not only can/must there be no retreat from [a single] kilometre of the Land of Israel, God forbid, but on the contrary, we shall conquer and liberate more and more...in our Divine, world-encompassing undertaking, there is no room for retreat.’<sup>66</sup> This idea became more extreme, when R. Filber stated that ‘I believe with perfect faith that if the Holy One gave us the land in a patently miraculous way, He will never take it away from us.’<sup>67</sup>

This view that emerged from the talmidim of R. Tsvi Yehuda was tempered when the 1982 evacuation from Yamit occurred, forcing R. Ariel, the dean of the Yeshiva in Yamit to reflect, ‘we proclaimed daily that there would be no withdrawal. This slogan was a mistake from the point of both faith and education. No believing Jew should ever make absolute pronouncements.’<sup>68</sup> However, we can see a gradual rise of Messianic determinism from R. Avraham HaKohen Kook, to his son, to his talmidim. There were even those on the fringes of this movement who plotted to blow up certain Muslim shrines on the Temple Mount, viewing this as an apocalyptic move, forcing a Holy War to be launched on Israel that would in turn force God to bring the Redemption. It must be acknowledged, however, that the right wing Religious Zionist party, Habayit HaYehudi, is struggling. Its leader, Daniel Herszkowitz, declared in December 2008 that it was ‘not a religious party’ and it still won only three seats, far below the regular performance of the old Mafdal. It was also noticeable that the inability of the right wing Religious Zionist parties (Habayit HaYehudi and Ichud Leumi) to run on a joint list meant that their representation fell from nine seats to just seven.

Religious Zionists have always been in partnership with secular Zionists. The first Emuni settlement of Keshet,

## *Religious Zionists have always been in partnership with secular Zionists.*

founded by Mercaz Harav, was a partnership between R. Tsvi Kook and Yehuda Harel (the secular kibbutznik). Even the political parties have maintained a connection with secular Jews, and the growth of Mehinot is testimony to this focus. The hesder yeshivot that are more open to modern culture are thriving, such as Otniel and Petah Tikva, whilst others are losing their impetus. The National Union Party, known to be the most hawkish in the Knesset, has many secular members in its ranks.

The withdrawal from Sinai was met with universal horror amongst the nationalist Religious Zionists, and they maintained a united front. The recent disengagement from Gaza and some of the settlements in the Shomron did not meet with a similar show of unity. In order to contextualise these splits, we must discuss a new philosophy that has entered Religious Zionism.

## Hardal

The Hardal movement, an acronym for חרדי לאומי , (but meaning, literally, 'mustard') was founded by R. Tau when he left Mercaz Harav to found Yeshivat Har Hamor. This movement represented the followers of R. Kook who disagreed with his stance on secular studies. Rav Tau is opposed to secular academic studies. In recent years, following the disengagement from Gaza, this movement underwent a schism as different rabbis went in different directions. R. Tau and his Yeshiva, now consisting of many yeshivot and kollelim taught that study and prayer were important weapons in the fight to prevent the withdrawal, and few of their members took part in lobbying and protests. On the other side of the divide, R. Shmuel Tal, Rosh Yeshiva of Torat Hayim has emerged as the leader. R. Tal instructed his talmidim no longer to celebrate Yom Ha'atsmaut and bewailed Religious Zionists for interacting with secular Israeli culture.<sup>69</sup> R. Tal is not alone in his views. R. Shear-Yashuv Cohen, the Chief Rabbi of Haifa changed the words of the Prayer for Medinat Israel from תהיה ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו to ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו ('the beginning of the flowering of our Redemption')

to 'may this be a beginning of the flowering of our Redemption').

This small change denoted that for the first time, Religious Zionism had doubts 'concerning what has been axiomatic since the State's founding: The presumption that the State of Israel is the first stage in the process of redemption. R. Cohen did not instruct his talmidim to cease their celebrations of Yom Ha'atsmaut, but he said, 'When the Government of Israel raises a hand to uproot Jewish communities from Erets Yisrael, the reality changes.'<sup>70</sup> R. Shlomo Aviner of Bet El continued to show his unabashed support for the State of Israel when he wrote an article that was addressed to disheartened young Religious Zionists. He wrote that he would never stop praying for Erets Yisrael 'because this is my State. I have no other, and I love it the way it is.'<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusions

We have seen that Modern Orthodoxy is primarily a descendant of R. Hildesheimer, and that while R. Hirsch has been hugely influential few outside the explicitly Hirschian kehillot would consider themselves followers of his philosophy in all its aspects. R. Hildesheimer believed in populating and building the Land of Israel and working with the non-Orthodox to do so. We have also seen the two types of Religious Zionism, one (the non-Messianic version) that has become the Zionism of

### *It is perfectly possible to accept one hashkafa and reject the other.*

Yeshiva University and to a lesser extent has prevailed in this country and the other (the Messianic version) that is predominant in Israel today.

We have seen how most Messianic Religious Zionists have some connections with Modern Orthodoxy; namely its inclusion of secular studies and its connection to the secular world. We have also seen how some Religious Zionists have distanced themselves from this, forming the Hardal movement. It is therefore perfectly possible to be both Religious Zionist and Modern Orthodox; Alei Tzion is certainly not an exception as indeed, most people who adopt one ideology also subscribe to the other. But it is

perfectly possible to accept one hashkafa and reject the other, and the number who do so is growing.

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16. Whilst Anti-Zionist ideology is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that R. Shalom Dov Baer

Schneersohn, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, was at the forefront of the so-called passive camp. This advocated the now popular opinion that 'forcing the end' was in contradiction to a Torah lifestyle.

17. TH Kalsicher, *Derishat Tsiyyon* (Lyck, 1862)
18. <http://www.eretzyisroel.org/~peters/oriental.html>
19. The Russian Zionist movement was always more pro-Erets Yisrael than Zionist movements in other countries, and it is no coincidence that when Herzl advocated the Ugandan option at the sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, the Russian delegates left in disgust.
20. Ketubot (Bavli) 111a
21. M Breuer, *The Discussion concerning the three Oaths in Recent Generations in Geulah u-Medinah* (Jerusalem, 1979) 49-57
22. See commentary to the Rambam's Sefer haMitzvot, Mitzva Aseh 4. I ben S Perfet, *Teshuvot haRibash* (Constantinople, 1546), sec. 101
23. Y Alkalai, *Kitvei HaRav Yehuda Alkalai*, ed. Yitzhak Werfel (Jerusalem, 1944), 201
24. N Z Y Berlin, *Mara de-ara Yisrael*, (Jerusalem, 1974), 15-16
25. Y Y Reines, *Orot Yisrael*, Beit Hamidrash I, (1888)
26. *Sefer ha-Tsionut ha-Datit* (Jerusalem, 1977), pt.1, 339
27. S. Almog, *Zionism and History; The Rise of a New Jewish Consciousness* (New York and Jerusalem, 1987)
28. Whilst R. Hirsh and R. Hildesheimer were more successful in opening such institutions, the crucial difference was that these were in Germany, where the Jewish population was tolerant of such efforts. R. Reines opened his yeshiva in Belarus, outside the sphere of Enlightenment, and his efforts were arguably doomed from the start.
29. E Leonie ed., *Translation of Wolozyn; sefer shel ha-ir-shel yeshivat "Ets Hayim"*, (Tel Aviv, 1970), 120-4
30. Ibid, 113-141
31. Y Alkalai, *Kitvei HaRav Yehuda Alkalai*, ed. Yitzhak Werfel (Jerusalem, 1944), 529
32. D. Ellenson, *Esiel Hildesheimer and the creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy*, (Tuscaloosa Alabama, 1990) 60, 109
33. *Hirsch Siddur*, (New York 1969), 703
34. S R Hirsch, *Horeb: A philosophy of Jewish laws*, (London 1981), 461
35. S Schwab, *Rav S R Hirsch-The Leader and Fighter in the Living Hirschian Legacy: Essays on "Torah im Derech Eretz" and the Contemporary Hirschian Kehilla* (New York, 1988), 73
36. M Eliav, *Various Approaches to Torah im Derech Eretz: Ideal and Reality*, Mordechai Brauer ed. (Ramat

Gan, 1987), 48

37. M. Breuer, 'The Doctrine of Torah-im-Derech-Eretz in the Philosophy of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch', *Hamaayan* 9, Tishrei 5729, 15. Note that whilst most Hirsch scholars promote this view, there are others, most notably R. Isaac Breuer (R. Hirsch's grandson), who believe that 'Rav Hirsch's fight was not for balance...and certainly not for parallel power, but for the ...absolute domination of the divine.' (I. Breuer, *Samson Raphael Hirsch*, in Leo Jung, ed. *Jewish Leaders (1759-1940)* (New York, 1953), 168-9

38. A Rothkoff, *Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy*, (Philadelphia, 1972), 72

39. JJ. Schachter, 'Torah U-Madda Revisited: The Editor's Introduction', *Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol 1 1989, 18

40. N Lamm, *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition*, (New Jersey, 1990), 142-3

41. Ibid.

42. Note that Modern Orthodox scholars are more likely to try and bridge the gaps between them and the Neo-Orthodox Movement (see R. Lamm above), as opposed to the Neo Orthodox scholars who draw distinctions between the two movements (Joseph Elias, Introduction to S.R. Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters*, New York 1995)

43. AY Kook, *On Zionism in Ha-Devir*, (Jerusalem, 1920), 30

44. AY Kook, *Iggerot ha-Reiyah*, (Jerusalem, 1962), 341

45. AY Kook, *Brooks in the Negev*, Ha-Peles (1903), 71-77

46. A Bein, *Herzl*, (Jerusalem, 1977), 185, 193. R. Kook did distinguish between Herzl and those (namely Nordau, the Vice President of the Congress) who did promote this idea. Herzl described Nordau as 'the abomination of my soul and of the soul of everyone who has a spark of Judaism.'

47. AY Kook, Eulogy in Jerusalem, *Ma'amrei ha-Reiyah* (Jerusalem, 1984), 96-9

48. AY Kook, *Iggerot ha-Reiyah*, (Jerusalem, 1962), II 164

49. AY Kook, *Iggerot ha-Reiyah*, (Jerusalem, 1962), II 173

50. Ibid., 178

51. See <http://www.hagshama.org.il/en/resources/print.asp?id=291/2092> for more details

52. In Kabbalah, these lights shine with so much force that they shatter the vessels below

53. AY Kook, *Orot HaKodesh*, (Jerusalem, 1964), 2:545

54. AY Kook, *Orot*, (Jerusalem, 1963), 13-15

55. TY Kook, *LeNetivot Yisrael*, (Jerusalem, 1967), I:82

56. AY Kook, *Iggerot ha-Reiyah*, (Jerusalem, 1962), II, 84-5

57. JB Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek*, (New York 1956)

58. Ibid.

59. <http://www.mizrachi.org/aboutus/aboutus.asp>

60. Having said this, it can be claimed that Kol Dodi Dofek does contain some Messianic undertones.

61. *Mentor of Generations, Reflections on Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. Zev Eleff, (New Jersey 2008)

62. <http://ravkook.net/torah-secular.html>

63. *The Jewish Chronicle*; London, 13 September 1935, 21

64. S Fischer, *Fundamentalist or Romantic Nationalist? Israeli Modern Orthodoxy*, ( at the Conference on Dynamic Jewish Belonging, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, June 2004)

65. Y Bramson, ed., *Ba-Ma-arakah ha-Tsibburit*, (Jerusalem, 1986), 52

66. ibid

67. Y Filber, 'Our Period as Mirrored in the Sources', (Morasha I, 1971), 33

68. G. Aran, *Hevel Yamit Tashmah*, Studies of the Jerusalem Foundation for Israel Studies, no 18, (Jerusalem, 1988), 68-69

69. K Nahshoni, *Disengagement from Secular State*, ynetnews.com, October 2007

70. N Shragia, [http://www.boell.org.il/download\\_en/060501shragai.pdf](http://www.boell.org.il/download_en/060501shragai.pdf)

71. [http://www.tashmah.blogspot.com/2006\\_05\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.tashmah.blogspot.com/2006_05_01_archive.html)

HASHKafa

## Tevye's milk is still fresh: One hundred and fifty years of Sholem Aleichem

Nathan Woodward

One hundred and fifty years ago one of the world's greatest, most famous and well respected Yiddish authors and humorists was born. Called Shalom Rabinovitz by his parents, posterity knows him as Sholem Aleichem. In 1883, serving as the Crown Rabbi in the Ukraine, he published a satirical account of local politics in the St. Petersburg *Yiddische Volksblat*, and humorously signed it 'Sholem Aleichem'.<sup>1</sup> This name became synonymous with a series of great comical, cynical and observational Jewish novels. From 1883 until his death in 1916, Aleichem's genius shone, and he produced work that epitomised 'the Jewish people's desire and power for survival.'<sup>2</sup> Indeed 'the author paints a giant canvas of the Jewish society at the time of the great historical transition from the old order of traditional life in Eastern Europe to modern times.'<sup>3</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century Russian Jewry was struggling to survive. It was willing to embrace the new but still trying to hold on to its heritage.

I want to examine how Aleichem explores the predicament of Russian Jewry in this period through his most famous character, who has become known throughout the world from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye the Dairyman. Tevye survives by cleaving to his faith. He tackles every difficulty by hiding behind the religious quotations he so often recites. His difficulties were numerous. During the course of his lifetime, he loses his wife Golde, his seven daughters, his possessions, and hard-earned money that a long-lost relative, Menahem took and gambled away, as well as being expelled from his village simply for being Jewish.

Aleichem's writing forms an important commentary on the Russia of his time - a turbulent period for its Jews. Fiction was an especially important vehicle of social commentary for Aleichem and other writers because they were working

in a tightly controlled society where political writing was severely restricted. Aleichem offered his social criticism through his portrayal of shtetl life, offering a fictionalised reality. I want to explore what we can learn from Sholem Aleichem and Tevye, and suggest the relationship between the two.

I will consider Tevye from three different perspectives: the author, his audience and his society. What does Tevye the Dairyman tell us about the author? What message is Sholem Aleichem trying to convey through his observations? What does his work tell us about the audience for his stories, either as readers or as listeners at a public reading? What is Aleichem's essential purpose in writing; to improve the morals of the present, to remind the reader of the past, or to warn him that events that took place in the period Aleichem wrote about, the late eighteenth or nineteenth century, could be repeated? What does the work tell us about Russian society, both Jewish and non-Jewish in Aleichem's own time at the end of the nineteenth century? Was Russia a united or polarised society? Was it fragile or stable? How close to reality was the picture that Aleichem painted of Tevye, his family and his travels? And finally, what is the overall significance of this fictionalised reality? An attempt to answer these questions must begin with an understanding of the historical background to Aleichem and his fiction.

*I want to explore what we can learn from Sholem Aleichem and Tevye, and suggest the relationship between the two.*

## Sholem Aleichem, the man

Sholem Aleichem was born on 2 March 1859 in the town of Pereyaslav in the Ukraine. He moved at an early age to Voronka, where he learnt in the heder.<sup>4</sup> His early life was plagued with disasters. In 1872, his mother died of cholera, leaving behind a family on the poverty line. In 1876, Sholem graduated from the Russian gymnasium in Pereyaslav, at which time he had already shown 'artistic promise at first as a comic actor and mimic.'<sup>5</sup> Inspired by *Robinson Crusoe*, in around 1879 Aleichem began to publish works for weekly newspapers and the like, and from 1880 to 1883, he served as Rabbi of the small town of Lubny 'where he tried to improve relations between the rich and the poor'. Aleichem's 'relations with the rich members of the community were strained' and money is a central theme in much of Sholem's writings.<sup>6</sup> During the rest of the 1880s, and early 1890s, the young author continued to write, and travel, but soon Sholem Aleichem entered the most trying period of his life, which had a significant affect on his writing.<sup>7</sup> In 1890, Aleichem lost his entire fortune in a stock speculation and also first contracted tuberculosis. It was during the years that followed that his most important works were written, and key personalities developed. In 1892, his character Menachem Mendl was born, and in 1894 Tevye was created.

Throughout the early 1900s, Aleichem had to write to support himself. Whilst living in Kiev, he witnessed first hand the 1905 pogrom 'from the window of the hotel in which he had taken refuge with his family.'<sup>8</sup> Aleichem left Russia soon afterwards, he returned only for brief visits between then and his death in New York in 1916.<sup>9</sup> In 1907 a lack of money forced him to travel to Europe to tour the length and breadth of Russia giving public readings of his now much-loved stories. Wherever he went Aleichem observed and absorbed the people and places he encountered, for example the *nouveaux riches* of Kiev. These influences shine through in his work. From 1909 to 1914, Aleichem enjoyed a period of prolific writing, with such works as *The Bloody Hoax* and in 1913 started the unfinished *Funem Yarid*, or *Back from the Fair*.<sup>10</sup> The year 1914 saw yet another lecture tour of Russia followed by visits to Germany, Copenhagen and the U.S. again.

## Sholem Aleichem's times

Aleichem lived against a backdrop of extreme terror. From



*Still from Tevye the Dairyman (1939)*  
Directed by Maurice Shwartz

1881-1917 the Jews of Russia experienced one of the most vicious periods since the massacres of Khmel'nitsky's Cossacks in the 1648-1649 in the Ukraine. 'Moreover', writes Halkin, 'not only were the pogroms that took place under Alexander III and his successor, Nicholas II, actually incited and approved by the Russian government, they were part of an official policy of anti-semitism calculated to render life so intolerable for the country's Jewish inhabitants that, in the notorious words of Alexander III's adviser Constantine Pobiedonostzev, 'a third of them would be forced to emigrate, a third to convert, and a third to perish from hunger.'<sup>11</sup>

This novel and aggressive policy was the result of major changes in the late eighteenth century. Jews had been excluded from Russia from the end of the fifteenth century until the first partition of Poland in 1772 when Polish Jews came under Russian rule. Partitions in 1793 and 1795, and the revisions of them made by the Congress of Vienna further increased the number of Russian Jews. Although these Jews were unwelcome, it was decided to allow the Jews to remain, but only in certain areas – those areas in which they already lived and other annexed areas which Russia wished to colonise. By the end of the eighteenth century these Jews were trapped in this Pale of Settlement, which confined millions of Jews to the areas of western and south-western Russia, from the Baltic to the Black sea. Created by Catherine the Great, from 1791 the Pale at its height housed a Jewish population of over 5 million, which represented the largest concentration of world Jewry at that time. Jews were permitted to leave the Settlement, but only under certain conditions, defined by law.<sup>12</sup>

The Pale was one problem, the widespread squalor and

deprivation was another, which was compounded by swinging taxes on such basic essential items as kosher meat, candles and clothing.<sup>13</sup> To this was added the 'head tax'; since becoming Russian subjects, the Jews had been exempted from military service in exchange for this special tax. The Jews became the scapegoat for Russia's ills, whether it be Alexander III's assassination in 1881, or the new revolutionary movements. The period from 1880 was marked by pogroms, culminating in the most violent in the early 1900s and other anti-semitic measures.<sup>14</sup> In 1890, many towns within the Pale of Settlement were reclassified as villages, which lead to the expulsion of thousands of Jews. In 1899/1900, a Jew was put on trial in Vilna on the ancient charge of attempting to murder a Christian girl in order to use her blood to make matsa. Finally, came the pogroms of 1905, the worst of which took place in Odessa. Jewish life was in turmoil and teetering towards disintegration. These deprivations, persecutions, pogroms and expulsion all feature in the life of Tevye the Dairyman.

## Sholem Aleichem's literary response

One of the first modern writers to use Yiddish as a literary language, he wrote some three hundred short stories, five novels and many plays. The skill of Sholem Aleichem lay in the way in which, despite the atrocious situation in which the Jew found himself he lifted the Jewish soul from depression. Laughter was 'the explosive with which he systematically mined all escape routes away from the truth.'<sup>15</sup> He could address the problems of the day head on, but still distract his Jewish audience from their predicament, even if only temporarily. The humour which can be found in nearly all of the Tevye the Dairyman stories personifies his optimism through such a dark period of Jewish history, holding out hope to those being crushed, both mentally and physically, by appalling circumstances.

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The Tevye stories follow a pattern of 'rise', 'fall', 'salvage' and 'restore', a sequence which is repeated in nearly all the stories. The pattern is almost uniform: the beginning is simple, unassuming and relatively normal (in the circumstances), which develops into a crescendo of conflict and disaster.<sup>16</sup> The continuous recitation of Jewish quotations, whether Biblical, or Yiddish which Tevye has learned over the years, are the prime sources of rejuvenation after each calamity, and renewed energy which sees Tevye through each day, and which also drives his wife mad! They are like a guiding friend, or mythical travelling companion. Thus, each crisis ends at the close of each entry of his extensive diary, with a Tevye who is 'revived and refreshed, who is entertaining, timeless, and immutable, ready for the next trial (its coming almost predictable, nay obvious), for death and for resurrection.'<sup>17</sup>

There are two sets of stories concerning Tevye: *The Railroad Stories* and the set I will discuss, *Tevye the Dairyman* stories. There, one can see Tevye and his family as a depressing example of the fate of Russian Jewry. They are helpless wrecks, as so many Russian Jews were at the time. Throughout *Tevye Strikes It Rich*, one is made very aware of the sorry state of affairs, with, of course, the customary optimism attached. Tevye tells us, for example, 'a Jew must never, never give up hope. How does he go on hoping, you ask, when he's already died a thousand deaths? But that's the whole point of being a Jew in this world!'<sup>18</sup> A thought which, although written in jest, must have been shared by a large proportion of Russian Jewry.

The Tevye stories are tragicomic. 'Though Aleichem was a humourist and Tevye is his most famous character, Tevye is not funny. Nearly everything that happens to him and his daughters is tragic. His humour lies in his evaluation of what happens to him, in what he says and the way he says it.'<sup>19</sup> A happy beginning always turns sour, if not within the story, certainly in the next. For example, while in *Tevye Strikes It Rich*, he stumbles across a generous gift, the next story is called *Tevye Blows a Small Fortune*. Aleichem has already told us about Tevye's bad luck, so the unhappy ending comes as no surprise. Tevye is a dreamer and a fantasist. When he inherits the money we find him daydreaming about how the money could be spent.<sup>20</sup> He wants to become something which he, and his family are not, and never likely to be, like the rich Jews of Boiberik or Yehupetz, types inspired by the *nouveaux riches* of Kiev. These dreams only emphasise the gap between Tevye's aspirations and the reality of his poverty stricken life. Finally Tevye realises he 'just wasn't meant to be upper

crust, that's not how God wanted it.<sup>21</sup> In the conclusion of *Tevye Blows a Small Fortune* he exclaims: 'Do you know what I still can't get over, though? Losing my dream.'<sup>22</sup> That is exactly what it was, a dream; pure 'escapism' from the misery in which both Aleichem and Tevye were living.

The stories of two of Tevye's daughters, Hodel and Hava, are sad reminders of the times that Tevye lived in at the end of the nineteenth century, and in Hava's case, the age in which world Jewry lives today. The reasonable fear Tevye had of one of his seven, precious daughters marrying outside the faith became a reality in Hava's case. This was Tevye's waking nightmare; he is so appalled that he pronounces Hava dead when he finds out. The story gives an interesting insight into relations with the local priest, who says to Tevye (who was angrily inquiring about his Hava's whereabouts), 'I am not God forbid, your enemy, even though you are a Jew.'<sup>23</sup> Aleichem here transforms Tevye and the priest into representatives of all poor Russian Jews on the one hand and the Russian priesthood on the other. This is not just about two fictional characters but about the relationship between two groups in Russian society.

## Sholem Aleichem and Tevye

The lives of Sholem Aleichem and Tevye are closely intertwined. Aleichem's own experiences can sometimes be seen in the stories explicitly, for example the marrying out of a daughter, or sometimes only implicitly, for example, Tevye's dreams and fantasies. Aleichem specialises in an intertwining of comedy and tragedy, a central theme of much Jewish humour. He will turn the direst of situations into a joke, not so the Jews could laugh at themselves, nor revel in their own misery, but instead face reality, comforted by a facade of jest. That is why the works of Sholem Aleichem should be read as 'fictionalised reality'. Tevye was fiction but his life was shared by millions of real people. Although Aleichem was writing for the reader of his own time, he was in fact also writing an important historical document, of huge value today in the light it throws on shtetl life. Unquestionably, 'in the absence of other sources, one could infer much of the history and

*Tevya was fiction but his life was shared by millions of real people.*

sociology of the Russian Jewry (and non-Jewish society too surely), of this time from his work alone.'<sup>24</sup>

'Prepared to compete for the common reader, Sholem Aleichem offered high-culture literature in popular form. Aleichem was the only one of the three modern Yiddish classicists<sup>25</sup> who directly took the path of popular literature. Sholem Aleichem was unique in that his literary genius drew its resources from the living people, their way of life, their manner of speech, their idiom and ironic humour.'<sup>26</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. The Crown Rabbi was a Rabbi appointed by the State to carry out official religious functions, such as marriage registration, but often without deep learning and unpopular with other Rabbis. The Encyclopedia Judaica (EJ) points out that 'in his memoirs Sholem Aleichem explains the pseudonym as a guise to conceal his identity from his relatives, especially his father who loved Hebrew.' It goes on to state 'Yiddish literature, greatly despised by the Hebrew Maskilim and the Russian-speaking Jewish intelligentsia, led Yiddish authors to write under pseudonyms, or to publish their works anonymously.' EJ (Jerusalem, 1972), 1273.
2. EJ 1285.
3. *ibid.*
4. A small town nearby, which later served as a model for the imaginary town of Kasrilevke described in one of his works by the same name (translated as Cheerfultown).
5. EJ, 1273
6. *Ibid.*
7. For example, in 1890, Aleichem went bankrupt and fled to Paris, returning to Odessa in 1891.
8. S. Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories*. Hillel Halkin, trans. and ed. (New York, 1987), xv.
9. EJ cites his departure stemming specifically from the 1905 pogrom of the first Russian revolution 'which shocked him so much that he resolved to leave from Russia for the U.S.A.' EJ, 1275. Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, xv.
10. The first is a trans-culturisation of Mark Twain's

*The Prince and the Pauper*, where a nobleman and a pauper switch roles, each discovering the advantages and disadvantages of the other's situation. The second is Aleichem's autobiography, the writing of which was triggered by a relapse of acute hemorrhagic tuberculosis which hospitalised Aleichem for two months.

11. Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, x.

12. The right to leave the Pale of Settlement and to reside permanently in any part of Russia was with certain exceptions accorded to the following classes of Jews: gild merchants, persons possessed of a higher education, persons who completed their term of military service in accordance with the conscription regulations and artisans.

13. The tax was on the right to wear traditional clothing.

14. For example, in 1903, the pogroms in Kishinev, where '45 Jews were killed, 86 severely wounded, 1500 Jewish houses and stores looted and demolished', and Homel, 'when Jews try for the first time to defend themselves with arms, 36 are indicted for attacking Christians.' (Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, xiv.)

15. *ibid.*, xi. 'The laughter his work evoked', maintains Halkin, 'was not that of contempt, or of embarrassment, or of relief, or even of sympathy, but rather of identification and acceptance.'

16. Perhaps the biggest tragedy was the conversion of one of his daughters to Christianity, and even greater, that of the suicide of his daughter.

17. EJ, 1281.

18. Taken from *Tevye Strikes It Rich*, S Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 5.

19. Butwin, *Favourite Tales of Sholem Aleichem* 1859-1649, xvi

20. For example Aleichem writes: 'We [Tevye and Golde] thought. And the harder we thought, the dizzier we became planning one business venture after another. What didn't we deal in the night? First we bought a pair of horses and quickly sold them for a windfall; then with the profit we opened a grocery store in Boiberik, sold out all the stock, and opened a dry-goods store; after that we invested in some woodland, found a buyer for it, and came out a few more rubles ahead; next we bought up the tax concession for Anatevka, farmed it out again, and with the income started a bank...' Taken from *Tevye Strikes It Rich*, S Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 19.

21. *ibid.*, 34.

22. *ibid.*

23. *ibid.*, 74.

24. Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, xi.

25. The other two being Mendele Mokher Sforim and Isaac Leib Peretz

26. L. S. Dawidowicz, *The Golden Tradition*, 65

## JEWISH HISTORY

# Radical Outsiders? Jews in pre-War British business

Ben Vos

This article is not a paean of praise to Anglo-Jewish commercial acumen or success and not only because neither of these are as prevalent as many people think.<sup>1</sup> Yet a case can be made that Jewish businesses have on occasion displayed impressive boldness and that by an aggressive rejection of established standards and commercial practices, they have sparked changes not just within staid British trades, but within British society as a whole.

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## Cowboys

Jews created Hollywood as a cultural force. The major studios were all started by or driven to greatness by Jews. Hollywood also offers pronounced examples of the characteristics we can also identify in Britain.

Having invested in Manhattan penny arcades to supplement his furriery business, Hungarian-born New Yorker Adolph Zukor saw potential in the single-viewer peep-boxes showing thirty-second drama reels. With

Marcus Loew, he began developing nickelodeons - the first cinemas - from old theatres, restaurants and billiard halls. Zukor then progressed to film distribution and eventually production. Arguably his greatest achievement was to transform the Paramount studio from a mere distributor of nickelodeon 'shorts' to one of the top five studios in Hollywood.

Before 1930, the foundations and amalgamations of various studios had transformed this sunny Los Angeles suburb into a company town. William Fox, another Hungarian, established Fox Film Corporation. Louis B. Mayer, a Russian-born peddler's son, began with other Jews the studios which became Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM), while tailor's sons Harry and Jack Cohn founded Columbia Pictures with Joe Brandt. All had progressed from the exhibition business via distribution to studio ownership. Carl Laemmle, German-born and previously something of a drifter, started Universal Pictures. Four sons of Benjamin Eichelbaum, a Polish cobbler, moved their film-making out west in 1917; in 1923 they established a studio in their American name: Warner Brothers Inc.

The studios did not flower gracefully: vested interests and a self-appointed 'moral majority' attacked the studios in fits and starts. The inventor Thomas Edison for instance, headed a cabal of 'primarily white older Anglo-Saxon Protestants' (the Trust) which retained sufficient camera patents from the novelty era of movie-making to make filming and distribution of anything but Trust pictures near impossible.<sup>2</sup> Laemmle though, led distributors in importing from Europe and in making their own, patent-breaching films. He built up sufficient insubordination to overcome 289 lawsuits and survive until 1912, when the US government filed suit against the Trust on antitrust

grounds: Edison's monopoly was dissolved and the independent movie-makers were victorious.<sup>3</sup>

Enemies were also found further afield: Fox, Zukor, Zukor's partner Jesse Lasky and the Warners (distrusted the New York banks, they distrusted the eastern bankers, they distrusted Wall Street. They felt they were discriminated against just because they were Jewish.<sup>4</sup> Though the Hollywood Jews deferred to the cultural superiority of the eastern establishment and feared their power, this distrust and resentment was further motivation for men like Lasky to engage in renewed, ever more lavish, self-transformative acts of creativity: 'making movies was a metaphor for one's entire life.'<sup>5</sup>

The studio bosses superimposed their temperaments onto their films. Studios developed specific styles, contracted particular actors and directors, used distinct themes and adhered to different moral standards. Warner Brothers' films featured hard-boiled private eyes, mobsters and 'women with history' and were 'permeated with...a vague underdog liberalism.'<sup>6</sup> Conversely, his own children acknowledge that Mayer's difficult childhood influenced his desire to make and sell musicals, romantic comedies and other family fare, from *Lassie* to *Mrs. Miniver*.<sup>7</sup> The Los Angeles studios, and the towering personalities behind them, supplemented and altered American popular culture and Americans' perceptions of themselves and their history, which can hardly be envisaged without - for instance - the Warner brothers' *Scarface* (1932) and *Casablanca* (1942), or *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Gone With The Wind* (1939) from MGM.

The studio heads then commandeered an infant industry, risking their slight capital and slighter reputations, going where established interests feared to tread. In the process, these Jews dragged what had been a 'two bit' and artless industry designed to separate wage-packet workers from their nickels, towards respectability and into the forefront of mainstream American culture. For Zukor in particular, something more than money-making was involved: in contradistinction to the first Waspish generation of motion-picture men, who had been happy to take the nickels and dimes as they came, he intended:

'...that the movies would become a kind of 'canned' theatre, that the diversions of the middle and upper classes could be popularised, attracting a new audience while elevating the old one.'<sup>8</sup>

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The early history of the Hollywood studios demonstrates the boldness and the cultural impact of the bosses. On a smaller scale, some of the same pioneering characteristics are discernible in some Anglo-Jewish businesses.

## Carefree

Immigrants generally are disadvantaged by a number of factors including a lack of legal, commercial and cultural knowledge of their adopted home countries, a lack of guild or other societal connections and the fact that they speak a foreign language. Anti-Semitism, which may have been less overt in Britain than elsewhere, still impeded acceptance in business and social life; the sort of attitude that leads to acquaintances to be described as 'Jews but quite nice people.'<sup>9</sup> All this was compounded by an absence of skills, scant capital, being considered 'on the wrong side' in the conflicts and cultural clashes of the period, e.g. being Russian in 1917, and being German at any time between 1914 and 1945 and religious separating factors, e.g. the observance of kashrut and Shabbat.

All of these factors can be turned in the newcomer's favour, however. A Hollywood journalist has described the attractions of Hollywood to the Jewish studio bosses. Primarily:

'...it admitted them. There were no social barriers in a business as new and faintly disreputable as the movies were in the early years of [the 20th] century. There were none of the impediments imposed by loftier professions and more firmly entrenched businesses to keep Jews and other undesirables out. Financial barriers were lower too, and that attracted Jews...'<sup>10</sup>

In other words, a disliked immigrant may charge into new markets with all his capital, for he may have little of it to lose. Moreover, often he enjoys a lower social standing, reducing bankruptcy to a mere impediment rather than a social disgrace. As importantly, unpopular, low-paid immigrants may not worry whom they harm by undercutting or disrupting established businesses. In short, these eventualities are arguably easier for immigrant outsiders to contemplate than for native businessmen. This was particularly the case for British Jews.

## Zebulun?

Generally, Anglo-Jews did not storm the barricades of entrenched business interests in the early 1900s, dazzling fusty guilds and boards by invention and daring. There is no obvious equivalent to Hollywood, no young industry driven forward by Jews such that it transformed society.<sup>11</sup> Yet some Anglo-Jews have changed things by innovation, albeit more quietly than in California. One surprising Victorian example is public houses: Dick Levy, son of a travelling-salesman-turned-publican, formed a partnership with his brother-in-law in 1892:

‘Their idea was to alter the image of public houses from being gin palaces to places where food was available, notably to City workers at lunchtime; this concept, of providing food, was copied by all other public-house operators.’<sup>12</sup>

Trading as Chef & Brewer, this company played a part in overturning the grim culinary ancien régime. In engineering we find Siegfried Bettman (1863-1951), who founded Triumph Motorcycles, a pioneering marque. In finance and trade, from N.M. Rothschild to Marcus Samuel (later Lord Bearsted), ‘...a series of remarkable Jews have come to the City, found it slumbering, given it a rude awakening, ignored the often emotive protests and bequeathed a wholly beneficial legacy.’<sup>13</sup>

However, due to their familiarity and more palpable qualities, I will concentrate on businesses directly affecting the public. In a similar way to Hollywood, these concerns quickly and measurably affected society.

## Joseph

Jews were prominent in the second-hand clothing ‘slops’ trade from the eighteenth century, facilitating the transition of clothing between the classes; only wealthy people bought new clothes. Moses Moses was born in St. Pancras and began in the slop-selling business in 1860.<sup>14</sup> In 1881 his sons Alfred and George extended Moses’ Covent Garden shop in King Street over the entire Bedford Street corner.<sup>15</sup> Moses’ company followed a now-familiar progression from ‘ethnic businessman’ to general retailer: ‘it is easy enough to find examples of pedlars and street-traders who took up retailing from a fixed shop, some of them founding long-lasting firms.’<sup>16</sup>

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***Ready-to-Wear Department was headed by east-European Jewish tailors did not appear to trouble customers much.***

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Moss Bros. though, as its name became at an unknown time, was a pioneering company.<sup>17</sup> From around the 1870s, ready-made garments became increasingly important to clothing retailers.<sup>18</sup> Moss Bros. was one of the first shops selling clothing ‘off the peg’. Industrialisation made men’s clothing cheaper, but Moss Bros. allowed only the major, cruder elements of a suit to be made by machine. Those parts which required handwork received it, bringing a ‘made-to-measure’ element to their business. Still, standardisation of production undercut the traditional tailoring trade: fewer fitting sessions and less customisation meant savings for Moss Bros. and their customers. Now a whole new swathe of the male population could afford new semi-formal and formalwear, while further up the market, the middle classes ‘...began to discover that the cut, quality and finish they had hitherto demanded from their own tailors could now be rivalled and very often bettered in an off-the-peg suit from Moss Bros.’<sup>19</sup> That the Ready-to-Wear Department was headed by east-European Jewish tailors did not appear to trouble customers much.

Following a favour to a friend of Alfred Moss, from 1897 Moss Bros. engaged in the ‘letting’ of clothes to customers for limited periods. The company historian is clear that the firm: ‘...made respectable the renting

of both men’s and women’s clothing and is now by far the largest and most experienced hirer of clothes in the world.’<sup>20</sup> In the 1920s ‘there was a certain amount of ‘lace curtain’ embarrassment in being caught hiring an outfit of clothes which, one would like to have had it thought, were one’s own.’<sup>21</sup> Moss Bros. were untroubled by this. Those who had never previously owned suits were not the only beneficiaries of this innovation: officers hired their uniforms, the entire Cabinet hired court dress in 1924, and their vast and eclectic stock made Moss Bros. *the* standard supplier for coronations, levees, debutante balls, etc. Whether for cost or quality, customers included Field Marshal Earl Haig, Ernest Shackleton and Noël Coward.

Popularising off-the-peg and hiring-out of clothes were not Moss Bros.’ only new ideas. A Publicity Manager was appointed in the 1930s, John Cassels. He developed statistical data on the client base, a card index of customers and direct mailing. This last idea was credited with pushing the average monthly number of returning ‘old customers’ from sixty per month to one thousand per month, as many customers took the mailing to be a personal communication.<sup>22</sup> More significantly, Cassels initiated a form of indirect marketing with his much-reprinted 1930s pamphlet *All At Sea* and its successors. By practical but light-hearted advice, *All At Sea* taught a class-conscious readership the pitfalls of sea-cruise etiquette:

‘Fancy Dress. Advisable to take one of some sort... There will be at least fourteen other Pierrots and Spanish Pirates!’<sup>23</sup>

Despite the reputation of the company for military dress uniforms and formal evening-wear, these novel, levelling tactics broadened access to sartorial knowledge and the clothes themselves, enabling Moss Bros. ‘to sell clothing to people of all classes’ from their rough Covent Garden base.<sup>24</sup>

## Dining out

Asher Gluckstein (1794-1859) and his family emigrated from the Oldenburg region of Germany (now in Lower Saxony), via the Netherlands, to Whitechapel and Soho in the 1840s or 1850s.<sup>25</sup> Asher’s Rhineburg-born son Samuel (1821-1873) became a cigar trader once in England. In partnership with a brother and a cousin, Samuel set up shop in Crown Street in Soho in 1854.<sup>26</sup> Twenty years

later though, the business came into the hands of one of Samuel’s sons – Montague Gluckstein (1854-1922), who worked with his brothers Isidore (1851-1920) and Joseph (1856-1930).<sup>27</sup> By the 1880s, imported and machine-produced tobacco products threatened the old established English manufacturers and small retailers, who increasingly relied on fixing prices and regional monopolies to guarantee prices and jobs.<sup>28</sup> To survive in this tough climate, the business now called Salmon & Gluckstein (S&G) embarked on a mixed manufacturing and retailing strategy, selling their own products almost at cost price and offering ‘free gifts’ for the return of branded cigarette cards.<sup>29</sup> By 1894 there were 30 shops. Other tobacco manufacturers also expanded but S&G became the largest and most aggressive tobacco retailer with a fierce reputation for price-cutting.<sup>30</sup>

By expanding, S&G forced other manufacturers to give them discounts and so were able further to cut the prices of the lines they stocked. They even opened a shop in Bristol, the heartland of W.D. & H.O. Wills, a behemoth of English tobacco. Other retailers squealed at the disruptive competition.<sup>31</sup> S&G were confronted with disdainful opposition; A. Baker & Co., with 22 London shops, initially demoralised small retailers no less than S&G, but most ‘trade’ anger fell on the heads of the foreign-born interlopers. Perhaps it is significant in this light that the popular British nicknames for the WWII German battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were ‘Salmon’ and ‘Gluckstein’.

In 1895, literally capitalising on their momentum, S&G listed on the London Stock Exchange for £400,000. Now beholden to shareholders but increasingly dominant in retail, the company agreed to level its regional prices in line with other retailers: as the world’s biggest retail tobacconist with 140 outlets by 1900, S&G could well afford to do this.<sup>32</sup> The directors’ aloofly aggressive attitude was not always sensible: on one occasion the company was fined for falsely claiming its cigarettes were handmade.<sup>33</sup> Various secret-profit and rent disputes also came to court, but the Salmons and Glucksteins were not yet behaving like the knights and colonels they would

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***The Salmons and Glucksteins were not yet behaving like the knights and colonels they would become.***

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become, largely in recognition of contributions made to military catering, the next and most impressive chapter of their history.<sup>34</sup>

Early on, S&G had catered certain public events in fear of being forced out of tobacco; to run this operation the directors employed an optician cum hawker cum songwriter cousin called Joseph Lyons. They worked through Lyons in part so that the S&G brand would not be tainted by this humble line of work.<sup>35</sup> The first major event catered to was the Royal Exhibition at Newcastle in 1887; soon not only was 'J. Lyons & Co.' (Lyons) providing food on a massive scale for further high-Victorian spectacles, but also for the Barnum & Bailey circus (1889) and army manoeuvres (1894) so that soon, tens of thousands of paying customers were eating Lyons' food.<sup>36</sup> Progressively investing vast sums into industrial food production at their suburban plants, Lyons needed sales more stable than vast but occasional shows; teashops were the answer. London's coffeehouses had degenerated terribly from their eighteenth century peak of prestige, when they were the hubs of English finance and culture: '[t]he nineteenth century coffee house appealed to a lower social class than many of its predecessors, most of whose customers had by this time migrated to clubs.'<sup>37</sup> The field was clear for brave newcomers.

By 1900, the almost 40-year old Aërated Bread Company (ABC) bakery chain had 100 outlets, at most of which it sold hot drinks.<sup>38</sup> Standard priced and temperance-based chains such as ABC were an improvement on the coffee houses, but only just. They supplied no greater improvement in variety and cleanliness than the provision of buttered muffins. In 1905 one might still, '...under a dim gas jet take your cup of tea - it was generally served slopped over into the saucer.'<sup>39</sup> That Montague Gluckstein was correct in calculating he could outflank this trudging competition with quality and narrow profit margins, is proved by the need for police to control the crowds at the opening of the first Lyons teashop at 213 Piccadilly in 1894. Lyons' fund-raising opportunities and skills were unique; but to the detriment of most of their competitors, so were the directors' principles:

'...respectability, quality, cheapness, speed and cleanliness – tenets that gained them widespread popularity, as did their apparently democratic classlessness.'<sup>40</sup>

The 'revolutionary management' introduced novelties as

simple as fresh tea for each customer, rather than having a constantly simmering urn.<sup>41</sup> China crockery replaced granite; marble-topped tables and silk hangings added luxury. Standardised prices, uniform-wearing, single waitresses forbidden to take tips and branded facades all helped to create a reliable, welcoming brand for people on middling incomes.<sup>42</sup> The 1920s 'Nippy' waitress was an early and successful attempt to trade on brand recognition.<sup>43</sup>

Lyons banked on a customer base still coming into its own:

'As a rapidly expanding class of clerical white-collar workers began commuting into central London, the dearth of cheap, clean and inviting catering establishments was increasingly apparent.'<sup>44</sup>

After 1918, newly-enfranchised, newly-employed women also benefited from clean, alcohol-free, modestly-priced dining:

'To-day the Lyons teashop is everywhere... The girls who crowd into the teashops at midday no longer need the protection of a room reserved for their sex alone. They share a table with men as naturally as they take a seat - or a strap - in tram and tube.'<sup>45</sup>

Jealousy got the better of more competitors: in September 1914 Lipton's Tea said that J. Lyons & Co were German



Advert for Lyons' Tea Shop

and that patronising them aided the enemy.<sup>46</sup> Spoiler tactics were hopeless: Lyons were granted an injunction against Lipton and in the first year of their teashop era, made £11,000 profit, allowing a 10% dividend.<sup>47</sup> Twelve teashops opened in 1895. In 1910 a Lyons teashop opened approximately every fortnight and expansion peaked again after the Great War.<sup>48</sup>

### *The famous Corner Houses and numerous other Lyons outposts, collectively killed off the traditional, sawdust-floored old English chop houses.*

Lyons also ventured into restaurants and hotels, surpassing anything seen before in scale and expense. The lavishness and value of the various eateries contained in the gargantuan *Trocadero* (1894) at Piccadilly Circus; the *Throgmorton* (1897) in the City; the 'palatial' *Popular Cafés* in Piccadilly and Manchester; the famous *Corner Houses* and numerous other Lyons outposts, collectively killed off the traditional, sawdust-floored old English chop houses.<sup>49</sup>

Dominance was gained through saturation and the unbeatable economy of food made in factories and kitchens geared to cooking thousands of dishes daily: by 1920, Lyons' semi-automatic 'Titanic' ovens could bake 10,000 loaves per hour.<sup>50</sup> Contemporarily at the 'Troc', the 560-item wine list included at least one *chateau* whose entire output had been bought up for use in-house.<sup>51</sup> A nine-course 'Troc' supper cost half a guinea in 1896, but cheap dinners could be had for as little as 5 shillings and these prices were long-retained.<sup>52</sup> More and more people at every level of society could now expect at some point, to be able to afford some measure of luxury at one or several Lyons establishments. Literally, all classes were catered for by the range of tearooms and restaurants, from women shoppers seeking afternoon tea to pinstriped grandees holding shareholders' meetings.

### Moving pictures

Oscar Deutsch, born in Birmingham in 1893, was the son of a Hungarian metal merchant father. Control of the Deutsch family business was blocked by relatives

with prior claims, so Oscar entered film distribution – a fledgling industry even compared to its Hollywood counterpart. The reputations of British film-distribution and cinema-operation in the 1920 and 1930s, were not high. Fly-by-night contractors, shady construction contracts and mirage-like piles of money were perceived to be common fare.<sup>53</sup> Respectable architects might shun cinema-building commissions, judging the risks of commissions falling through too great. As one architect told his colleagues in November 1933:

'Of all the possible jobs you can get, cinemas are the worst – if you are able to build one out of every twenty cinemas you prepare, that is a good average.'<sup>54</sup>

As in America, this uncharted and necessarily populist-flavoured commercial territory was *infra dig* to the grandees of theatre and was rife with risk; ideal territory then, to willing risk-takers, of whom a remarkable proportion were Jewish. Of these, Deutsch may be considered pre-eminent, but other cinema builders and owners included: Harry Pearl and R. Sokoloff (*Essandee Cinemas*); H.H. Weingott; A.E. Abrahams (south-east London/Kent); Alexander Bernstein (south of England), whose son Sidney (later Lord Bernstein), developed the Granada Group; M. and M.G. Mindelsohn (West Midlands); and Sol Levy (Birmingham).<sup>55</sup> Other significant Jewish figures in mid-century British film were cinema builder Nat Cohen, who with Stuart Levy founded Anglo-Amalgamated Productions in 1945, brothers Isidore, Mark and Maurice Ostrer who with C.M. Woolf and Michael Balcon, headed *Gaumont British Picture Corporation* (owning approximately 350 cinemas by 1939, housing approximately 10% of cinema seats nationwide), Hungarian-born Alexander Korda (1893-1956), who founded London Films in 1932 and Emeric Pressburger who made films for Korda and then with Michael Powell (not Jewish) wrote/produced features such as *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942) and *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).<sup>56</sup>

Deutsch's way in was through *Victory Motion Pictures*, a company founded in 1920 by Michael Balcon (1896-1977) and Victor Saville (né Salberg, 1895-1979). *Victory* was Midlands agent for W&F, a London distribution company. Like Deutsch, Balcon and Saville were born in Birmingham to Jewish immigrant parents. Saville went on to direct, while Balcon became the dynamo behind Ealing Studios from 1938, where he brought innovative

methods of film-making as exemplified by the terrifying wartime propaganda drama *'Went The Day Well?'* (1942), as well as the lighter touch of the famous Ealing Comedies. Balcon's brother Finn, then managing *W&F's* Birmingham office, told Deutsch that a small, bust local cinema circuit was selling off its outlets. Deutsch now diverted from the production path of his colleagues to build the most exciting and cinema chain in England. But it is the building programme instituted by Deutsch which marks him out and which involves many of the characteristics with which this article is concerned: imagination, risk-taking, the steam-rolling of established local interests and a great openness – or at least, equally unusual in interbellum Britain, mere acquiescence – to new cultural ideas and forms.<sup>57</sup> Deutsch elbowed aside what had been a cottage industry and imposed a modern consumerist brand on the nation.

Deutsch was a man in a hurry, partly because he knew he was dying of cancer. He died in 1941 while only in his early fifties. Thus though the Odeon circuit began only in June 1933, by January 1934, the *Kinematograph Weekly* trade paper reported Deutsch's plan to open 25 cinemas that year, mostly in Surrey and Sussex, of which 17 were actually opened.<sup>58</sup> By 1941 when cancer finally killed him, Deutsch had built 141 cinemas of a chain totalling 258.<sup>59</sup> Deutsch was not quite the first. Odeon faced competition from ABC, Grosvenor, Gaumont and other circuits. Odeon outpaced these though, by building cinemas in suburbs and even the countryside. Building in these locations was cheaper and eventually the gamble would pay off: Odeons would serve as hubs of new and growing residential areas.<sup>60</sup>

In the 1930s 'the pictures' were novel, but their sophistication was increasing rapidly. They allowed Britons to peer across the Atlantic, to a country which could seem only glamorous and rich where Britain was dowdy and hidebound. Customers gathered in hygienic, respectable mobs to gaze in awe on Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall *et al.*<sup>61</sup> One writer 'who was there' highlighted the aspirations or escapism offered by 'the pictures' to the working-class in the north, suffering calamitous unemployment:

"The streets in which they lived breathed an apathy which in the worst areas was a kind of nerveless peace. Paint flaked from woodwork, doorsteps were ritualistically cleaned, delicate undernourished children in darned jerseys and

clothing-club boots flocked to see Shirley Temple and Tom Mix on Saturday afternoons for two-pence."<sup>62</sup>

But 1935 saw Odeon cinemas also opening in the London suburbs such as Colindale, Isleworth, Chingford and Sudbury Town. Openings followed the spread of new London Underground stations along the Piccadilly Line and chased the middle classes to the suburbs.<sup>63</sup> Suburbanisation was a reliable trend between the wars: between 1911 and 1931, the population of inner London fell from 4.5m to 4.0m (estimated) while the population of Greater London rose from 7.2m to 8.6m (estimated).<sup>64</sup> Sensibly, until 1937, Deutsch's financial liabilities were minimised by forming new companies to handle each new building. Kingstanding in Birmingham opened in 1935: there were 9,000 modern council houses planned within a mile, to be filled by aspirational respectable working-class families. They were gifted an Odeon cinema, complete with giant faience-clad fins, neon lighting and massive 'ODEON' signage.

J. Cecil Clavering, who was the architect for the Kingstanding Odeon, remembered in 1972: "There then followed quite a number of cinemas on the same design basis – they included Sutton Coldfield, Colwyn Bay and Scarborough, and they were all done in one week and submitted on the same day for planning approval... Speed was of the essence, to pre-empt the opposition, and to increase cash flow, which was a dire need.' In 1936 Scarborough, Corby, Colwyn Bay, Clacton, Oldham and Harrogate were blessed with Odeon cinemas, showing Deutsch's confidence in expanding his brand to parts of the country affected by the Depression far more than the south-east.

Deutsch and Odeon did more than simply import a new

***The cinema buildings themselves - plumped down incongruously in the high streets of hundreds of British towns - served as modernist portals to a future of clean, egalitarian design and American panache.***

mode of entertainment to a tired nation racked by hunger-marches and strikes, happy though this achievement was. The cinema buildings themselves – plumped down incongruously in the high streets of hundreds of British towns – served as modernist portals to a future of clean, egalitarian design and American panache. After 1935 – when a vast, elongated, faience-clad, neon-lit Odeon complex landed at South Harrow – Odeon cinemas established for themselves a significance beyond the provision of feature-length films. Little had previously existed in Britain remotely like an Odeon cinema:

"In the early 1930s, it was not unusual that in a town of 150,000 to 200,000 inhabitants, there had been only one or two major building contacts in the previous five years. Extensions perhaps to the Labour Exchange or the Post Office, a shop for Montague Burton with a billiard saloon on the first floor, or a garage for the local bus company..."<sup>65</sup>

The architectural context of the period helps us understand what image of his business Deutsch was trying to project to the cinema-going public. Much of the 'moderne' architecture created in 1930s Britain appears in transport, especially the Tube stations that were built or refurbished at that time, such as East Finchley or Borough, and the headquarters of London Passenger Transport Board itself in Broadway (1927-29).<sup>66</sup> The Imperial Airways headquarters involved the construction of an unlikely skyscraper in Buckingham Palace Road (1939).<sup>67</sup> A Daimler garage with capacity for over 500 cars still graces Herbrand Road in Bloomsbury (1931).<sup>68</sup> Other examples include the polished black granite and bronze-covered British headquarters for an American company – the National Radiator Company building (Argyll Street; 1929).<sup>69</sup> In Fleet Street the former offices of the Daily Telegraph (1928) and Daily Express (1932) still compete for attention; the latter, faced entirely with glass and Vitrolite, is still striking. Of the Thameside power stations, Battersea was described on completion as 'a futurist icon' (1934).<sup>70</sup>

Deutsch's aim was to align his cinemas with the American image of efficiency, power and speed, as represented by the various US companies which built new factories along the Great West Road out of London, including Firestone, Chrysler, Packard and – still standing – the Gillette and Hoover buildings. Yet doing this with cinemas was counter-intuitively a European tactic and was certainly considered avant-garde.<sup>71</sup> In the words of Pevsner,

modernism arose from 'a desire for cleanness, directness and precision, 'exemplified in the pavilion built for Lord de la Warr at Bexhill-on-Sea by refugee Erich Mendelsohn and his Russian assistant Serge Chermayeff.<sup>72</sup> To follow the path beaten by a radical aristocrat, a German Jew and a Chechnyan, was bold indeed for a mass-entertainment brand.

Once lured in by glass towers lit in red and green, or 'travelling signs' displaying the features, Odeon customers were ushered to their seats across jazz-age carpets and rubberoid flooring by uniformed staff armed with American-style deference; they could be sold cigarettes and Lyons' ice cream where they sat, surrounded by stylised, futuristic art and furnishings and entertained with the best-available projection and sound equipment.<sup>73</sup> Ashtrays, carpets and clocks were branded with the single word 'ODEON' in various art-deco fonts; the face of Oscar Deutsch grinned out from portraits in many cinema lobbies; the house song *Round the Corner* played audiences out of the cinema doors to the words:

Won't you meet me tonight,  
Where your favourite pastime's right,  
It's round the corner at the O-de-on,  
Around the Corner at the O-de-on?<sup>74</sup>

To buy a ticket to an Odeon cinema then, was to be a consumer in the fullest, modern sense. To gain entry to these amazing buildings, with their potted palm trees and totally un-English consumerist ethos, could cost as little as sixpence a ticket – far less than the theatre.<sup>75</sup> Odeon cinemas were deliberately divorced from the rest of the British high street. Because they were a pipeline to America, they represented aspiration, democracy and brash vitality, at a time when Britain seemed impotent against the tumultuous forces shaping themselves on the Continent:

***To buy a ticket to an Odeon cinema then, was to be a consumer in the fullest, modern sense.***

"With their cloud-piercing towers and sweeping lines, Odeons were a promise of the shapes

of things to come. For less than a shilling... coal miners, railway workers, teachers, nurses, servicemen, typists and clerks could disappear into a shining world of futuristic dreams, a whole dimension away from the grim economic and political reality.<sup>76</sup>

The zenith was reached on 2 November 1937 with the opening of the flagship Leicester Square Odeon.<sup>77</sup> Taking a cue from the way the Grand Palais in Paris had been lit for the previous decade, the Leicester Square Odeon was built to be viewed as 'night architecture.'<sup>78</sup> This involved lighting buildings from within and below and by giving them dramatic neon outlines, whereupon, at night, they became mere blocks of light and stark, gleaming geometry.<sup>79</sup> Pre-empted by a matter of days by the Odeon at Woolwich (25 October 1937) and followed by shockingly modern cinemas at Balham, Peckham and Redhill (1938), Deutsch had made the radical a common sight.

## Michael

Given its rock-like presence on the high street, Marks & Spencer (M&S) is hard to envision as a retailing innovator. Indeed, the classic pedlar-to-shopkeeper pattern appears to apply in the case of the unskilled immigrant Michael Marks, who probably started peddling at Stockton-on-Tees.<sup>80</sup> Marks set up a stall in Leeds, followed by a shop; but details of the business are hazy.

Emergent from the historical fug in around 1886 though, its significance clear in retrospect, is the motto 'Don't Ask the Price, It's a Penny.'<sup>81</sup> This limit for everything from soap to baking tins and the concomitant low profit margins, pushed Marks to expand his range and volume of sales as quickly as possible. With capital from Tom Spencer, Marks opened branches first in Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Cardiff, Bath then in 1899, south London.

Contemporary British retailing was criticised by American budget retailer Frank Woolworth in 1900; Woolworth's Stateside innovations were later influential on the M&S strategy so it is worth quoting him:

'The moment you go into an English shop, you are expected to buy, and to have made your choice from the window. They give you an icy stare if you

follow the American custom of just going to look around.'<sup>82</sup>

It was against this proprietorial retail tradition that Michael Marks' business flourished. Perhaps fortunately, Marks had served no apprenticeship in England. As an interloper, he could sever relationships with middlemen without qualms, instead dealing directly with manufacturers and reducing overheads.<sup>83</sup> Almost uniquely, M&S encouraged customers to enter the Penny Bazaars and to browse, in at least one case by a sign saying 'Admission Free.'<sup>84</sup> This attitude was sufficiently radical to trouble conservative minds even in the 1930s: an outspoken magistrate sentenced locals accused of shoplifting from the Brixton branch to merely being 'bound over' as 'temptation was being placed in the way of thousands and thousands of people.' The relevant shop had twelve island counters, each manned by two people and it was estimated that 20,000 people used it every week.<sup>85</sup>

After Marks' death in 1907, his son Simon and son-in-law Israel Sieff continued to expand the chain: by 1939 there were 234 M&S stores.<sup>86</sup> With such size, stagnation loomed. Yet thanks to a 1924 visit to the USA and the influence of an American cousin, Simon learned how to compete with Woolworth and how further to differentiate his stores from amateurish, often drab native competition:

'I learned the value of more imposing, commodious premises, modern methods of administration and the statistical control of stocks in relation to sales...the value of counter footage, that is, that each counter foot of space had to pay wages, rent, overhead expenses, and earn a profit. There could be no blind spots on the counters insofar as goods were concerned. This meant a much more exhaustive study of the goods we were selling and the needs of the public.'<sup>87</sup>

It is noteworthy that Simon Marks and Sieff were receptive to such functional ideas partly due to the influence of Chaim Weizmann, who instructed them particularly on the pertinence of technology to retailing.<sup>88</sup>

By the late 1920s, 'large-scale retailing was supplanting... small-scale retailing: shops, like cinemas, were part of a new urban landscape.'<sup>89</sup> But alone amongst the large retailers, M&S now

'...revolutionised its internal stock control and, crucially, its relationship with its manufacturers and suppliers. For the first time, at least in England, a retail company took an active role in the internal business of the manufacturer who supplied it, interpreting the state of the market and advising on the production techniques needed in order to guarantee continuous supplies.'<sup>90</sup>

Armed with a revised price cap of 5 shillings per product introduced in 1928, M&S expanded and improved their outlets throughout the 1930s, a programme which was partly paid for by an initial stock-market listing in 1926 and subsequent share issues, 'in the context of [a] continuing bear market.'<sup>91</sup>

Old-fashioned stalls were exchanged for shop premises and 162 spacious new stores were established between 1931 and 1939.<sup>92</sup> Great faith was placed in the continued increase in the purchasing power of the growing consumer class, '...who enjoyed the new lifestyle, living in the suburbs and commuting to work.' In London at least, '...resilience in the depressed job market of the post [First World] war years [led to] a huge housing and consumer boom.'<sup>93</sup> Therefore '...despite unemployment, the real wages of people still in work rose even during the worst Depression years. Consequently the number of customers grew.'<sup>94</sup> In the process of the redevelopments and expanding *into* town centres *from* the suburbs, M&S became '...an entirely new form of business, located between the unit price store and the department store...which, penetrating deeply into the assortment of department stores,' absorbed much business.<sup>95</sup> The result was massive, Depression-busting sales: between 1929 and 1939, turnover rocketed from £2.5m to £23.4m, giving a rise in net profits from £0.2m to 1.1m.<sup>96</sup>

M&S was granted a coat of arms in 1968, featuring the ladder of Jacob. I suggest that the aspiration represented by the ladder belongs not just to the Marks and Sieff families who developed M&S, but also to their customers. That company did not just wax fat on a burgeoning middle class, provided reasonably-priced manufactured goods and clothes which markedly improved the quality of the lives of millions of people.

## Solomon

The achievement of all the businesses I have discussed was not just to have spotted gaps in the market; nor was it merely to have employed ruthlessness and ingeniousness to disrupt and rationalise their respective markets. Rather, as in Hollywood, these Anglo-Jewish companies went beyond increasing turnover and profit, to recognising and encouraging the aspirations of the general public. They helped to change society as much as they benefited from the changes taking place; indeed, it is hard to envision the rapid shift to consumerism in the post-war period having happened without decades of familiarity with Lyons and M&S preceding them.

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***Anglo-Jewish companies went beyond increasing turnover and profit, to recognising and encouraging the aspirations of the general public.***

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By acts as simple as displaying twentieth century America in cinemas, by selling dignified clothing and a good meal 'out' at affordable levels, the collective achievement of these companies was to raise the aspirations of the British public and partly to have fulfilled them. And it is no accident that the willingness to sell 'up' rather than 'down' was so largely an innovation of Jews. Unafraid of disrupting social mores and separate from established trade traditions, the men behind the concerns were unbound by stifling convention and ignorant of the stultifying class prejudices possessed by much of the competition; Deutsch, Marks, Moss etc. all applied a creativity to their commercial fields, an openness to the best foreign influences and such brazen confidence in expansion and new ventures, that it is hard to envision anyone else doing what they did.

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## Endnotes

1. The following discussion is not limited to privately-owned businesses: several of the companies examined were still controlled by their Jewish founders after flotation.
2. P. Gabler, *An Empire of their Own - How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (Crown, 1988), 59
3. *United States v. Motion Picture Patents Co.*, 225 F. 800 (E.D.Pa. 1915)
4. Gabler, 132; see also 238
5. *Ibid.*, 240
6. *Ibid.*, caption to photograph after 280
7. *Ibid.*, 80
8. *Ibid.*, 28
9. Vivian Hugh Smith of Morgan Grenfell, describing members of M. Samuel & Co. in 1925, quoted in D. Kynaston, *The City of London: Volume III Illusions of Gold 1914-1945* (Pimlico, 1999), 337
10. Gabler, 5
11. See H. Pollins, *Economic History of the Jews in England* (Littman, 1982): Pollins argues that Jewish innovation has been even rarer than I believe.
12. See Pollins, 178, on information from H.C. Franks, grandson of one of the founders.
13. Kynaston, 338
14. B. Weinreb and C. Hibbert (eds), *The London Encyclopaedia* (First edition revised) (Macmillan 1983), 544
15. W. Tute, *The Grey Top Hat: The Story of Moss Bros of Covent Garden* (Cassell, 1961), 13
16. Pollins, 106
17. Use of 'Moss Bros.' may predate the 1914 registration of the company at Companies House.
18. Pollins, 173
19. Tute, 63
20. *Ibid.*, 1
21. *Ibid.*, 58
22. *Ibid.*, 81
23. *All At Sea*, (1934), 31
24. Tute, 39
25. See ACC/4415/01/017 and /018, London Metropolitan Archives, which contain copies of a short history of the family written by Asher Gluckstein.
26. Crown Street is now buried beneath Charing Cross Road; however, it is portrayed in Hogarth's *Morning*, one of his series on *The Four Times of the Day* (1736).
27. P. Bird, *The First Food Empire: A History of J. Lyons & Co* (Phillimore 2000), 5 and Appendix 12
28. *Ibid.*, 6-11
29. Samuel Gluckstein's daughter Helena married Barnett Salmon in 1863
30. Bird, 6
31. *Ibid.*, 7
32. *Ibid.*, 11
33. The plaintiff was, predictably perhaps, someone called Nathan Kershenboim of Glasgow. See Bird, 7
34. E.g. *Gluckstein v Barnes* [1900] AC 240; *Kirshenboim v Salmon and Gluckstein* [1898] 2 QB 19; *re Olympia Limited* [1898] 2 Ch. 153 CA ICLR Chancery Division
35. Bird, 14
36. *Ibid.*, 21
37. A. Clayton, *London's Coffee Houses: A Stimulating Story* (Historical Publications, 2003), 136
38. *Ibid.*
39. George Sims in the Daily Mail, 5 October 1905, quoted in Clayton, 135
40. Clayton, 137
41. Clayton, 42
42. Bird, 39
43. *Ibid.*, 114
44. Clayton, 136
45. Lady Angela Forbes, *Daily Mail*, 5 October 1921
46. Bird, 63
47. *Ibid.*, 41
48. *Ibid.*, 41
49. *The Jewish Chronicle*, 7 October 1904; Clayton, 137
50. Bird, 58
51. *Ibid.*, 51
52. *Ibid.*, 50
53. For a sense of the outlandishness and excitement of the early British film industry, read Evelyn Waugh's short story *Excursion in Reality*, contained in the collection *Work Suspended* (1943), published by Penguin.
54. Julian Leathart quoted in A. Eyles, *Odeon Cinemas: Oscar Deutsch Entertains Our Nation*, (BFI Publishing, 2002), 49
55. <http://cinematreaasures.org/theater/15742/>; Eyles, 89, 16
56. Internet Movie Database; Pollins, 204; Allmovie.com
57. Eyles, 70
58. *Ibid.*, 21, 31
59. J. Glancey, *The mogul's monuments*, *The Guardian*, 18 May 2002
60. Eyles, 31
61. The Camberwell Odeon (1939) was the largest Odeon of them all, with a capacity of 2,470: Eyles, 251
62. R. Blythe, *The Age of Illusion: England in the Twenties and Thirties, 1919-1940* (London 1963)
63. Eyles, 238
64. Inner London defined as the area of the now-defunct LCC; Greater London as defined by the London Government Act 1963: Weinreb and Hibbert, 632
65. Robert Bullivant, an architect who worked on several Odeon cinemas in 1938 and 1939, quoted in Eyles, 206
66. Colin Hines and Keith Hitchen, *Art Deco London* (Park House Press, 2003), p44; Weinreb and Hibbert, 96
67. Hines and Hitchen, 36
68. Hines and Hitchen, 42
69. Now called "Ideal House"
70. Hines and Hitchen, 37
71. C. Benton, T. Benton and G. Wood, editors, *Art Deco 1910-1939* (Bullfinch, 2003), 257
72. N. Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in Britain* (Cambridge, 1937), 12
73. Lyons sold ice-cream to Odeon to even-out seasonal sales.
74. Eyles, 71
75. *Ibid.*, 211
76. Glancey
77. The Times, 3 September 1937
78. Benton, Benton and Wood, 258
79. Eyles, 247-248
80. Born 1859 at Slonim in White Russia (now Belarus). A. Briggs, *Marks and Spencer 1884-1984* (London, 1984), 17
81. Briggs, 18
82. *Ibid.*, 35
83. Isaac Dewhurst, a non-Jewish Leeds wholesaler, may have suggested this tactic to Marks; Dewhurst lent money to Marks in 1884; Tom Spencer was Dewhurst's bookkeeper before entering into partnership with Marks: Briggs, 20-22
84. Briggs, 20
85. The magistrate was Claud Mullins: Briggs, 85
86. Briggs, 35
87. *Ibid.*, 37
88. *Ibid.*, 33
89. *Ibid.*, 35
90. C. Ross, *Twenties London: a City in the Jazz Age* (Philip Wilson, 2003)
91. Ross, 44; Kynaston, 203
92. Briggs, 37-43
93. H. Clout, (ed), *The Times History of London* (Times Books, 1999)
94. Briggs, 43
95. H. Pasmardjian in *The Department Store-Its Origin, Evolution & Economics* (1954), quoted in Briggs, 35
96. Briggs, 43

## Letter to the Editor

Sir,

In the inaugural edition of *Degel*, the Editor laid out his stall and that of this excellent new publication with a lucid description of the ideological stance of the periodical. Each group within the Jewish People, he claimed, was entitled to fly its particular banner, as long as it remained an 'authentic approach within the Jewish Tradition'. He went on to claim that Alei Tzion and therefore, presumably, *Degel* represents the banner of Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism.

This contributor feels there is too little specificity in the latter claim. Since 1948 virtually no group or leading figure has continued in the assertion that modern Zionism was a historic mistake let alone a national het. Whether as an historical accommodation like the Roman Catholic Church to Copernicus, or a halakhic acquiescence as in the dropping of opposition to women voting in Israeli elections, virtually every movement in the so-called 'Torah Camp', from Agudat Yisrael to Belz, to Shas, has mellowed its language, muted its criticism, and even adopted many of the traditional positions of established Zionist groups – Erets Yisrael Hashelema, teaching Torah in Ivrit. In short they all recognise the centrality, not to say indispensability of Israel in modern Jewish life throughout the world.

Indeed, all the 'anti-Zionist' groups have participated in

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***Since 1948 virtually no group or leading figure has continued in the assertion that modern Zionism was a historic mistake.***

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the Knesset and even in Government. Surely legitimisation can go no further than being an MK or a Government minister! After the Merkaz HaRav attack the *Yated Ne'eman*, no less, the arch proponent of R. Schach's ideology headed its editorial with the large headline 'We are all Mercaz HaRav'. Surely, I thought, Mashiah must come now; sadly, not quite yet. My point, however, is that there is little value in today's world in laying exclusive claim to the territory of Religious Zionism. Today all Torah Jews are Zionists, with a small or large 'Z'.

The issue of Modern Orthodoxy, however, is still the subject of a very lively debate. There are two powerful constituencies in the USA, both self-confident, almost triumphalist, which both claim to represent the heart of American Torah Jewry. They rarely debate. Rather, they circle the ideological boxing ring seeking an opportunity to win a point or two, or perhaps to land a knock-out blow. 'Acknowledge the legitimacy of others' approach whilst affirming the value of ours...' This statement does not chime with reality. In the other headquarters of Jewish life today, in Israel, the situation is, if anything, even less tolerant than in America. Self-definition by school attended, yeshiva learnt in, army service, shehuna lived in, style of kisui rosh for women, the omnipresent differentiation of kippa style, show us in Israel today, a spectrum of observance, ideology and weltanschauung, where a fanatic is anyone more religious than I, and little acceptance, let alone a hekhsher, is offered, even to those who differ only in absolute trivialities.

Perhaps a more fruitful line in inquiry might be to measure the term 'Modern Orthodoxy' against some real standards; positions occupied by the giants of our Tradition who yet grappled with contemporary demons and were forced in their time to take up positions on one

or other side of the ideological divide. Who better than the Rambam himself? The question is not whether he was, or would have been ready to be described as Modern Orthodox, but rather to examine a number of the issues with which he grappled; the problems which he and his contemporaries encountered and in particular (for this is a, if not the, litmus test of a movement or leader) to examine how he interacted with the outside world.

Many have written about the Rambam, not just as a halakhist or a philosopher but as a leader of his generation, as engaged with his modernity as were R. AY Kook, R. SR Hirsch, R. JB Soloveitchik, or R. YY Weinberg. None was afraid of the real world, none too timid to take a position. Each of them sensed the short-term and long-term trends in contemporary society, both Jewish and general. Did the Rambam not take a position of courageous leadership with regard to the Karaite community, which he found in his adopted home of Egypt, to draw them near educationally and spiritually, while firmly rejecting both their theology and halakha? Did he not brave those whom he saw as blinkered literalists on the issue of aggada, both in Hazal and even Tanakh, in order to release a more profound understanding of Midrash? Was he not ready to advance a minority position on ta'amei hamitsvot, advocating a more rational, and therefore more risky approach to observance? Did he not condemn virtually all contemporary Rabbinic leaders, who had in his view forfeited their place in the World to Come by making the Torah into a spade or a crown, that is, by taking a salary? In this last case, he may have won the argument, but he lost the vote (see the Kesef Mishneh on Rambam, Hilkhos Talmud Torah), and nevertheless remained unfazed.

A real Modern Orthodox figure would lead passionately but with care. Who has offered remedies to heal a Jewish People amongst whom only a minority observe mitsvot, by offering a contemporary version of the Thirteen Principles of Faith or Albo's Ikkarim in order to stake out a minimum position on 'Who is a Jew?' and 'What is Judaism?'. Who is ready, in R. Reuven Bulka's apocalyptic language, to deal with the 'coming cataclysm' of intermarriage, progressive, antinomian and anti-halakhic stances? Viewed against this backdrop the Rambam is a truly gigantic figure. We, by contrast, sadly pretend that our superficial ritual compromises and our feeble attempts to maintain the illusion of a united community through 'accords' represents a real paradigm of Jewish life, which can retain the loyalty of the Torah observant whilst issuing a clarion call to those who are, in R. Kook's unforgettable words

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***A real Modern Orthodox figure would lead passionately but with care.***

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'not yet observant'. Truly 'miMoshe ad Moshe, lo kam keMoshe'!

Which personality or movement today is ready to lead, to stake out positions, to show how the eternal verities of Torah can be sustained alongside the realities of contemporary society? Who is ready to critique a society where liberal standards have reflected, if not caused, the collapse of the family as a basic institution? Who is ready to slay the dragon of pluralism, a zeitgeist that has stretched tolerance far beyond its original limits and has spawned a backlash in some cultures in the form of a fundamentalism which seeks to delegitimise, not to say exterminate, any proponent of ideas different to its own? Our twice-orphaned Jewish world is truly in need of courageous Modern Orthodox leadership, but where is the figure of whom future generations will say, 'Mi... ad ... la kam ke...'

— BOBBY HILL



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