

# DEGEL

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

פסח תשע"א  
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VOLUME 3 ISSUE 2





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# חג כשר ושמח

RABBI DANIEL AND NA'AMAH ROSELAAR

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# Message from the Rav

The details of the rituals for the Lel HaSeder are complex and manifold but Rabban Gamliel's ruling – that one who omits to speak about the Korban Pesah, Matsa and Marror has not fulfilled his obligation – is well known.



There is debate amongst the Rishonim regarding which mitsva has not been fulfilled, whether that of sippur (recounting the story of the Exodus) or the mitsvot of Pesah, Matsa and Marror respectively. But in any event, it is very clear that these are key aspects of the celebration of freedom that is the theme of Pesah.

Why are Pesah, Matsa and Marror so central to the observance of Lel HaSeder? Superficially, one could suggest that it is because they were consumed in Egypt at the time of the Exodus and that they remind us of the miracle, the haste of Yetsiat Mitsrayim and the bitterness of the servitude.

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*We see ourselves as a community that shares in each other's celebrations and sadnesses and as a Kehilla with shared values and aspirations.*

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Rav Soloveitchik suggested that they symbolise more than that. He noted that when slaves are freed from the oppression and suffering that they have endured, they commonly have difficulty adjusting to normal life. They

may experience three particular difficulties: a reluctance to recall the past because such recollections are too painful for them; an obsession with wealth induced by the poverty that they have endured means that the acquisition of wealth becomes a focus of their existence; a self-centeredness brought on by the privations of their experiences, to the extent that they may become obsessed with personal self-preservation.

The symbolism of the Pesah, Matsa and Marror helps to address these issues. The Marror forces them to confront the past – they cannot deny it or hide from it and are compelled to live with the memory of their experiences. The Matsa – which is known as the bread of affliction as well as the bread of freedom – counters the second difficulty by reminding them that wealth and freedom need not be synonymous and that they can enjoy freedom without being obsessed by the pursuit of material riches. The Pesah sacrifice addresses the third concern, the preservation of self at the expense of others; because one of the unique aspects of the Korban Pesah is that the Torah demands that it be eaten in a group of people, which suggests a sense of community and the sharing of assets and values.

This aspect of the Korban Pesah – the requirement that it be consumed as part of a habura – is a fine image of the aspirations of Kehillat Alei Tzion. We do not see ourselves as individuals, or even as a group of people that unite solely for the purposes of prayer only to disband immediately afterwards. Rather we see ourselves as a community that shares in each other's celebrations and sadnesses and as a Kehilla with shared values and aspirations.

I wish the all of Kehillat Alei Tzion, and the wider readership of *Degeg*, Hag kasher vesame'ah.

RABBI DANIEL ROSELAAR

# DEGEL

## CONTENTS

|   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| <i>Editor</i><br>Ben Elton  | 6  | Notes from the editor<br>BEN ELTON   |
| <i>Design</i><br>David Bloxham, with<br>thanks to Tammy<br>Youngerwood  | 7  | The silent priest<br>DANIEL YOUNGERWOOD  |
| <i>Sub editors</i><br>Joshua Freedman,<br>Jemma Jacobs, Edward<br>Zinkin  | 18 | Rashi and the interaction between twelfth century Jewish and Christian Bible<br>commentary<br>ZAK JEFFAY                                 |
| Front cover illustration<br>Yolanda Rosalki   | 27 | Tempered Enthusiasm: requirements for religious worship<br>DORON LUDER   |
| <i>Yolanda Rosalki is an<br/>artist and illustrator, for<br/>more information on<br/>how her designs can<br/>enhance your simha, or<br/>if you wish to purchase<br/>the original of the front<br/>cover artwork, email:<br/>yolros@googlemail.com</i> | 32 | Tikkun Olam: a concept in need of repair<br>JONATHAN NEUMANN   |
|   | 44 | Israel's decadence, the destruction of the Temple and lessons for today<br>R. YAAKOV ETTLINGER, translated and edited by JOSHUA FREEDMAN |
|   | 49 | Moses Mendelssohn's demystified Judaism and Max Weber's disenchanted<br>world<br>GABRIELLE NEJAD STERN                                   |
|   | 60 | The early history of the Hambro Synagogue of London, 1704 – 1750<br>RABBI DAVID KATANKA  |

## *Notes from the editor*

This sixth issue of *Degel* includes many aspects I have come to relish as editor. You are likely to see most the contributors to this edition at tefilla on a Shabbat or a weekday. *Degel* therefore remains indigenous to Alei Tzion, although guests also appear and will always be welcome.

I am delighted to present a new contribution from Daniel Youngerwood, who has provided another beautiful analysis of a problem in Biblical interpretation, using approaches developed by Modern Orthodox scholars at the heart of the religious-intellectual life of the State of Israel. Zak Jeffay looks at our leading commentator, Rashi, and shows how interaction between Jewish and wider thought is nothing new, and in particular that Rashi's influence went far beyond his own community.

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch began his great work *Horeb* with the statement 'the flower of knowledge is life', in other words, study cannot be divorced from day to day existence, rather it must enhance a Jew's religious experience. That was one reason why R. Hirsch founded his famous Torah journal, *Jeschurun*. Among his astonishing achievements is that he managed to publish *Jeschurun* monthly for 16 years, before passing on the editorship. *Degel* cannot compete on that score, but in the same religious spirit as R. Hirsch, Doron Luder brings the sensibilities of a Ben Torah and a student of philosophy to what is as much a piece of creative theology as it is an objective analysis.

*Degel* has often been the venue for slaughtering sacred cows, and commonly held views about hashgaha pratit and the question of whether we all have equal capacity for Torah greatness have come under critical scrutiny. In this issue, Jonathan Neumann turns his attention to the

popular concept of Tikkun Olam and challenges what has become a new orthodoxy, even in parts of Orthodoxy.

Many of our readers will be familiar with R. Jacob Ettlinger as the teacher of Rabbis S.R. Hirsch and Esriel Hildeshiemer, a father of Modern Orthodoxy, an opponent of Reform and as the author of the *Arukh LaNer* and the *Binyan Tsion*. Joshua Freedman gives us an opportunity to read from the less well known part of his literary output, his sermons, in which he set out a vision for Judaism that inspired and heartened the traditional Jews of Western Europe.

R. Ettlinger was struggling with the impact of modernity on Jewish life, an issue with which all Jewish groups, on every part of the religious spectrum, continue to wrestle. Gabrielle Nejad Stern argues that the condition of modernity, identified, analysed and lamented by Max Weber was partly a consequence of the philosophy of Moses Mendelssohn, whose attempts to equip Judaism for the world of the Enlightenment and Emancipation may have begun the process that stripped it of meaning.

Rabbi David Katanka closes this issue with a stimulating account of the early years of the Hambro Synagogue, which is not only fascinating in its own right, but is also alive with contemporary resonances. There is no missing R. Katanka's implication that Alei Tzion should rename itself 'The New Hambro Synagogue', but that is not a campaign *Degel* intends to take up!

Thanks, as ever, go to the authors, editorial team and sponsors, and the Rav, Board and Kehilla for their continued support. Hag kasher vesame'ah.

- BEN ELTON

# The silent priest

DANIEL YOUNGERWOOD

The story of the Golden Calf is one of the best known episodes described in the Torah. The people, having recently left Egypt and received the Torah, build a Golden Calf, to the great anger of God. The implications of this action are far reaching. God tells Moshe:<sup>1</sup>

וְעַתָּה לֵךְ נַחֵם אֶת הָעָם אֲלֵי אֲשֶׁר-דִּבַּרְתִּי לְךָ הִנֵּה מֵלֶאכֶי לְךָ לְפָנֶיךָ וּבְיוֹם פְּקֻדֵי וּפְקֻדָתִי עֲלֵהֶם חֲטָאתָם

*Therefore, go, lead the people as I have spoken to you; behold My angel will go before you and on the day I will punish, I will punish their sin upon them.*

Rashi on this verse interprets the obscure last phrase as follows:

עַתָּה שְׁמַעְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ מִלְּכֻלֹתָם יַחַד וְתַמִּיד תַּמִּיד כְּשֶׁאֶפְקֹד עֲלֵיהֶם עֲוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם וּפְקֻדָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם מֵעַט מִן הָעוֹן הַזֶּה עִם שֶׂאֵר הָעֲוֹנוֹת וְאִין פּוֹרְעֵנוֹת בָּאָה עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁאִין בָּהּ קִצַּת מִפְּרַעוֹן עוֹן הָעֵגֶל

*Now that I have listened to you and will not destroy all the people together, whenever I will punish them for their sins, I will also include a little of this sin [of the Golden Calf] together with the rest of their sins; all punishments that Israel suffers contain a little retribution from the sin of the Calf.*

The Golden Calf is a sin for which we literally receive punishment to this day.<sup>2</sup> Given the gravity of this sin, it is hard to understand how the chief architect of the calf – Aharon – appears to be absolved of guilt. The narrative describes how Aharon is the one who chooses to use gold to answer the requests of the people and is the one who melts the gold down and creates the calf.<sup>3</sup> It is Aharon who builds an altar next to the calf and calls for a festival to God the next day. Despite all of this, there appears to be no Divine response to Aharon's sins apart from a brief mention of God's anger at Aharon decades later in Sefer Devarim.<sup>4</sup> Moshe, who orders the slaughter of thousands



of Israelites, apparently lets Aharon off the hook entirely. How can it be that the man responsible for bringing the Golden Calf to Israel is not punished at all?

This question becomes even greater if we compare Aharon's role in the Golden Calf to his role later on in the story at Mei Meriva.<sup>5</sup> In this famous episode, Moshe strikes a rock instead of talking to it, and both he and Aharon are punished severely by being barred entry to the Land of Israel.<sup>6</sup> However difficult it is to understand why Moshe was punished, this problem is magnified considerably when applied to Aharon who appears to play no role whatsoever in the story and yet dies shortly after as a result. This discrepancy appears to be highly unjust.

In this article, I will attempt to explain this apparent inconsistency. In so doing, I will try to show that Aharon was indeed punished greatly for his role in the Golden Calf episode and that Aharon never truly recovered from that moment onwards. I will also try to tie this in to

Aharon's role at Mei Meriva and argue that the two episodes are intrinsically linked.

## Understanding Aharon

Our question is based on the assumption that Aharon sinned and it is the absence of punishment that is puzzling. The simplest way to answer this question is that given by many of the classic commentaries – namely, Aharon did not sin at all! The Hizkuni says this explicitly:<sup>7</sup>

*According to the peshat, God forbid that Aharon performed Avoda Zarah: He was sanctified to God and a prophet to Israel, and many mitsvot were given through him with Moshe his brother. If he was guilty of Avoda Zarah, why did Moshe not kill him?<sup>8</sup> How could it be that afterwards, [Aharon] would atone for Israel – he and his children forever. In addition, we find no mention of any blemish apart from Mei Meriva.*

As understood here, the absence of punishment of Aharon is taken as evidence of absence of guilt.

This point is explained in more detail by the Ibn Ezra:<sup>9</sup>

ועתה אחל לפרש דרך קצרה קצת הסוד. חלילה חלילה שעשה אהרן ע"ג. גם ישראל בקשו ע"ג, רק חשבו, שמת משה שהסיעם מים סוף, כאשר פירשתי. כי ראו שהמן אינו יורד בהר סיני, ומשה התעכב שם ארבעים יום. ואין כח באדם לחיות זה הזמן בלא מאכל, כי הוא לא אמר להם מתי ירד. גם הוא לא ידע, כי השם אמר לו, עלה אלי ההרה, ושב שם עד שאותן לך לוחות הברית

והנה לכבוד השם נעשה, על כן בנה אהרן מזבח לפניו, והכריזו שיוזבחו מחר לכבוד השם. וכן עשו כאשר צום. וזו תשובת אהרן, כי נקהלו עליו, וכמו שהודעתך כי כל קהלה ואחריה על היא גנאי, ואם אחריה אל היא לשבח, כמו ויקהלו אל המלך שלמה (מ"א ח, ב). וזהו אתה ידעת את העם כי ברע הוא (שמות לב, כב), כי אני לא עשיתי רע להם, כי לא בקשו רק אשר ילך לפניהם, ולכבוד השם עשיתי. רק בעבור שישראל היו מעורבים עם ערב רב, וזהו כי ברע הוא ולא אמר רע הוא. וחשבו מעטים מישראל שהיתה ע"ג, והביאו זבחים והשתחוו לו ואמרו אלה אלהיך ישראל.

ואל תתמה בעבור שהתאנף השם באהרן, כי זה בעבור שהיה הוא הסבה. כי הנה נענש עם משה אחיו על דבר מי מריבה ולא חטאו בזדון. וכתוב עליהם לא האמנתם בי (במד' כ, יב), מריתם (שם כז, יד), מעלתם (דבר' לב, נא).

*I will now briefly explain the issue. God forbid that Aharon was guilty of idol worship. Even the people of Israel did not plan on idol worship. However, they thought that Moshe had died...because the Manna had not descended on Har Sinai and Moshe had already been there for forty days, and nobody can survive that time without food, and he did not say how long he would be. Indeed, he did not know how long he would be, since God told him, 'Come up the mountain to me and stay there until I give you the Lulav'.*

*Furthermore, [the Calf] was built for the honour of God, therefore Aharon built an altar before it and announced that they would offer sacrifices to the honour of God; and they did what he commanded of them. This is what is meant in the answer of Aharon [that he gave to Moshe when challenged] – that the people gathered over him [i.e. in an intimidating manner]...and this is what is meant [also in his reply to Moshe] by 'and you know that there is wickedness in this people' (Shemot 32:22) i.e. I did not do any harm to them because they only asked for something to go before them. I made this in honour of God. However, since the Erev Rav [Egyptians who joined the Jewish people during the Exodus] were mixed into the nation, Aharon said that there was a wickedness IN them; he did not say the Jewish people ARE wicked. However, some of the people thought that the Calf was an idol and brought sacrifices and bowed to it and proclaimed, 'This is your god Israel'.*

*And do not ask why God was angry at Aharon (Devarim 9:20) [and think this implies God was angry with Aharon on account of the golden calf] because Aharon was the cause of this [sin]. Aharon was punished with Moshe at Mei Meriva where there was no intentional sin, and nevertheless, the Torah says of them, 'you had no faith in Me', 'you rebelled against me', 'you betrayed me'.*

The Ibn Ezra's explanation seems to be the one most widely known. Nobody knew how long Moshe was going to be absent for and the fact he was alone on a mountain without food was evidence enough that he was dead. The people craved leadership and requested a physical form to lead them through the wilderness, much like the cloud and pillar of fire. As a result of the intervention of certain foreign elements in the Jewish camp, this was turned into a classic form of idol worship. However, it is clear from Aharon's response to Moshe that Aharon intended to 'replace' not God, but Moshe, with the Calf, which was done in honour of God. The fact that this was hijacked in no way makes Aharon guilty.

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*The argument that Aharon was essentially guiltless is reinforced by a meticulous analysis described by Rav Menachem Leibtag.*

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The only caveat to this statement is a pasuk in Devarim which says that God was angry at Aharon, but this is not considered as being a statement of sin or guilt. The Ibn

Ezra makes the comparison to Mei Meriva where God employs several phrases condemning Moshe and Aharon which are far more severe than that used in the Golden Calf episode, and asserts that these phrases are used in criticising an unintentional sin. The implication is that, if in an unintentional sin, Aharon is condemned in several severe terms, then if only one general phrase is used, the action described is not considered even to be an unintentional sin.

The argument that Aharon was essentially guiltless is reinforced by a meticulous analysis described by Rav Menachem Leibtag.<sup>10</sup> He argues that God had promised that He would appoint a messenger to walk in front of the people to lead them (namely Moshe) earlier on at the original covenant at Sinai:<sup>11</sup>

הִנֵּה אֲנִי שֹׁלֵחַ מַלְאָךְ לְפָנֶיךָ לְשַׁמְרֶךָ בְּדַרְךְ וְלְהַבִּיאֲךָ אֶל-  
הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הִכַּנְתִּי.

כִּי-יֵלֶךְ מַלְאָכִי לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִבִּיאֲךָ אֶל-הָאָמְרִי וְהַחֲתִי וְהַפְרָאִי  
וְהַכְנַעְנִי הַחַי וְהַיּוֹסִי וְהַכְחֲדִיתִי

*Behold I am sending a messenger before you to lead you on the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.*

*For when My messenger shall go before you and bring you to the Emori...*

When Moshe disappeared, the people asked for a replacement for the messenger using the same wording that God uses:<sup>12</sup>

וַיִּרְאוּ הָעָם כִּי-בִשְׁשׁ מִשָּׁה לְרֹדֶת מִן-הָהָר וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל-  
אֶהְרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּם עֲשֵׂה-לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ  
כִּי-זֶה מִשָּׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדָעֵנוּ מָה-  
הָיָה לוֹ.

*And the people saw that Moshe was delayed from descending from the mountain; and they descended on Aharon and said to him, 'Arise and make for us a leader who will go before us, for Moshe the man who brought us from Egypt - we do not know what has happened to him'.*

Furthermore, Rav Leibtag points out that after God promises the people a messenger to lead the people on their way, there is a ceremony in which the people wake up early and offer sacrifices which compares linguistically to the Golden Calf

| Shemot 24,4-5  | Shemot 32,5-6   |
|--|---|
| וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל-דִּבְרֵי הַ<br>וַיִּשְׁכַּח בַּבֹּקֶר וַיָּבִין מִזְבֵּחַ<br>תַּחַת הָהָר וּשְׁתֵּי עֶשְׂרֵה<br>מִצֵּבָה לְשֵׁנִים עֹשֶׂר שְׁבֻטֵי<br>יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-נְעָרֵי בְנֵי<br>יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּזְבְּחוּ<br>זָבָחִים שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה. | וַיִּרְא אֶהְרֹן וַיָּבִין מִזְבֵּחַ לְפָנָיו<br>וַיִּקְרָא אֶהְרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר חַג<br>לַיהוָה מִחֹר וַיִּשְׁכִּימוּ<br>מִמַּחֲרָת וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּגְשׁוּ<br>שְׁלָמִים וַיִּשָּׁב הָעָם לְאֹכַל<br>וְשֵׁתוֹ וַיִּקְמוּ לְצַחֵק. |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>And Moshe wrote down all the words of God. And he awoke early in the morning and built an altar under the mountain and twelve stones corresponding to twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent the youths of Israel and they served Olot and Shlamim to God - cows.</i> | <i>And Aharon saw and built an altar before it [the calf], and Aharon called for a festival to God the next day. And they awoke early the next day, and offered Olot and brought Shlamim; and the people sat to eat and drink and they arose to rejoice.</i> |
|--|--|

In addition, Rav Leibtag points out other parallels. In both stories, the altar is built in front of a symbol – namely the 12 stones or the Golden Calf. In both stories, the people eat and drink (see Shemot 24:11).

As for why Aharon chose a Golden Calf to represent the messenger of God, Rav Leibtag brings a fascinating insight. At the covenant of Sinai, the Torah describes how the Jewish people looked up and 'saw God' and that under His feet was a sapphire structure (see Shemot 24:10).

וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לְבַנֵּת הַסַּפִּיר  
וַכְּעֵצִים הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר.

*And they looked at the God of Israel, and under His feet was like a shining sapphire.*

He contrasts this with the famous vision Yehezkel has at the beginning of his Sefer. In this famous vision, Yehezkel describes a vision of God in which calves' feet appear:<sup>13</sup>

וַרְגְלֵיהֶם רַגְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַף רַגְלֵיהֶם כְּכַף רַגְלֵי עֵגֶל

*And their legs were straight and their feet were like those of a calf.*

In addition, Yehezkel describes seeing a sapphire structure:<sup>14</sup>

וַיִּמְעַל לְרִקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל-רֹאשָׁם כְּמֵרָאֵה אֶבֶן-סַפִּיר

*And above the firmament which was over their heads was the appearance of sapphire.*

The implication is that the Jewish people at Sinai saw the feet of the calf as the foundation of God's chariot. Aharon wanted to build the calf as a representation of the messenger carrying God's Presence before the people.

Finally, Rav Leibtag makes the observation that God only responds on the second day of their worship with the calf, when the people have already offered their sacrifices and sat to eat and drink. This would imply that up until this moment, the people's actions were without fault. God only acts after the people turn the ceremony into one of

idol worship (indicated by the phrase in Shemot 32:6 – that the people got up to rejoice).

### *The Jewish people at Sinai saw the feet of the calf as the foundation of God's chariot.*

Taken together, the picture described is one of a religious ceremony deeply connected to a tradition started at Sinai which is hijacked by a small number of people in the camp.<sup>15</sup> It therefore follows that Aharon did nothing wrong. Everything he did made sense in light of the events at Sinai. This provides one answer to our original question, namely, why Aharon is not punished. The simplest answer would be that Aharon did nothing wrong!

However, even though this understanding of the narrative is tight, there remains the difficulty of Devarim 9:20:

וּבְאַהֲרֹן הַתְּאֵנִי הַמָּאֵד לְהַשְׁמִידוֹ וְאַתְּפִלֵּל גַּם בְּעַד אֶהָרֹן בְּעַת הַהוּא.

*And God was very angry at Aharon [and wanted] to destroy him; and I also prayed for Aharon at that time.*

How can it be that God is described as 'very' angry and wants to 'destroy' Aharon if Aharon was innocent of sin? The Ibn Ezra's response is to accept that while God was angry, this never extended to blaming Aharon for an actual sin. He accepts that Aharon was the 'reason' for the construction of the calf inasmuch as he designed and built it, but as we have seen, this was not intrinsically wrong. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the degree of God's anger does imply fault.

In addition, when we look at the wording of this pasuk, we can see an interesting parallel to God's decision to punish Moshe by barring him entry to the Land of Israel:<sup>16</sup>

גַּם בְּיַד הַתְּאֵנִי הַבְּגִלְלָתְכֶם לֵאמֹר גַּם אֶתֶּה לֹא תָבֹא שָׁם

*God was also angry at me on account of you saying, 'Also you will not enter there'.*

In using the same word, perhaps Moshe was hinting that both actions led to punishment.

Even though these challenges to the proposition that Aharon did not sin can no doubt be explained away, the difficulties are such that we should search for another answer to the question as to why Aharon was not punished.

### **Will both a Kohen and a prophet be slain in the Temple of the Lord?**

So far, we have presented the opinion that Aharon's actions were without fault and intrinsically acceptable. Needless to say, this is not the consensus. The Gemara presents a different explanation for Aharon's role that certainly implies fault:<sup>17</sup>

וירא אהרן ויבן מזבח לפניו מה ראה א"ר בנימין בר יפת א"ר אלעזר ראה חור שזבוח לפניו אמר אי לא שמענא להו השתא עבדו לי כדעבדו בחור ומיקיים בי אם יהרג במקדש ה' כהן ונביא ולא הויה להו תקנתא לעולם מוטב דליעבדו לעגל אפשר הויה להו תקנתא בתשובה

*'And Aharon saw and he built an altar before it'. What did he see? Rabbi Binyamin bar Yefet said in the name of Rabbi Elazar, 'What did he see? He saw Hur slaughtered before him. Aharon said, "If I do not listen to them, then they will do to me what they did to Hur and fulfil the pasuk [Eikha 2] – 'will both a Kohen and a prophet be slain in the Temple of the Lord?' [If they do], it can never be put right. It is better that I will make them a calf – at least they can fix this through Teshuva".'*

In this Midrash, we learn that Hur, son of Miriam, has been murdered. According to another Midrash, Hur understood that the people wanted to build an idol.<sup>18</sup> Hur refused to accede to this request and was duly killed by the mob. Aharon witnesses this and realises that he would share the same fate as Hur. Aharon makes the calculation that there are two bad options before him. Either he accedes to their request which leads to Avoda Zara, or he sacrifices himself. If he allows himself to be killed, then the people will be guilty of murder of Aharon who was both a priest and a prophet.<sup>19</sup> This murder would have made the people of Israel impossible to forgive, unlike the Avoda Zara which could have been forgiven.

What is the source of this idea?<sup>20</sup>

When Moshe ascends Sinai for the first time, he instructs the people:<sup>21</sup>

וְאֶל-הַזְקֵנִים אָמַר שְׁבוּ-לָנוּ בְּזָה עַד אֲשֶׁר-נָשׁוּב אֲלֵיכֶם וְהָיָה אֲהָרֹן וְחֹר וְעִמְקֶם מִי-בְּעַל דְּבָרִים יִגֶּשׁ אֲלֵהֶם

*And to the elders [Moshe] said, Stay here until we will return to you, and behold, Aharon and Hur will be with you; whoever needs counsel should draw near to them.*

Hur was an important character after leaving Egypt. He and Aharon supported Moshe's arms during the war against Amalek, and as we can see, Hur and Aharon were meant to lead the people in Moshe's absence. However, Hur disappears from the narrative. Given that Aharon

and Hur were meant to be in charge at the time of the episode of the Golden Calf, it is surprising that only Aharon is approached and that only he is mentioned. Hazal – as is their style when gaps in narratives present themselves – deduced that Hur had been killed.

In addition, in the Golden Calf narrative, the following phrase is employed:<sup>22</sup>

וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל-אַהֲרֹן

*And the people assembled on Aharon*

The people do not gather in an ordered manner but swarm over Aharon. The implication is that Aharon was facing a mob. As evidence, we see the same phrasing used to describe the rebellion of Korah:<sup>23</sup>

וַיִּקְהַל עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן

*And they assembled on Moshe and on Aharon*

The same phrase is used again later on:<sup>24</sup>

וַיְהִי בְהַקְהֵל הָעֵדָה עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן וַיִּפְּנוּ אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַהֲנִיחָה כְּסָהוּ הָעֲנָן וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד ה'

*And when the congregation assembled on Moshe and on Aharon, and they turned to the Ohel Moed and beheld the cloud covered it and the Glory of God appeared.*

In this last passage, which occurs after the death of Korah, the people assemble over Moshe and Aharon accusing them of killing their fellow Jews, to the extent that God has to protect Moshe and Aharon by bringing down the cloud.

We therefore see (as the Ibn Ezra mentions above) that the phraseology used implies menace. It is with these points in mind that Hazal deduced the murder of Hur and the dilemma of Aharon. As Aharon was both a prophet (evidenced by the fact that God communicates directly with him) and a priest, his murder would be unforgivable. There would be no way back for the Jewish people. However, Avoda Zara is forgivable.

## *Aharon found himself in a near-impossible situation in which he had to choose between causing murder or Avoda Zara*

According to this understanding, Aharon found himself in a near-impossible situation in which he had to choose between causing murder or Avoda Zara. The Netsiv has a different understanding as to the exact nature of Aharon's

'sin', but on one point he summarises beautifully the idea that Hazal were conveying. He describes how Aharon knew that he was doing something wrong, but he was prepared to sacrifice his own life for the greater good of the Jewish people.<sup>25</sup>

However, we are still left wondering when exactly Aharon was punished for his wrongdoing, and for this we must look at a highly controversial Rashi.

## Sins of the father

In Devarim 9:20, Moshe alludes to God's anger at Aharon for his role in the Golden Calf. Rashi on the pasuk explains (based on a Midrash in Vayikra Rabba 7:1)

ובאהרון התאנף ה' - לפי ששמע לכם

לה שמידו - זה כלוי בניים וכן הוא אומר (עמוס ב) ואשמיד פרוי ממעל

ואתפלל גם בעד אהרון - והועילה תפילתי לכפר מחצה ומתו שנים ונשאר השנים

*And God was angry at Aharon – because he listened to you*

*To destroy him – this is the killing of sons as it says [Amos 2] 'And I will destroy his fruit from above'*

*And I also prayed for Aharon – and my prayer helped to partially atone as two sons died and two survived*

This Rashi is staggering in its implications. In Vayikra 10, Aharon's oldest two sons, Nadav and Avihu, are killed for bringing 'strange fire' into the Mishkan. Rashi is telling us here that they were killed for the actions of their father earlier on. This presents many difficulties. Nadav and Avihu were killed for a sin they performed. How can it be argued that they died for what their father did? Not only does this present us with a contradiction in peshat, but if God can punish someone due to the actions of a predecessor we lose the whole concept of personal accountability. What is the point of Mitsvot if God can punish for somebody else's actions?

In addition, we have a pasuk that specifically counters Rashi's peshat:<sup>26</sup>

לֹא יוּמָתוּ אָבוֹת עַל-בְּנֵיהֶם, וּבְנֵיהֶם לֹא יוּמָתוּ עַל-אָבוֹת: אִישׁ בְּחַטָּאוֹ, יוּמָתוּ

*The fathers should not be put to death because of the sons, and the sons should not be put to death for the sins of the fathers. Each should die for his own sin.*

This leaves us with a greater difficulty! On the one hand, we are struggling to answer how Aharon evaded punishment for being involved in one of the greatest sins of all time (even if his role was one of the tragic hero). On

the other hand, the only answer Hazal do offer presents us with a major theological problem that overturns the Torah's own definition of just punishment!

In order to answer these questions, we will look at a stunningly creative Abarbanel.

## The Abarbanel's hiddush

The Abarbanel offers a solution that solves two problems at once – namely, why was Aharon apparently not punished for his role in the Golden Calf, and why was he punished for his trivial role at Mei Meriva.<sup>27</sup> He suggests that Aharon *was* punished for the Golden Calf by being refused entry to Israel. The story of Mei Meriva was a trivial sin but was used as a 'cover' for Aharon's real sin at the Golden Calf – as a means of dissociating Aharon from the sinners themselves. He applies the same reasoning to Moshe. Moshe was really refused entry to Israel for his role in the story of the spies and Mei Meriva was simply a cover.<sup>28</sup>

Although Aharon was not guilty of Avoda Zara, he still had an important if undesired part in the story. However, God promised that the punishment will be delayed:<sup>29</sup>

וַיְבִיֹם אֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרָא וַיִּקְרָא עֲלֵהֶם חַטָּאתָם

*And on the day I will visit, I will visit their sin upon them.*

God declared (as we have seen) that the punishment would be spread out over generations and, in Aharon's case, delayed by several decades. Mei Meriva was used as a disguise:<sup>30</sup>

*It often happens that a man with a beloved son who sins will delay punishment out of respect for him, but after that, for a small infraction, he will punish him disproportionately. If the father is asked why he acted so drastically, he will reply that he was not punished for the latter action but for earlier sins and that he delayed punishment until now. Similarly, Moshe and Aharon were not punished for Mei Meriva alone, but were really punished for what they did earlier. However, in order to cover up those deeds and to protect their honour, God associated their punishment with Mei Meriva.*

The Abarbanel is quick to point out precedents. For example, the elders who inappropriately looked at God in Parashat Mishpatim are punished much later on in the story of Taveira.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, the Abarbanel offers us an elegant solution to the problem posed in our introduction. Aharon played no real part at Mei Meriva. We now understand that his

punishment was really for his role at the Golden Calf which we had previously assumed had been overlooked.

We are now left with only one problem. How are we to understand Rashi? Rashi, based on a Midrash, and followed by other commentators, associates the deaths of Nadav and Avihu with punishment for Aharon's role at the Golden Calf.<sup>32</sup> We have two choices. We can either disagree with Rashi, or we can try to integrate it into our understanding of the story. As I will argue, Rashi's opinion offers a much deeper understanding into not only the Golden Calf story, but also what happened to Aharon's family, and ultimately why Moshe and Aharon were replaced with Yehoshua and Elazar.

## Consequence and Punishment

We have seen the difficulty in Rashi's opinion that Nadav and Avihu were killed by God as punishment for Aharon's role at the Golden Calf. This contradicts our basic sense of justice. However, we can perhaps solve this problem if we re-define our terms. Rather than seeing the deaths of Nadav and Avihu as *punishment*, we can see their deaths as a *consequence* of Aharon's action. This important distinction is very well explained by Rav Yaakov Meidan in his discussion of God's response to David and Batsheva.<sup>33</sup> He argues that David was punished by losing four babies before he is forgiven with the birth of Shlomo. The deaths of his grown sons, Amnon and Avshalom, were also a consequence of his actions. David could not rebuke Amnon for sexual improprieties with Tamar as he himself had slept with Batsheva – a married woman. Similarly, David could not rebuke Avshalom for murdering Amnon, as David himself had sent Uria to his death.

---

*Rather than seeing the deaths of Nadav and Avihu as punishment, we can see their deaths as a consequence of Aharon's action.*

---

This distinction between punishment and consequence is key in understanding the fate of Aharon if we look at the story of Nadav and Avihu:<sup>34</sup>

וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי-אַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אִישׁ מִחֶתְתּוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בְּהֵן אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְרֶת וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם. וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי ה' וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הוּא אֲשֶׁר-דִּבַּר ה' לֵאמֹר בְּקִרְבִּי אֶקְדָּשׁ וְעַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָעָם אֶכְבֹּד וַיִּדָּם אַהֲרֹן

*And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, each took their fire-pans and put fire in them, and they placed incense on it and brought foreign fire before God that they were not commanded to bring. And a fire went from before God and consumed them and they died before God. And Moshe said to Aharon, 'this is what God said – that I will be sanctified by those who draw near to me and I will be honoured amongst the people'. And Aharon was silent.*

This is the story of Aharon's two eldest sons who perform an act in the Mishkan that leads to their deaths. Moshe apparently tries to comfort Aharon by telling him that God is still honoured and that Nadav and Avihu were still considered 'close' to God, but Aharon is silent<sup>35</sup>. It is a little unclear as to why we need to learn about Aharon's reaction. After all, when Aharon is told at Mei Meriva of his punishment, we do not hear of any reaction – silence or otherwise. When Aharon is told he is to die, there is a similar lack of description of his response.

Rashi interprets this as an acceptance of the Divine decree for which Aharon receives reward.<sup>36</sup> While this may be a good lesson in accepting both the bad and the good from God, this also dehumanises Aharon. After all, is it so reprehensible to cry for the loss of two sons? Ramban explains that Aharon cried initially but then stopped,

presumably after being comforted by Moshe, but this comment does little to shed light on to why we need to learn of this silence.

The Baal HaTurim gives a different definition of this silence when he draws a parallel to the phrase in Sefer Yehoshua:<sup>37</sup>

וַיִּדָם הַשָּׁמַשׁ

*And the sun stood still*

This phrase is in the context of Yehoshua's battle against the Southern cities of Israel. In this battle, God suspends the motion of the earth so that the sun stays where it is, thereby prolonging the day and enabling Yehoshua to complete the victory. Even though the Baal HaTurim draws a different conclusion, it is clear here that the word *VaYidom* does not refer only to physical silence but can also refer to a physical paralysis. If so, we should re-read the story of Nadav and Avihu as ending with the statement that Aharon had been paralysed. What was this paralysis? Was it simply extreme grief, or is the Torah hinting at something deeper?

The lengthy discussions in Hazal and modern commentators about what Nadav and Avihu did wrong are beyond the scope of this article; however, a brief look

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at the story tells us that they performed an action which they had not been commanded to do in the Mishkan. If we look at the narrative, Nadav and Avihu were not doing anything different from the daily rituals of the Kohanim. The point is that they were not commanded to do so. If we return to the Golden Calf, we can see a similar issue, as elucidated by Rav Amnon Bazak.

## The Golden Calf and the Mishkan

Rav Bazak argues that Aharon was trying to create the Golden Calf as a replica of the Mishkan.<sup>38</sup>

He compares two descriptions of the mystical Chariot given by Yehezkel in his description of his vision:<sup>39</sup>

1.

וְדַמוֹת פְּנֵיהֶם פְּנֵי אָדָם וּפְנֵי אֲרִיָּה אֶל-הַיָּמִין לְאַרְבַּעַתָּם וּפְנֵי-  
שׁוֹר מִהַשְּׂמָאוֹל לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן וּפְנֵי-נֶשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן

*and the images of their faces were the face of a man... the face of a lion... the face of an ox....the face of an eagle...*

2.

וְאַרְבַּעָה פָּנִים לְאֶחָד פְּנֵי הָאֶחָד פְּנֵי הַכְּרוּב וּפְנֵי הַשָּׁנִי פְּנֵי אָדָם  
וְהַשְּׁלִישִׁי פְּנֵי אֲרִיָּה וְהָרְבִיעִי פְּנֵי-נֶשֶׁר

*the face of a keruv... the face of a man... the face of a lion... the face of an eagle*

In describing the four creatures seen at the base of the chariot 'carrying' God, Yehezkel interchanges the words keruv and ox, implying that these are really the same thing. (The word for ploughing in Aramaic is kerava, as cows are classic ploughing animals.) It seems that the Divine presence is carried on Keruvim, on oxen. As we have seen previously, the Jewish people saw this very vision at Sinai when they looked up at the firmament. In addition, we see from the description of the construction of the Mishkan:<sup>40</sup>

וְנוֹעַדְתִּי לָךְ שָׁם וְדַבַּרְתִּי אִתְּךָ מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרוּבִים  
אֲשֶׁר עַל-אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֲצַוְהָ אוֹתְךָ אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

*And I will meet with you there, and I will speak to you from above the covering, from between the two keruvim which are upon the ark of the testimony...*

The Aron HaKodesh was constructed with a covering upon which were two keruvim. God's Presence rests above and between the two keruvim, much like the Chariot of Yehezkel's vision. If so, we can now understand Aharon's choice of a calf. In building a calf he was mimicking the Aron. In constructing an altar in front of this, he was doing what was done in the Mishkan with its altar similarly placed near the Aron HaKodesh!<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the people had just received the instructions for the

building of the Mishkan.<sup>42</sup> But if Aharon had effectively built a Mishkan, why was God so angry? Why was Aharon punished so severely?

The lesson we learn from this reading of the Golden Calf is that ultimately God did not command Aharon to make up his Mishkan-like structure. However similar it was to God's vision in the previous parshiot, God had not given specific instruction to Aharon to do what he did. The only difference between the Golden Calf and the Mishkan was the presence of God's command.<sup>43</sup> The Netsiv points out that in Parashat Pekudei, after every structure is built for the Mishkan, the phrase 'as God commanded it' is used. This serves to underline the point that serving God can only be done in the way God sanctions, however logical one thinks the alternatives are.

With this in mind, we can now see the similarities between the story of the Golden Calf and the sin of Nadav and Avihu. Both are stories where the protagonists perform a religious act not explicitly sanctioned by God. We can now return to our question of how Nadav and Avihu died as a consequence (not punishment) of Aharon's action. We introduced a pasuk above that states that sons do not die for the sins of their father. However, there is a contradictory pasuk that says that God visits the sin of the father on to the next generations:<sup>44</sup>

פָּקֵד עֵוֹן אָבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְעַל-בְּנֵי-בָנִים עַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רְבָעִים  
*who visits the sin of the fathers on the sons, grandsons and on the third and fourth generations.*

The Gemara tackles this problem:<sup>45</sup>

אמר מר צדיק וטוב לו צדיק בן צדיק ורע לו צדיק בן  
רשע איני והא כתיב

פקד עון אבות על בנים וכתוב ובנים לא יומתו על אבות  
ורמינן קראי אהדדי ומשנינן לא קשיא הא כשאוחזין מעשה  
אבותיהם בידיהם הא כשאין אוחזין מעשה אבותיהם  
בידיהם

Mar says [quoting a previous statement of Hazal], 'If we see a Tsaddik who is doing well, it is because he is a Tsaddik the son of a Tsaddik. If we see a Tsaddik suffering, he is a Tsaddik the son of a Rasha'. Is that really the case? Is it not written, '[God] visits the sin of the fathers on the sons' (Shemot 34). However it also written, 'Sons will not be put to death for their fathers' sins' (Devarim 24). These pasukim contradict each other! But we learn that there really is no contradiction. [The former pasuk] refers to when the sons continue their fathers' actions and the [latter pasuk] refers to when sons do not act as their fathers'.

The Gemara teaches us that sons are only punished when they do the same sin as their fathers, meaning that sons

are really punished for their *own* actions, but which they learnt from their father.

We can now understand our Rashi. Nadav and Avihu died as a punishment for their own actions. But their actions were a consequence of Aharon's actions. Nadav and Avihu saw how Aharon had performed a religious ceremony and to all intents and purposes had gone unpunished! They therefore learnt from their father and did exactly the same.<sup>46</sup> How did this happen? Could Aharon not have stopped Nadav and Avihu? The Torah tells us though that Aharon could have done nothing to stop Nadav and Avihu – *even if he wanted to*. Why? Because of two words: Vayidom Aharon.

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*Aharon was paralysed. His experience at the Golden Calf meant that he was in no moral position to rebuke his sons.*

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Aharon was paralysed. His experience at the Golden Calf meant that he was in no moral position to rebuke his sons. How could he criticise his sons for doing something which he himself had done earlier?! Moshe tries to comfort Aharon, but Aharon is both paralysed by guilt and realises that he was paralysed by his actions at the Golden Calf. In fact, we see that the Golden Calf scarred Aharon throughout the rest of the Torah.

When we meet Aharon, he is appointed by God to be Moshe's spokesman.<sup>47</sup> The Golden Calf thrusts Aharon into a position where he has to speak without instruction from Moshe – and he fails despite his best intentions. We see that from that moment on, Aharon is silent. He simply does not speak (except for one incident which we shall shortly discuss). In the story of the lashon hara Miriam speaks about Moshe, Aharon listens and does not protest. In the story of the spies, Aharon is absent. In the rebellion of Korah, Aharon is silent. Finally, in the episode at Mei Meriva, Aharon stands silently as Moshe hits the rock. We can posit that Aharon was so affected by the trauma of the Golden Calf that he retreated into silence as a response.

## Mei Meriva revisited

The nature of the sin of Moshe at Mei Meriva is discussed by almost every commentator; however Rashi's view is most well-known. Moshe hit the rock instead of speaking to the rock. What was so bad about this? One suggestion is that Moshe was dealing with a new generation.<sup>48</sup>

The generation that left Egypt were used to miracles and signs. They were a generation who needed to see actions. The second generation were not brought up in that environment. They needed to be spoken to – they did not rely on miracles. Moshe was unable to communicate with this generation as symbolised by his hitting the rock and not speaking to it. The symbolism here suggests that Moshe was removed as leader since he was not right for this second generation. We can extend this to Aharon. A generation that needed its leaders to speak to it could not be led by a Kohen who was silent! If so, Aharon's 'punishment' at Mei Meriva can also be seen as a consequence of the effects of the Golden Calf. His silence caused him to stand by at Mei Meriva and prove himself to be unsuited to the needs to that generation.

## A time to be silent, a time to speak<sup>49</sup>

We can now understand the appropriateness of the choices of Yehoshua and Elazar for the next generation. Yehoshua stands out against the crowd in the episode of the Meraglim. However, he is not alone. Calev also stands up to the crowd. Why is Calev overlooked as leader? If anything, it is Calev who speaks first and protests most strongly!<sup>50</sup> Rav Meidan argues that it is actually Yehoshua's initial silence that made him appropriate as leader.<sup>51</sup> Calev is always arguing with the people. However, Yehoshua sees how things are going, and realises that there is little to be gained by fighting back. He realises he will need to help clear up the mess later on and will need the respect of the people. It is only when the people suggest returning to Egypt that Yehoshua can stay silent no longer, whereas Moshe and Aharon simply fall to the ground.<sup>52</sup> It is Yehoshua's sophisticated understanding of when to speak and when not to speak that illustrates his suitability as leader of the next generation.

We see a similar attribute in Elazar. After the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon and his sons are instructed to continue the Avodah.<sup>53</sup> Moshe later checks on events and accuses them of performing things incorrectly. Aharon – fearing that he may lose his remaining two sons as a result – speaks up for the last time to defend their actions. It is here where Rashi makes a strange but incisive observation:<sup>54</sup>

וידבר אהרן - אין לשון דיבור אלא ל' עז שנאמר (במדבר כא) וידבר העם וגו', אפשר משה קצף על אלעזר ועל איתמר ואהרן מדבר הא ידעת שלא היתה אלא מדרך כבוד אמרו אינו בדין שיהא אבינו יושב ואנו מדברים לפניו ואינו בדין שיהא תלמיד משיב את רבו יכול מפני שלא היה באלעזר להשיב תי"ל (שם לא) ויאמר אלעזר הכהן אל אנשי הצבא וגו' הרי כשרצה דבר לפני משה ולפני הנשיאים

*'And Aharon spoke'...Is it possible that Moshe was angry at Elazar and Itamar, and Aharon replied? You should know that [Elazar and Itamar did not speak] out of respect. They said, 'It is not right that our father sits while we speak before him, and it is also not right that a student should answer back to his teacher'. Perhaps Elazar did not know how to reply! Therefore we see (Bamidbar 31) a pasuk - 'And Elazar the Kohen spoke to the people of the army etc.' - implying that when he wanted, he could speak before Moshe and before the princes...*

This Rashi is remarkable in that he feels that he has to explain that Elazar really could speak! Why is this so important? We see now that Elazar shared the important attribute that Yehoshua possessed. He knew when it was right to speak up and when it was right to be silent. Rashi is telling us that we should not feel that Elazar shared the same fault as his father.

We now see that towards the end of Bamidbar, the ground has been laid for two new leaders to take over the Jewish people, both of whom shared the same ability to speak up when appropriate and to stay silent and listen as well.

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*The Golden Calf affected Aharon more deeply than is first apparent. Not only was Aharon punished by being refused entry to the Land of Israel, but it left him unable to act when he saw his sons going down the same path as he had. Aharon's consequent paralysis and silence is one of the enduring tragedies of the Torah.*

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## Conclusion

The Golden Calf affected Aharon more deeply than is first apparent. Not only was Aharon punished by being refused entry to the Land of Israel, but it left him unable to act when he saw his sons going down the same path as he had. Aharon's consequent paralysis and silence is one of the enduring tragedies of the Torah. Ultimately though, Yehoshua and Elazar demonstrated that they had what

Moshe and Aharon lacked – the ability to speak, listen and understand the second generation.

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<sup>1</sup> Shemot 32:34.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the Gemara in Sanhedrin 102a offers an opinion that the punishment was fully completed 'only' 24 generations later with the destruction of the first Mikdash, but this hardly detracts from the gravity of the sin.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Shemot 32:4 to 32:24. The wording in the latter pasuk is slightly strange in that Aharon does not admit to actually making the calf. Rashi explains that the calf just 'appeared' – perhaps as a result of the intervention of the Erev Ravor Mikha. The involvement of Mikha perhaps hints at parallels between the pesel Mikhastory towards the end of Shoftim and the story of the Golden Calf, although this is beyond the scope of this article. However, the simple peshat of our story in Shemot appears to accuse Aharon directly of creating the calf himself.

<sup>4</sup> In Devarim 9:20, Moshe clearly indicates that God was angry at Aharon; however, it is implied that Moshe's prayers led to Aharon's total forgiveness. In addition, the narrative in Shemot indicates no such anger. We will discuss in greater detail the meaning of Devarim 9:20 later in the article.

<sup>5</sup> See Bemidbar 20:1-14.

<sup>6</sup> This episode is possibly the most difficult to understand in the Torah and there are dozens of explanations offered as to the nature of Moshe's 'sin'. We will touch on some of these later on in the article.

<sup>7</sup> Hizkuni, Shemot 32:1

<sup>8</sup> Without mentioning it explicitly, there is a hint here to Moshe's blessing to Levi at the end of the Torah – see Devarim 33:9. There was an expectation on Levi that they would even kill their own family if they had been guilty of participation in the worst parts of the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe, being from Levi, was of course brother to Aharon – so surely, as the Hizkuni writes, Moshe should have done what he asked others to do in his position!

<sup>9</sup> Shemot 32:1

<sup>10</sup> Rav Menachem Leibtag – [www.tanach.org](http://www.tanach.org) – parashat Ki Tisa

<sup>11</sup> Shemot 23:20;23

<sup>12</sup> Shemot 32:1

<sup>13</sup> Yehezkel 1:7

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.1:26

<sup>15</sup> The Ibn Ezra also observes that only 3000 people were executed – a tiny fraction of the Jewish people implying that only a small minority actively participated in Avoda Zara.

<sup>16</sup> Devarim 1:37

<sup>17</sup> Sanhedrin 7a

<sup>18</sup> Vayikra Rabbah 10:3

<sup>19</sup> The more astute reader will realise that Aharon was appointed as Kohen after the sin of the Golden Calf, rendering this Gemara difficult. However, there is a Rashi on Shemot 4:14 that argues that Aharon was appointed Kohen as a punishment to Moshe for the latter's continued arguing with God when asked to lead the people at the Burning Bush. If so, this not only solves the problem of our Gemara but also counters the Hizkuni's question as to how God could appoint Aharon as Kohen after the Golden Calf if indeed he had sinned. The answer of course is that Aharon was already Kohen.

<sup>20</sup> See Ohr HaHayim, Shemot 32:1 and Rav Yuval Cherlow, *Yireh LaLevav*, 284-309, especially 290.

<sup>21</sup> Shemot 24:14

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 32:1

<sup>23</sup> Bemidbar 16:3

<sup>24</sup> Bemidbar 17:7

<sup>25</sup> Netsiv, Shemot 32:5

<sup>26</sup> Devarim 24:16

<sup>27</sup> Shemot 32. He also discusses this idea in Bemidbar 20, Devarim 1 and 9

<sup>28</sup> See Rav Y Meidan, *Bekhiya LeShaah U'Bekhiya LeDorot (Het HaMeraglim)* in Megadim 10:21-37. Using the Abarbanel's principle, he presents a very elegant peshat in which he re-defines Moshe's role in the story of the Meraglim.

<sup>29</sup> Shemot 32:34

<sup>30</sup> Abarbanel, Bemidbar 20 – this is my translation.

<sup>31</sup> Shemot 24:9-11 and Bemidbar 11:1-3

<sup>32</sup> See Netsiv on Shemot 34 for example.

<sup>33</sup> Rav Y Meidan, *David and Batsheba: The Crime, the Punishment and the Restoration*, 127-152

<sup>34</sup> Vayikra 10:1-3

<sup>35</sup> We can draw a nice parallel to the fate of Aharon with his two sons and Eli with his two sons. Both are stories of the Kohen Gadol who loses two sons. One occurs at the very beginning of the Mishkan while the other occurs at the very end. Both stories have themes of drunkenness (Hazzal maintain that Nadav and Avihu had drunk alcohol, whilst Eli accuses Hannah of drinking). However, when Nadav and Avihu die, God's Kavod is considered

intact. When Eli's two sons die, God's honour is labelled absent as evidenced by the naming of the orphan of Pinchas who is called Eekavod

<sup>36</sup> Rashi on Kohelet 3:4

<sup>37</sup> Yehoshua 10:13

<sup>38</sup> *The Ideological Basis of the Sin of the Golden Calf* at <http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.61/21ki-tisa.htm>

<sup>39</sup> Yehezkel 1:10 and 10:14

<sup>40</sup> Shemot 25:22

<sup>41</sup> Further proof for this idea is provided in the story of Yeravam in Melakhim I 12 in which Yeravam blocks the paths to the Mikdash and places two golden calves at the northern and southern borders of his kingdom. He also builds an altar and calls his two sons Nadav and Aviya (like the sons of Aharon) and proclaims that the calves are the leaders who took the Jews out of Egypt (employing near identical language to that used at the Golden Calf). The implication is that Yeravam's kingdom is replacing the Mikdash, and therefore there was no need to travel to Yerushalayim. This mirrors Aharon's 'building of the Mishkan' as I am presenting it.

<sup>42</sup> This point is a classic debate amongst Hazal – did the command to build the Mikdash precede or follow the sin of the Golden Calf. I have chosen in this essay to follow the more straightforward reading that argues that the command preceded the Golden Calf.

<sup>43</sup> See Rav Yuval Cherlow's book *Bein Mishkan LaEgel*, in which he discusses the fine difference between the Mishkan and the Calf and the relevance to innovation in modern day Judaism.

<sup>44</sup> Shemot 34:7

<sup>45</sup> Berakhot 7a

<sup>46</sup> What exactly motivated them to act as they did is the subject of many comments by Hazal that is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>47</sup> Shemot 4:10-16

<sup>48</sup> This is an idea I first heard from Rav Yossi Hovav and I have heard subsequently from several Rabbanim.

<sup>49</sup> Kohelet 3:4

<sup>50</sup> Bemidbar 13:30

<sup>51</sup> See endnote 28

<sup>52</sup> Compare Bemidbar 14:5 to 14:6

<sup>53</sup> Vayikra 10:12-20. This is a complicated episode to understand and which has been greatly simplified for the purposes of this essay.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 10:19

# *Rashi and the interaction between twelfth century Jewish and Christian Bible commentary*

ZAK JEFFAY

An important source of evidence about the intellectual relationship between Jews and Christians is their respective Biblical exegeses. For no other two religions does so much hinge on the interpretation of a corpus including the same texts. The task of expounding the Hebrew Bible was of fundamental importance for both groups. As such, the study of exegesis is a prime candidate for evaluating the intellectual relationship between the two communities. In this article I will attempt to do that in the context of the twelfth century. I will explore the effect of Christian scholarship on the attitudes and work of their Jewish counterparts, in particular Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitshak (Rashi) and some of his school, as well as the Jewish legacy to Christian scholarship.

We would expect exegesis to be practised radically differently by the two communities. While both Jews and Christians held the Hebrew Bible in esteem the nature of its purpose differed greatly. For the Jewish community, the Bible, as understood by the Oral Law, served as a practical guide for day to day living. For Christians the 'Old Testament' had a different function. It was seen as a prequel to the 'New'. The moral admonitions and beautiful poetry of Mishlei and Tehillim, and the supposed foretellings of Jesus in the Nevi'im, received more attention than the laws of separation and purity characteristic of Leviticus and elsewhere. This differing concept of the Bible means that any similarities between Jewish and Christian exegesis are particularly worthy of note and may well be indicative of intellectual and more general relationships between the two communities.



*Manuscript of Rashi's commentary (Munich 1233)*

We will see that Christianity and Christians impacted upon Jewish exegesis, primarily, in two ways. Firstly; through the criticism of Christianity. There are many points at which Jewish exegetes saw fit to directly criticise or comment on a particular aspect of Christian practice or belief. There were other occasions when Jewish exegetes employed more discreet methods of criticism within their commentaries, often presented in the form of affirmations of Jewish belief. Finally, there may be ways in

which the essential approach to commentary is influenced by intellectual exchanges between communities.

In this article I will highlight some of the most apparent examples of influence and reaction, examining both explicit and more subtle examples. I will then discuss to what extent the turn towards a more literal approach towards Biblical commentary can be traced to the intellectual meeting of Judaism and Christianity. First, however we need to understand the extent to which Rashi was aware of Christians and Christianity at all.

## Rashi's exposure to Christians and Christianity

The broad outlines of Rashi's life are well known. He was born in 1030 C.E. to rabbinic stock in Troyes, Northern France. He studied in his home town and later in the academies of Worms and Mainz under the students of the previous head of European Jewry, Rabbenu Gershom 'Or Hagola' – 'Light of the Exile'. Rashi was an owner of vineyards, which he cultivated with the help of his family while he wrote commentaries to the Bible and Talmud along with liturgical poetry and responsa answering questions on matters of Jewish law.<sup>1</sup>

The size of medieval towns coupled with the nature of economics in the twelfth century ensured that medieval Jewry was a minority dependent upon the larger community. The city of Troyes probably had no more than 10,000 residents in total with a Jewish community of around 500 in 1190.<sup>2</sup> Religion alone distinguished Christian and Jew.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that 'the Jewish community was part of the town, not merely geographically, but also socially'.<sup>4</sup> Language has a 'particularly important role in defining nationality' and the Jews spoke the language of their Christian counterparts in most areas, as can be seen from the *laaz* (French translations) used by Rashi in his commentary<sup>5</sup> 'Jews communicated with their non-Jewish surroundings, but also with one another, using the local vernacular'. Nevertheless they were generally familiar with Hebrew and may have also spoken some Hebraic dialect among themselves.<sup>6</sup> The outward appearance of Jews may be presumed to be the same as their neighbours, as the demand for discernable dress only came into effect with the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.<sup>7</sup> Externally Jews probably appeared similar to their Christian neighbours; they even seem to have used many of the popular 'elements of architecture and decorative painting' in their houses and communal buildings.<sup>8</sup>

Rashi can be shown to have had at least some knowledge of Christianity, the attitudes it contained and the possible threat to Judaism and Jews which it posed. While there 'always lurked the ideology of separateness based on the religious conceptions of both the Jewish and the Christian groups', there was a certain level of engagement and the commentary of Rashi displays his interaction with Christianity in a number of ways.<sup>9</sup> Rashi is said by some to have engaged with Christian ideas through the bi-annual fairs held in Troyes which attracted merchants from a wide area.<sup>10</sup> This is supported by a reading of Rashi's comment on Yehezkel 27:3 in which he displayed detailed knowledge of local methods of trade.<sup>11</sup>

There were Jews and Christians who would engage each other in genial debate regarding the Scriptures. Herman of Scheda, a twelfth century Jewish convert to Christianity, wrote that prior to his conversion while living in Cologne, he 'frequented the company of Christian clerics, engaging them in debate about the Old Testament'.<sup>12</sup> While this may have been the prequel to his conversion, he nevertheless presents this as a normal course of action for someone who at the time was a practising Jew. Additionally there is much to indicate that Rashi was aware of trends and style of Christian exegesis, in addition to engaging in particular matters, he 'surely knew [...] the homiletical and exegetical trends prevalent at that time in the Christian world'.<sup>13</sup> However, much of the evidence indicating communication between the two communities is characterised by clash rather than cooperation.

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*There are a number of instances in which Rashi reveals particular knowledge of what may be termed general culture indicating a level of engagement with particular practices of his neighbours who were largely Christian.*

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Against such a background we can consider the indications within Rashi's Biblical commentary of his knowledge of and interaction with the wider community. There are a number of instances in which Rashi reveals particular knowledge of what may be termed general culture indicating a level of engagement with particular practices of his neighbours who were largely Christian.

His comment on Shemot 28:41 regarding the investiture of the priests explained the term 'filling of the hand' by reference to the old French practice of using a glove to transmit authority.<sup>14</sup> We can deduce from this, a certain level of communication between Rashi and his neighbours. The debate regarding Rashi's Latin literacy and his familiarity with commentaries written in Latin has no clear resolution, 'although many of his comments seem to be direct reactions to their challenge'.<sup>15</sup> Whether direct or indirect however there was certainly some level of acquaintance with Christian views and ideas.<sup>16</sup> Some suggest that his grandson Rabbi Shmuel (Rashbam), 'knew enough Latin to acquaint Rashi with the Christian interpretations' in that language.<sup>17</sup>

## Responses to Christianity in Rashi's commentary

Christianity valued the 'Old Testament' in its totality, yet there were certain areas that were given greater consideration due to their prophetic nature or their place in the liturgy. Thus, Tehillim and certain areas of Yeshaya aroused great interest among the Christian exegetes who saw veiled allusions and allegory throughout Scripture predicting the coming of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> On such passages Rashi often resorted to clear literal interpretations which either explicitly or implicitly countered the Christian position. The clear challenges to Christianity voiced by Rashi lead some to posit that Rashi should be seen as a polemicist who wrote his commentary as 'the definitive Jewish counterpart to the Christian *Glossa Ordinaria*', the authoritative Christian commentary on the Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate.<sup>19</sup>

While polemical or semi-polemical comments in response to fundamental principles of Christianity based on Christian readings of Tanakh are to be expected, and are easily detectable, we can detect more nuanced comments which Rashi made in response to contemporary Christian exegetes. The particular approach which he took to certain Biblical books may have been informed by his wish to counter Christian readings and understandings. For example, in his commentary to Daniel he intended to argue that the majority of the book is written with regard to the political reality of the period of the Second Temple, and not according to the Christian view which read it with regard to the final redemption.<sup>20</sup>

Rashi offered simple explanations of the meaning of words based on their occurrence elsewhere in the Tanakh. When explaining the phrase 'you are My son, on this day

I have given birth to you', Rashi cited Shemot 4:22 where God refers to the Children of Israel as 'My son, My firstborn, Israel', as a precedent for the imagery of sons of God being used without the implications which it came to bear in Christian theology.<sup>21</sup> This method is one favoured by the rabbis of the Talmud, yet its use in this particular context is fresh.<sup>22</sup> While Tehillim 2 is a core text for many of the claims of Christianity, Rashi did not engage in debate or close examination of the claims in his commentary but rather made merely general comments in support of the Jewish reading.<sup>23</sup> He began his comments on Tehillim 2 by stating: 'Our rabbis explained the matter regarding the anointed king (Messiah). However according to its basic meaning, and as an answer to the Christians it is proper to interpret it regarding himself [i.e. David] as it is written, 'And when the Philistines heard that Israel had anointed (mash'ho) David as King over them'.<sup>24</sup>

In this comment Rashi acknowledged the conflicting Christian interpretation of the Christian and chose to place the psalm in the context of King David, even though there was a viable, even preferable, alternative. This is the only explicit mention of Christian claims made anywhere in his commentary.<sup>25</sup>

On Tehillim 96:8 which states 'let the rivers clap their hands' St Jerome commented 'Let the rivers clap their hands. Let us ask the Jews who understand literally. Do rivers have hands? Do rivers have voices?'<sup>26</sup> In contrast to his idea of the literal Jewish understanding, Jerome explained that the rivers are in fact the saints and prophets who 'resound the advent of Christ'.<sup>27</sup> On the same verse Rashi stated 'the prophet spoke in a language appealing to the ear; not that the rivers have hands but it is an expression of happiness and joy'; a comment which is typical of his method of reading the text according to its plain sense, in order to explain the intended meaning in context. In doing so he seems not only to promote the Jewish understanding but seems to engage Jerome directly.<sup>28</sup>

This engagement with Jerome may take on more significance when it is noted that the only other Biblical occurrence of non-human objects clapping, in Yeshaya 55:12, 'and all the trees of the field will clap their hands', received no comment from either Jerome or Rashi.<sup>29</sup> This indicates an awareness by Rashi of Christian exegesis, and while Rashi could have made such a comment of his own accord, the manner and placement suggest it was a result of Christian thought.<sup>30</sup>

Rashi's comment on the beginning of Bereshit that 'there is no notion that the original constitution of Adam underwent any [...] change in consequence of the fall', is in stark contrast to Christian doctrine of Original Sin. Rashi infused all of his comments with this principle and in doing so he 'accept[ed] the normative Jewish interpretation of the story' that by 'yielding to this [natural] impulse man transgressed the commandment of God'.<sup>31</sup> Rashi was writing in an affirmative sense i.e. he was stating Jewish belief, nevertheless it is hard to explain his preoccupation with such a topic without acknowledging the rival explanation proposed by Christians.

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*The Biblical commentaries of Rashi and his school blended highly developed exegesis for its own sake with a strong ideological message of Jewish religious and cultural independence.*

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This is not to say that the primary motivator for Jewish exegesis was in any sense to shape the Christian understanding of the texts. Rashi was not writing to correct the Christian reader, 'medieval Jewish exegesis was primarily concerned with the exposition of Judaism for the Jews' and while much may have been written with Christian ideas in mind it was not intended for a non-Jewish audience.<sup>32</sup> Rather, the Biblical commentaries of Rashi and his school blended highly developed exegesis for its own sake with a strong ideological message of Jewish religious and cultural independence.

While the specific instances cited above shed light on the Rashi's response to Christianity on a case by case basis, we should also consider Rashi's commentary as a work with a polemical theme throughout, emerging in a period where Christianity was considered to be a great threat to Jewish existence. When reading Rashi as a polemicist one is struck by the quantity of his comments which raise problems with Christianity or affirm Jewish positions or interpretations. When commenting on the proximity of civil laws to the Decalogue in Shemot 21 he said 'just as those are from Sinai [Decalogue] so too these [...] to show you that the Sanhedrin [high court] should be next to the Temple'.<sup>33</sup> Here Rashi maintains that Judaism from its very outset was concerned with civil, religious,

physical and spiritual life; the preference of Christianity for the spirit over the letter, 'for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life' is purposefully given short shrift by Rashi.<sup>34</sup>

Rashi's commentary to the Bible was written in the shadow of the First Crusade (1096) during which there was a growing Christian interest and concern with the Land of Israel. The Christian doctrine that the Jewish People was replaced as God's chosen nation was not new but took on a greater significance at this time. Rashi seems to have written his commentary with this in mind and specifically his comment on the first verse in Bereshit dealing with his position that 'the Land does not belong either to the Christians or to the Muslims'.<sup>35</sup> Rashi explained that the Bible began with creation lest the Jewish people be accused of stealing the land they could respond saying that, 'the entire world belongs to God as he created it, and he gave it [the Land] to whomever he saw fit. By his will he gave it to them [the gentiles] and by his will he took it from them and gave it to us [the Jews]'.<sup>36</sup> This theme recurs throughout Rashi's commentary and a statement of this nature opens each of the books of the Pentateuch.<sup>37</sup>

## The influence of Rashi's interpretations on Christian commentators

Although Christian scholars were not Rashi's target readership, we should not ignore the ways in which Rashi's commentary was embraced by some Christian exegetes, a fact which may shed light on the nature of the relationship between the two communities. Beryl Smalley details a growing interest in the twelfth century in the Hebrew Bible as the *Hebraica Veritas*, the most ancient and accurate text of Scripture. As such, the Rabbinic scholarship surrounding it was also invested with value in light of its history and was admired for its work on the original meaning of the text.

Numerous Christian scholars were involved in dialogue with Jews, in which they gleaned much in terms of Biblical exegetical approach. Sigo, abbot of St Florent of Saumur (1055-1070) learned Hebrew in order to better grasp the *Hebraica Veritas*, and Stephen Harding, abbot of Citeaux, and the Victorines of Paris were in frequent contact with Jewish scholars.<sup>38</sup> According to Smalley, in the Christian mind, talking to a medieval rabbi was like 'telephoning to the Old Testament'.<sup>39</sup> The commentary of Nicholas of Lyra is so replete with references to Rashi that

it was said that not much would remain if you were to remove all the pages with references to 'Rabo Salomon'.<sup>40</sup>

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Rashi and members of his school earned themselves fame 'not only among Jews but in certain Christian circles'.<sup>41</sup> By embracing Jewish readings of the text Christianity gained authority and clarity, however, 'while it promoted a more accurate understanding of the Hebrew text it hampered Christian missionary activity and militated against the Christological interpretation, especially of the messianic prophecies'.<sup>42</sup> As such Jewish exegesis was accepted by some while being vehemently rejected by others.

We have seen, then, that Rashi's commentary indicates a high level of acquaintance with general culture and aspects of Christianity and Christian exegesis, and seeks to combat them. At the same time, Christian scholars were aware of and used Rashi's commentary. The exchanges I have considered so far relates to individual points. I want now to examine how Rashi's fundamental exegetical approach reflects intellectual exchange between Jews and Christians.

## Rashi and peshat

It is well known that there are four major methods of Jewish exegesis summarised by the acronym 'pardes': peshat, remez, derash and sod. Remez (hinted meanings, beyond the literal text) and sod (profound mysteries) do not concern us here; we will concentrate on peshat and derash. Peshat comes from the Hebrew root meaning to spread out and refers to the simple meaning of the text as understood in its context. Derash, from the root meaning to enquire or to seek refers to a less straightforward meaning of the text, often homiletical or spiritual but still related to the text, often by implication or through grammatical nuance.

This classic distinction between peshat and derash can be understood as a product of the nineteenth century movement for the academic study of Judaism (the Wissenschaft des Judentums). Enlightened Jewish

scholars in German universities who developed the peshat /derash distinction as it exists today were trying to create a Jewish answer to the approaches to Bible study being undertaken in the Protestant faculties of universities, often with a perceived anti-Semitic agenda.<sup>43</sup> Attributing to the Northern French School a form of linguistic research into the Hebrew Bible 'permitted Jews the claim that their ancestors had preceded the university faculties by almost a millennium'.<sup>44</sup> However, we must be careful to understand Rashi's peshat in its own terms, and not through the eyes of Wissenschaft scholars; 'it should not be said that in Rashi's time these two forms [peshat and derash] stood out with the same distinction or even antagonism they later assumed'.<sup>45</sup> The 'concept of a linguistically based historicist meaning for the Hebrew' developed within academia is not the same as Rashi's understanding of peshat, and as such we must take care in using this model.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, we can say that Rashi and his school revolutionised Jewish Bible study by promoting a form of peshat which had not previously existed. When the term was used in a Talmudic context, it could refer to both plain and applied meaning. Thus before Rashi 'very little meaning [was] attached to the word peshat'.<sup>47</sup> Rashi by contrast specifically and consciously studied texts with a consideration of literary meaning, grammar, context and logic. His school adopted the Talmudic saying, 'a verse can be not be removed from its simple meaning (peshuto)' as support for not only the validity but the supremacy of their approach.<sup>48</sup> The general attitude of Rashi is confirmed through the writings of Rashbam who recalls that in conversation Rashi said that were he to have time he would have liked to have continued amending his commentary in light of 'the plain meanings which appear daily'.<sup>49</sup> The students of Rashi took the primacy of peshat as an important doctrine and the indiscriminate use of derash as a sign of foolishness; Joseph Kara (1065-1135) wrote 'whosoever is ignorant of the literal meaning of the Scripture and inclines after a homiletic meaning (Midrash) is like a drowning man who clutches at a straw to save himself'.<sup>50</sup>

Although Rashi championed a new emphasis on peshat he did not reject derash, rather 'his originality lies only in his preference for the literal as an alternative'.<sup>51</sup> Rashi showed himself to be both knowledgeable regarding and interested in embracing Midrashic (homiletic/non literal) elements in his commentary. One such instance is Shemot 15:1: 'Then sang Moses and the Children of Israel, this song to the Lord and they spoke, saying...'.<sup>52</sup> Rashi first explained the peshat by citing other references

of the word 'then' (Az). In an initial conclusion he stated 'this settles the simple understanding (peshuto)' before he immediately continued, 'but the homiletic meaning (midrasho), our sages of blessed memory have taught us that there is from here a clue to the resurrection of the dead'.<sup>53</sup>

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### *Although Rashi championed a new emphasis on peshat he did not reject derash.*

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This shows Rashi's wish to embrace both peshat and derash in cases when the latter would enhance but not eclipse the former. At times when there was little difficulty with determining the peshat of the passage from an exegetical or grammatical point of view Rashi generally included Midrashic teachings.<sup>54</sup> Rashi was guided in his use of derash by that which was closest to the literal meaning of the text. In his gloss on Vayikra 19:3, 'every man should fear his mother and father' Rashi employed a comment from the Mekhilta, the halakhic Midrash on Shemot, rather than the 'Sifra', the halakhic Midrash on Vayikra itself. This may be because the comment of the Mekhilta answers more succinctly the two fold question posed by the verse (namely the precedence of mother to father and the use of the verb 'fear' rather than 'honour').

Rashi's employment of derash thus maintained a sensitivity to peshat. Much of Rashi's commentary 'consists of the integration of the explicit Biblical meaning and Rabbinic extra-Biblical data [derash]'.<sup>55</sup> Rashi rejected an inflexible model of absolute peshat; he synthesised peshat and derash often placing the latter in a more rational and less ambiguous context. This complex picture should once again make us cautious about trying to establish an absolute dichotomy between peshat and derash in Rashi's time or thought.

Just as some individual comments by Rashi can be identified as responses to Christian interpretation, so Rashi's whole enterprise in promoting peshat (in the nuanced form we have identified) can be at least partly explained as a reaction to his Christian intellectual context, and the influence it was having on Jewish exegesis. Rashi was living at a time when many Jewish commentators were reading Scripture and allowing allegorical stories and the like to take precedence over the literal meaning of the text.<sup>56</sup> This may have been the result to some extent of the influence of 'the Christian

way of allegorizing a great part of the Old Testament, especially the legal portions of the Pentateuch' when writing Biblical commentaries.<sup>57</sup> The differing notion of peshat amongst Jews of Christian Europe compared to that of Jewish exegetes living in Islamic lands reinforces the position that 'the Jewish exegetes of Northern France could not have lived and worked in splendid isolation from the surrounding culture'.<sup>58</sup>

We have seen already how Rashi's work includes responses to a hostile environment, with many of his comments neutralising Christian explanations.<sup>59</sup> Rashi may well have feared that 'the natural historical-literal sense of the Scriptures was being pushed into the background'.<sup>60</sup> Rashi's concern with peshat was therefore both a statement within the Jewish community of the precedence of a literal understanding of Scripture, and in response to exegetical currents in the external Christian community.

### **The influence of Rashi's style on Christian commentators: the turn towards literal interpretation in Christian commentary**

We have seen that some Christian commentators used Jewish exegesis to help clarify particular points. There also seems to be a connection between Rashi's promotion of peshat and a growing concern with the literal meaning of texts amongst some Christians. Just as Jewish exegesis knows the distinctions between peshat and derash, so Christian commentary includes both literal and non-literal / homiletical streams. Prior to the twelfth century what may be termed the plain sense was traditionally employed less in Christian scholarship than the non-literal method. This was because of the struggle of Christian exegetes to reconcile the 'Old Testament' and the New, which often seemed incongruous, and therefore forced them into non-literal explanations.<sup>61</sup>

However, the twelfth century saw a growing Christian emphasis on literal interpretation and in certain schools 'the importance of the letter [was] constantly stressed'.<sup>62</sup> The study of plain sense of the text flourished and it was considered to be a prerequisite to a proper understanding of Christianity. Hugh of St Victor of the influential Victorine School warned that 'they who despise the lesser things will gradually fail. If you scorn to learn your alphabet you will never even make your name as a grammarian'.<sup>63</sup> It was felt that 'to despise the literal sense [was] to despise the whole of sacred literature'.<sup>64</sup> Hugh advised his readers diligently to expound both 'the

meaning of the word itself (litera) and 'the sense (sensus) it convey[ed] within a given context'.<sup>65</sup> Thus, we can detect a common stream in exegesis in the two communities as they are both 'characterized by new efforts to interpret Scripture in its plain sense'.<sup>66</sup>

This search for the plain sense that became common to both communities occurred 'precisely at the period of the emergence of the northern French school of Jewish Biblical exegesis (eleventh and twelfth centuries) [when] there emerged also among the Christians of Western Europe an interest in recovering the literal sense of Holy Scripture'.<sup>67</sup> The growing precedence of the plain meaning in both Jewish and Christian circles during the twelfth century indicates some level of inter-religious influence or common dependence on external factors. Some scholars have therefore argued that the peshat for which Rashi is so well known, is an important source of the Christian idea of *sensus literalis*/plain meaning.<sup>68</sup>

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### *Christians turned their focus to the literal meaning partly as a result of their encounter with Jewish scholars.*

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Thus, it seems that just as Christian commentary was informed by Jewish interpretations in specific instances; more fundamentally, Christians turned their focus to the literal meaning partly as a result of their encounter with Jewish scholars who were not bound by reading the Hebrew Bible in the context of another book. This in turn set the scene for developments within Christian exegesis which ran very close to their Jewish counterparts.

We should not be carried away by evidence of shared methods and trends in Jewish and Christian exegesis. The congruity of Jewish peshat and Christian *sensus literalis* should not distract us from the fact that the literal sense Christian scholars aimed for was still intended to support the claims of Christianity, just as Jewish scholars sought to buttress Jewish beliefs.<sup>69</sup> In both cases the world of theology was inseparable from the world of exegesis, meaning that striving for peshat/literal meanings of texts by both parties was likely to render vastly different results.<sup>70</sup> Yet the growing Christian emphasis on the literal sense belongs both in terms of chronology and provenance to the Jewish sense of peshat which appeared to have taken popular root prior to the Christian literal method. A curious picture emerges whereby Jewish exegesis reacted to Christian allegory by strengthening

the idea of peshat which was in turn embraced by Christians.

## Conclusions

We can see that Rashi's commentary reflected the broader intellectual context in which he operated. His commentary reflects his engagement with Christian scholars, because he felt the need to respond to their Christological interpretations of Tanakh. However, Christian commentators did not make a positive contribution to Rashi's exegesis. Not a single comment in his entire commentary entertains the possibility of true or valuable Christian exegetical comments. By contrast Christian commentaries, and the approach many of their authors adopted, reflects the influence of Rashi and his followers. The turn away from allegorical and towards literal interpretations amongst twelfth century Christian exegetes in Northern Europe bears the mark of the Jewish exponents of peshat, led by Rashi. Although their desire to embrace the Jewish concept of peshat was limited by the necessary subservience of exegesis to theology, the Victorine School in particular embraced Rashi's commentaries and benefited greatly from his methodology, and meant that Rashi did not only direct Jews, but Christians as well, towards the plain sense of the Hebrew Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> S.W. Baron, 'Rashi and the Community of Troyes' in *Rashi Anniversary Volume*, edited by the American Academy for Jewish Research (New York, 1941), 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>3</sup> L. Rabinowitz, *The Social Life of the Jews of Northern France in the XII-XIV Centuries: As Reflected in the Rabbinical Literature of the Period* (London, 1938), 237.

<sup>4</sup> A. Grabois, 'The Hebraica Veritas and Jewish Christian Relations in the Twelfth Century', *Speculum*, 50 (1975), 631.

<sup>5</sup> R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350* (London, 1993), 198.

<sup>6</sup> C. Cluse, 'The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages: By Way of Introduction' in *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries)*, edited by C. Cluse (Turnhout, 2004), 11.

- <sup>7</sup> S. Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century* (Philadelphia, 1933), 309.
- <sup>8</sup> C. Cluse, 'The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages: By Way of Introduction' in *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries)*, edited by C. Cluse (Turnhout, 2004), 12.
- <sup>9</sup> J. Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (New Jersey, 1961), 7.
- <sup>10</sup> S.W. Baron, 'Rashi and the Community of Troyes' in *Rashi Anniversary Volume*, edited by the American Academy for Jewish Research (New York, 1941), 48.
- <sup>11</sup> Yehezkel 27:3 'Trafficker of the peoples', 'rokhelet ha'amim', Rashi writes, "Thus was their custom: the merchants who came there this one from the north, that one from the south were not allowed to conduct business with one another. Rather, the residents of the city would purchase from this one and sell to that one". 'Commentary of Rashi on Ezekiel', 'kakh haya minhagam sokhrim habaim la ze mitsafon v'ze midarom lo hayu r'shain laasot sekhora ze im zee la yoshvei ha'ir lokhin mize u'mokhrin l'ze', *Bar Ilan University: Judaic Responsa Project (J.R.P.)* at [www.responsa.co.il](http://www.responsa.co.il) on 1 February 2008.
- <sup>12</sup> D. E. Timmer (1989). *Biblical Exegesis and the Jewish-Christian Controversy in the Early Twelfth Century*. *Church History*, 58, 313.
- <sup>13</sup> B.D. Weinryb 'Rashi Against the Background of his Epoch', in *Rashi Anniversary Volume*, edited by the American Academy for Jewish Research (New York, 1941), 42-3.
- <sup>14</sup> Shemot 28:41 'u'mileta et yadam' and 'Commentary of Rashi on Exodus' 28:41, *J.R.P.*
- <sup>15</sup> E. Shereshevsky, 'Rashi's and Christian Interpretations', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 61 (1) (1970), 86.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> C. Pearl, *Rashi* (London, 1988), 28.
- <sup>18</sup> A. Grabois, 'The Hebraica Veritas and Jewish Christian Relations in the Twelfth Century', *Speculum*, 50 (1975), 628.
- <sup>19</sup> M. Gruber, (ed& trans.) *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms* (Boston, 2004), 55
- <sup>20</sup> Y. Baer, 'Rashi V'Hametsiut Ha'Historit Shel Zmano (Rashi and the Historical Reality of his Time)' (Hebrew) *Tarbiz*, 20 (1949), 326.
- <sup>21</sup> Tehillim.2:7 and 'Commentary of Rashi on Psalms' 2:7, M. Gruber, (ed & trans.) *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms* (Boston, 2004), 178.
- <sup>22</sup> See Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 2a and Megilla 17a.
- <sup>23</sup> E. Shereshevsky, 'Rashi's and Christian Interpretations', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 61 (1970), 77.
- <sup>24</sup> M. Gruber, (ed& trans.) *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms* (Boston, 2004), 175.
- <sup>25</sup> For similar examples of Rashi similarly neutralising Christian claims see Tehillim. 2:1, 9:1, 21:2, 40:7-8, 80:16, 88:1, 98:8, 105:1.
- <sup>26</sup> St. Jerome, 'Commentary on Psalms' 96:8 cited and translated in E. Shereshevsky, 'Rashi's and Christian Interpretations', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 61 (1) (1970), 78-9.
- <sup>27</sup> E. Shereshevsky, 'Rashi's and Christian Interpretations', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 61 (1) (1970), 79.
- <sup>28</sup> M. Gruber, (ed& trans.) *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms* (Boston, 2004), 96:8, 'haneviim dibru b'lashon she'haozen shomaat lo sheyehe lanaharot kaf ela lashon simha v'chedva', *J.R.P.*
- <sup>29</sup> Yeshaya 55:12, 'v'khol atzei hasade yimchau haf', *J.R.P.* Also see comments by Jerome and Rashi on Tehillim 96:1 'new song'. Note the occurrences of the same phrase on Tehilli. 33:3, 40:4 and 144:9, on which Rashi makes no similar comment whilst Jerome is also silent.
- <sup>30</sup> Other polemical comments indicate this as well see Rashi on Tehillim. 2:12, 9:1, 38:1, 39:2-5, Mishlei 14:10.
- <sup>31</sup> H. Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pittsburgh, 1963), 48.
- <sup>32</sup> E.I.J. Rosenthal, 'The Study of the Bible in Medieval Judaism,' *Studia Semitica* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 255.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Commentary of Rashi on Exodus', 21:1, 'ma harishonim misinai af elu misinai [...] lomar lach shetasim Sanhedrin etsel hamikdash', *J.R.P.*
- <sup>34</sup> 2 Corinthians.3:6, King James Version.
- <sup>35</sup> B.D. Weinryb 'Rashi Against the Background of his Epoch', in *Rashi Anniversary Volume*, edited by the American Academy for Jewish Research (New York, 1941), 42.
- <sup>36</sup> 'Commentary of Rashi on Genesis', 1:1, 'kol haarets shel hakadosh barukh hu he, hu bara'a u'natana l'asher yashar b'enai, birtsono n'tana lahem u'birtsono natal mehem u'ntana lanu', *J.R.P.*
- <sup>37</sup> M.A. Signer, 'God's Love for Israel: Apologetic and Hermeneutic Strategies in Twelfth century Biblical Exegesis' in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth century Europe* M.A. Singer and J. Van Engen (ed) (Notre Dame, 2001), 135-9.
- <sup>38</sup> B. Bedos-Rezak, 'The Confrontation of Orality and Textuality: Jewish and Christian Literacy in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Northern France,' *Rashi, 1040-1990*.

Hommage à Ephraïm E. Urbach, (ed) G Sed-Rajna (Paris, 1993), 553.

<sup>39</sup> B. Smalley, *Hebrew Scholarship Among Christians in XIIIth Century England as Illustrated by some Hebrew-Latin Psalters* (London, 1939), 1

<sup>40</sup> E.I.J. Rosenthal, 'The Study of the Bible in Medieval Judaism,' *Studia Semitica* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 261.

<sup>41</sup> A. Grabois, 'The Hebraica Veritas and Jewish Christian Relations in the Twelfth Century', *Speculum*, 50 (1975), 618.

<sup>42</sup> E.I.J. Rosenthal, 'The Study of the Bible in Medieval Judaism,' *Studia Semitica* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 256.

<sup>43</sup> S. Japhet, 'Research Directions in Medieval Biblical Exegesis in Northern France', (Hebrew) in *World Union of Jewish Studies Newsletter*, 25 (1985), 3-18.

<sup>44</sup> Signer 'Rashi as Narrator', p. 105.

<sup>45</sup> H. Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian scholars* (Pittsburgh 1963), 34

<sup>46</sup> M. Signer, 'Rashi as Narrator' In *Rashi et la culture juive en France du nord au Moyen Âge*. (ed) Gilbert Dahan, Gérard Nahon, and Elie Nicolas (Paris 1997) 105.

<sup>47</sup> D.W. Halivni, *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (New York, 1991), 53. See 52-79 for a view of *peshat* prior to the Rashi and his School.

<sup>48</sup> 'Commentary of Rashbam on Genesis', 37:2, 'ein mikra yotze mide peshuto' J.R.P. Also see Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 66a, Yevamot 11b & 24a.

<sup>49</sup> Commentary of Rashbam on Genesis', 37:2, 'hapeshat shemithadesh becholyom' J.R.P.

<sup>50</sup> F. Kermode, 'The Plain Sense of Things' in *Midrash and Literature*. (ed) G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven 1986), 186.

<sup>51</sup> B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1983), 151.

<sup>52</sup> Shemot 15:1, 'az yashir moshe u'vnei yisrael et hashira hazot lahashem vyomru leymor', J.R.P.

<sup>53</sup> 'Commentary of Rashi on Exodus', 15:1, 'zehu leyshev peshuto. Aval midrasho amru raboteinu zichronam livracha mikan remez l'tchiyat hametim', J.R.P.

<sup>54</sup> H. Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian scholars* (Pittsburgh 1963), 36

<sup>55</sup> S. Kamin 'Affinities between Jewish and Christian Exegesis in Twelfth century Northern France' in *Proceedings, 9th World Congress of Jewish Studies*, (ed) M. Goshen-Gottstein (Jerusalem, 1988), 153. Also see E.Z.

Melamed, *Bible Commentators*, Hebrew (Jerusalem, 1978), 444-7.

<sup>56</sup> H. Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian scholars* (Pittsburgh 1963), 32.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> S. Kamin 'Affinities between Jewish and Christian Exegesis in Twelfth century Northern France' in *Proceedings, 9th World Congress of Jewish Studies*, (ed) M. Goshen-Gottstein (Jerusalem, 1988), 147-8.

<sup>59</sup> See again Rashi on Tehillim. 2:12, 9:1, 38:1, 39:2-5, Mishlei 14:10.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> F. Kermode, 'The Plain Sense of Things' in *Midrash and Literature*, (ed) G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven, 1986), 185.

<sup>62</sup> B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1983), 89.

<sup>63</sup> J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vi. iii. 799-802 cited in B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1983), 87.

<sup>64</sup> B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1983), 93.

<sup>65</sup> S. Kamin 'Affinities between Jewish and Christian Exegesis in Twelfth century Northern France' in *Proceedings, 9th World Congress of Jewish Studies*, (ed) M. Goshen-Gottstein (Jerusalem, 1988), 145.

<sup>66</sup> Van Engen, 'Introduction', in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth century Europe* M.A. Singer and J. Van Engen (ed) (Notre Dame, 2001), 5

<sup>66</sup> B. Bedos-Rezak, 'The Confrontation of Orality and Textuality: Jewish and Christian Literacy in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Northern France,' *Rashi, 1040-1990. Hommage à Ephraïm E. Urbach*, (ed) G Sed-Rajna (Paris, 1993), 5

<sup>67</sup> M. Gruber, (ed& trans.) *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms* (Boston, 2004), 132.

<sup>68</sup> H. Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian scholars* (Pittsburgh 1963) 45-8; M.A. Signer, 'Peshat, *Sensus Litteralis* and Sequential Narrative: Jewish Exegesis and the School of St. Victor in the Twelfth Century', in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, (ed) B. Walfish (Haifa, 1993), 204-7.

<sup>69</sup> F. Kermode, 'The Plain Sense of Things' in *Midrash and Literature*, edited by G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven, 1986), 186.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

# *Tempered Enthusiasm: requirements for religious worship*

DORON LUDER

Orthodox Judaism expects the daily conduct of its followers to be performed with reflective repose and conscientious volition, whether they are engaged in prayer, social interaction, educational pursuit or metaphysical contemplation. The requirements of Torah observance are exacting, unyielding and leave little opportunity for triviality. There is of course room for introspective and contemplative experience within the fabric of halakha: fulfilled obligations largely require an eidetic effect. Emotion – when tamed – forms the nervous system of the most critical theological and humanistic applications of Judaism. Thus it would not be fair to claim religious life is without energy, but rather that it is obsessively paced; so hungry for calculation and so demanding of detail. It is here that I wish to focus this essay.

The discerning reader might speculate on the title of this article – it is in fact double-edged. For the seventeenth century man of letters, the word ‘enthusiasm’ was a term of opprobrium; an intelligent insult directed at an unbalanced thinker who, it was claimed, based his ideas on private revelation rather than reason. Today, though, ‘enthusiasm’ bears a meaning that is more relaxed and is neutral, if not positive.

## **Decline of Religion**

We can all identify certain cracks in practice, on both an individual and communal level. There has been an enduring attrition of religious fervour, which has plagued exiled Jewish communities of post-Biblical history. Most interesting are the rabbinic sensibilities that pertain to this condition. There is little self-victimisation to be found in rabbinic texts; the very tragedy of iniquity, which riddles Christian theological works, is absent. Undoubtedly the natural cadences that ensue in normative religious life are tersely and implicitly acknowledged. Yet Talmudic

sources are typically triumphant in tone: challenges, whether personal or communal, are invariably to be overcome with titanic effect and retained control; the results are to be legally qualified and intentionally driven. This is so even though the deep structures that make up the metaphysical core of Judaism are invariably out of sight, and the terrific oscillations of sometimes sensual sometimes sombre worship are difficult to ride. It is therefore of little import to add that many of us on occasion may feel our religious resolve is inaccessible, if not putrefied.

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*Many of us on occasion may feel our religious resolve is inaccessible, if not putrefied.*

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Undoubtedly the refluence of religion within contemporary liberal democracies spells a large societal trend that has engendered many quandaries, of which our problematic is one piece. Ecclesiastical power has come to be viewed as wholly medieval and its demands rejected by modern man. The usurpation of God’s authority has followed and a social malaise now stifles present day religious motivation. Admittedly this predicament has antecedent roots and, to an extent, has been historically imported. From the Middle Ages onwards westernised sense and thought has increasingly swelled. The metaphysical assumptions which stood medieval scholars in good stead have been all but discarded, their wells blocked up, and a mathematical compass set over the planetary orbs to read their significance in computational terms. The works of scholars and men of letters have been refashioned by scientists and schools of criticism. Reason has come to be seen by many as an independent force, whose stated purpose is to free modern man from the

shackles of divinatory magic and mystery, facilitating the rise of secular institutions. The effects of a poor work ethic, the rise of personal emotion, and the flattening of religious phenomenology and eidos, have individually and collectively contributed to the thawing of yirat Shamayim and natural thirst for God. The thrust of these metamorphoses has been succinctly described by Pope in his *Dunciad*:

See skulking *Truth* to her old Cavern fled,  
Mountains of Casuistry heap'd o'er her head!  
*Philosophy*, that lean'd on Heaven before,  
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.  
*Physic* of *Metaphysic* begs defence,  
And *Metaphysic* calls for aid on *Sense*!  
See *Mystery* to *Mathematics* fly!  
In vain! They gaze, turn giddy, rave and die.  
*Religion* blushing veils her sacred fires,  
And unaware *Morality* expires.  
Nor *public* Flame, nor *private*, dares to shine;  
Nor *human* Spark is left, nor Glimpse *divine*!<sup>1</sup>

Impediments abound. Though I do not wish to scrutinise the causes of this phenomenon, a survey of broadly relevant historical transmogrifications is in order. If we were to select several events that either induced or signified the dulling of our religious sensibilities we may wish to start with the invention of critical discourse in ancient Greece. The dilation of intellectualism and the phenomenological symbolism of this endeavour, as part of the distinctive quality of Greek culture, are well documented in rabbinic tradition.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, we would be hard pressed not to include the invention of the Gutenberg press, which enabled a new programme of applied knowledge, built on uniform and repeatable print; this fuelled the growing need for individual autonomy, and demonstrated a new automated and predictive system of knowledge. Thirdly, the discovery of a scalable and measurable heliocentric universe led to a dramatic reassessment of anthropocentrism, the mollifying of theosophical awareness, as well as a reinterpretation of human destiny. Noting these transitions, we must be wary to guard against the excesses of modern spiritualism on the one hand, and the deficiencies of contemporary science on the other.

## Enthusiastic requirements

With this in mind we may return to the primary concern of this essay and ask: what then are the Jewish texts on enthusiasm? Admittedly this is a loaded question. One need only take a cursory glance at Biblical, Talmudic or Midrashic passages to gauge the insensitivity and



*Alexander Pope*

simplicity of such an insistence. Judaism views enthusiasm as a rich property of religious experience; it is not an on-demand article that can be acquired for temporal comforts, nor is its end to be framed as a life science or personal therapy. As a set of personal attributes it is ubiquitous and assumed within the first demands of Judaism. Those rabbinic texts, which require religious drive for their fulfilment, assume a wholesome force and binding power so tremulous and awesome as to be completely other than the partial prescriptions which we typically label 'enthusiasm', personal or otherwise.

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## *Judaism views enthusiasm as a rich property of religious experience.*

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Nevertheless, texts are to be found which suppose the normative qualities of a religious personality who does not shirk away from Divine investigation, and in which enthusiasm is viewed as a virtue. The Rambam writes:

‘What is the way to attain love and fear of God? When a man contemplates His great and wondrous deeds and creatures, and sees in them His unequalled and infinite wisdom, he immediately loves and praises and exalts Him, and is overcome by a great desire to know the great Name. As David said, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Tehillim 42:3). And when he considers these matters, immediately he withdraws and is frightened and

knows that he is but a small, lowly, dark creature who, with his inferior and puny mind, stands before Him who is perfect in His knowledge. As David said, “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers...What is man that You are mindful of him?” (Tehillim 8:4 – 5) Thus do I explain many great principles concerning the actions of the Master of the Worlds [namely,] that they provide an opportunity for a wise person to love God. As the Sages said concerning Love, “as a result of this you will come to know Him by Whose word the world came into being”<sup>3</sup>

The unspoken moments in this passage are palpable. This much celebrated quotation from the Rambam is considered by many to be the locus classicus for the Maimonidean view on ahavat Hashem. In it the Rambam delineates the central competencies of Divine service, capable on multiple levels and for unexceptional individuals. The essential interplay and interchange between ahava and yira in the course of avodat Hashem is presented as a standard model of critical importance; these are emotions and virtues that take on higher, decisive roles in the search for God.

While the Rambam, in other places, does advise us to include in our regimes activities that offset the melancholy of mundane routine, and which keep us in good spirits, it would not however be in keeping with the Rambam’s overall ambitions and desiderata to indulge these freely. In fact one would expect a ben Torah to circumscribe these permissions to those situations that lean on tactical spiritual worth; or those that promote or lead, directly or indirectly, to overall religious achievement. And beyond this, we may add as a rule of thumb, that worldly activities which do not wholly or partly affirm or relate to Torah or hesed are of secondary cause. Undoubtedly this does not denigrate the habitual value of ordinary activity, only its quintessential worth, and one would still be expected to choose selectively and conscientiously based upon instrumental and general utility.

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*Worldly activities which do not wholly or partly affirm or relate to Torah or hesed are of secondary cause.*

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Perhaps it would be helpful to outline those dispositions upon which religious expectation is built. But as there are

a countless number what follows is a short, reflective study of two such requirements in particular.

## The Way of the Upright

In *Hilkhot De’ot*, the Rambam outlines the way of the upright:

‘The way of the upright is [to adopt] the intermediate characteristic of each and every temperament that people have. This is the characteristic that is equidistant from the two extremes of the temperament of which it is a characteristic, and is not closer to either of the extremes. Therefore, the early Sages commanded that one’s temperaments should always be such, and that one should consider them and direct them along the middle way, in order that one should be perfect.

‘How is this done? One should not be of an angry disposition and be easily angered, nor should one be like a dead person who does not feel, but one should be in the middle – one should not get angry except over a major issue about which it is fitting to get angry, so that one will not act similarly again. Likewise, one should not have desires except for those things which the body needs and without which cannot survive, as it is written, “The righteous eats to satisfy his soul”. Similarly, one should not labour at one’s business, but one should obtain what one needs on an hourly basis, as it is written, “A little that a righteous man has is better, et cetera”. Nor should one be miserly or wasteful with one’s money, but one should give charity according to what one can spare, and lend as fitting to whoever needs. One should not be [excessively] praised or merry, and nor should one be sorrowful or miserable, but one should be happy for all one’s days in satisfaction and with a pleasant expression on one’s face. One should apply a similar principle to the other temperaments – this is the way of the wise.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly in Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean, the resources available to the moral agent in his struggle to navigate the way of the upright are confined to his own intellect: ‘It is a settled state of choice, in a mean relative to us, which mean is determined by reason as the wise man determines it.’<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean deposits vital ethical-philosophic ballast that steadies and guides, and simultaneously it is a decision-based value that involves a willingness to act in whatever way practical reason requires. Notably it is not built upon a mathematical calculation of the median. Rather his exposition offers us no definitive call for moderation but an elusive, equivocal and shifting path, vulnerable to human error and

demanding independent encounter. It offers little in the way of an objective floor below which no moral agent can sink; no external metre of pointed temperance, which we may call upon automatically in times of confusion. We can neither defer decision nor suspend personal judgement; rather each circumstance must be judged individually according to its own merits and demerits.

Although the Rambam may utilise a comparable set of ideas to Aristotle, the substance of his philosophy – as well as the dynamics of his project – are hardly the same. For Aristotle the doctrine of the mean was a part of his formal definition of excellence of character; for the Rambam it provided an opportunity to include regular activities within the rubric of religious life, in such a way as to redeem religion from the confines of partial observance, and reclaim general living from the cavity of secularity.

Yet acting in the way of the upright is easier said than done. If we are to measure the success of this philosophy in the ability to have the intellect rule absolutely over the body – as the Rambam describes elsewhere – the typical reader might well exclude himself from this project, imagining that the Rambam intended on an elitist world, primed for a vanguard of philosophers and statesmen. I expect though, that the Rambam's philosophy was broader than this. And even if modern uses of the intellect tend to be exacting and slender, it appears that his were vibrant, dynamic, and democratic, encompassing varying mental activities that we may conveniently demote or restrict to other faculties.

## B'tselem Elokim

The notion of being created in the divine image is a source of underlying spiritual import. Properly recognised and understood it can act as controller and point of reference for our daily actions:

‘When Hillel would go somewhere, people would ask him, “Where are you going?” “I’m going to do a mitsva.” “What mitsva, Hillel?” “I’m going to the toilet.” “Is this, then, a mitsva?” He said to them: “yes—in order that my body should not degenerate.”

[Or again], “Where are you going, Hillel?” “I’m going to do a mitsva.” “Which mitsva, Hillel?” “I’m going to the bathhouse.” “Is this, then, a mitsva?” He said to them: “yes—in order to clean my body. By way of proof – look. If the government pays a polisher and cleaner a salary annually to take care of the icons which stand in royal palaces, and moreover, he is placed among the nobles of the kingdom – how much more so does it apply to we

who were created in the [Divine] image and form, as it is said, ‘For in the image of God He created man’.”

Shammai would not say thus, but rather: “Let us perform our duties with this body.”<sup>6</sup>

In this remarkable text Hillel's intentional activity surfaces and overflows into his most mundane chores, in such a way as to authenticate congenial living within the setting of religious enterprise. It is all too easy to lose sight of the ideational world that exists beyond corporeal objects; all too simple to search for an exacting account of life, which brings into focus and objectifies those articles belonging to scientific perception, and excluding those which lie ahead. This viewpoint validates the very monotony of materialistic acquisition by leading it back to a normative coding which seems, at first glance, so far removed.

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*With temperance, humility and reason it is possible to drive out the melancholy which all too readily fills the void we create when religious ecstasy reaches its low point and all its achievements are lost.*

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Religious enthusiasm refers to a notion which demands our attention and commitment. For most of us, the progress of modernity has moved the drivers of religion forward and variegated its ports of access. With temperance, humility and reason it is possible to drive out the melancholy which all too readily fills the void we create when religious ecstasy reaches its low point and all its achievements are lost. And if we can regulate the consistency of our thought and action it is possible to retain a view of our most important responsibilities – halakhic, human or otherwise – and enable us to build them into a routine for conventional living.

*Doron Luder learnt at Yeshivat Har Etzion and has a degree in philosophy from the University of London.*

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<sup>1</sup> A. Pope, *The Dunciad* (B) IV, 641 - 652

<sup>2</sup> The most systematic exposition of this is to be found in *Ner Mitsva* by the Maharal

<sup>3</sup> Rambam, *Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah* 2:2

<sup>4</sup> Rambam, *Hilkhot De'ot* 1:4

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b 36 – 1107a 2

<sup>6</sup> Avot deRabbi Natan, Beraita,



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# *Tikkun Olam: a concept in need of repair*

JONATHAN NEUMANN

**R**abbi Meir says, 'Look not at the vessel but rather at what is therein; there are new vessels which contain old wine, but also old vessels which may not contain even new wine' – Pirkei Avot 4:27

Tikkun olam is ubiquitous in the cogitations of certain circles, and, consequently, increasingly also in wider contemporary Jewish discourse.<sup>1</sup> Everybody knows what it means. "Tikkun olam means social justice."<sup>2</sup> And everybody knows what 'social justice' means. It is about environmentalism, toxic waste, renewable energy, economic justice, gay rights, intermarriage, criticism of Israel, opposition to the Iraq War, feminism, nuclear disarmament, universal healthcare, interfaith, foreign aid.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as the late American Reform rabbi, Arnold Jacob Wolf, lamented, 'it is no coincidence that our Jewish program looks pretty much like that of the ACLU or the Democratic Party... God seems to require of us no more and no less than a vote for Al Gore or for saving the whale.'<sup>4</sup> In his censorious review of *Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call For Justice*, a collection of essays by American Jewish progressives, Hillel Halkin also observes, 'on everything Judaism has a position – and, wondrously, this position just happens to coincide with that of the American liberal Left.'<sup>5</sup>

Taking a political position on these typically left-wing issues is not the object of this essay; in any case, it has been argued that tikkun olam can be used to serve conservative ends as well.<sup>6</sup> Rather, the object is twofold: to address, on the one hand, the problem raised by the variance with halakha that often characterises these political causes; and on the other hand, the appropriation of the term. How can today's 'tikkun olam' agenda find legitimacy in such an ancient concept? Or, put differently, can such an old vessel genuinely contain such new wine?

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*Can today's 'tikkun olam' agenda find legitimacy in such an ancient concept? Or, put differently, can such an old vessel genuinely contain such new wine?*

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In fact, the use of term to denote its contemporary meaning is a relatively recent phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> It was first used in the modern era as late as the 1950s by Shlomo Bardin, founder of the non-denominational and pluralist Brandeis Camp Institute in California, and by the 1970s it was adopted by the United Synagogue Youth (the national youth arm of American Conservative Judaism), which changed the name of its social action programs from 'Building Spiritual Bridges' to 'Social Action Tikkun Olam', or 'SATO'.<sup>8</sup> In the late 1970s, the left-wing New Jewish Agenda employed the slogan 'Tikkun Olam', and in the 1980s it became the inspiration for liberal activist Michael Lerner's Beyt Tikkun Synagogue and *Tikkun Magazine*, which 'was started as the liberal and progressives' alternative to the voices of conservatism and the neo-cons.'<sup>9</sup> Lerner's Tikkun community is part of the Jewish Renewal movement, which places a heavy emphasis on tikkun olam.<sup>10</sup> In 1988 tikkun olam was incorporated into Conservative Judaism's statement of principles.<sup>11</sup> Emil Fackenheim, the noted philosopher and Reform rabbi, also introduced tikkun olam into the post-Holocaust theology of his seminal book, *To Mend a World: foundations of post-Holocaust Jewish thought*.<sup>12</sup> It was only in the latter stages of this gradual adoption, though, that the search began for traditional sources for the modern presentation of tikkun olam.<sup>13</sup> This essay shall examine whether these sources do, in fact, exist.

In the past couple of decades, tikkun olam has become all but hegemonic, emerging from ever more diverse quarters: Bill Clinton and Cornel West, Barack Obama, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the Israeli consul-general in New York, and even some Orthodox Jewish groups are making appeals thereto.<sup>14</sup> Wolf is justified, then, in describing it as a 'strange and half-understood notion [which has become] a huge umbrella under which our petty moral concerns and political panaceas can come in out of the rain.'<sup>15</sup> Similarly, as Fine comments, contemporary liberal Jewish thinker Leonard Fein can now reasonably describe tikkun as a central conception of Judaism as a whole, one which any Jew should be able to recognise automatically.<sup>16</sup>

As regards whether we, as Orthodox Jews, should engage in tikkun olam, we must divide the term (the vessel) from its contemporary substance (the wine), and consider whether traditional sources exist to warrant the modern usage.

'Tikkun' is often understood as 'repair' or 'perfect', but can also mean 'rectify', 'improve' and 'establish' as well, all of which terms have dissimilar connotations. 'Olam', meanwhile, commonly translated as 'world', can also mean 'eternity' and 'perpetuity'. Indeed, in the cases of both terms, the various meanings are actually simultaneously implied in the Hebrew. Thus 'tikkun olam' cannot be explored in a vacuum; rather, in Foucauldian fashion, we must instead look to the evolving uses of the term in the tradition.

To that end, we must consider the thematically variegated and chronologically diverse appearances of the concept in the traditional texts. In this regard, this essay aspires to some originality in its comprehensiveness: many recent discussions of tikkun olam in the press and in the academy have attempted a thorough textual exploration but have often omitted important traditional allusions (as well as recent erroneous references). Though this essay cannot guarantee exhaustiveness, it is certainly more wide-ranging than any one of its sources: it shall examine the Biblical, liturgical, Talmudic, Midrashic, Maimonidean and Kabbalistic (particularly the Lurianic) references, amongst others, to tikkun olam. The thematic diversity of the concept will betray its amorphousness and undermine its dubious recent attachment to a political agenda.

Further, by demonstrating the multi-faceted underlying nature of tikkunolam, this essay shall question the centrality recently afforded the one understanding of the concept. In fact, it has played very particular and limited



roles in specific circumstances with little aspiration to a broader significance, barely assuming anything more than a peripheral place in the tradition. Perhaps, the Lurianic strand is the exception that proves the rule, but it illustrates the dangers of veering from the norm.

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To deal preemptively with a potential criticism: it might be noted that old vessels are often filled with new wine in our tradition, and therefore this particular instance should not occasion disproportionate distress. Indeed, Fine remarks that tikkun is useful precisely because of its malleability, and though it is easily lifted out of its original context, changed in meaning and transformed into a 'normative' Jewish value, the process of legitimating a contemporary idea by clothing it in the garb of tradition is as old as tradition itself.<sup>17</sup>

The retort is twofold: first, the clothing of novelty in old garb rarely goes unchallenged, and its legitimacy is judged

by its sustainability, that is, in retrospect. In this Darwinian sense, then, opposition now is not only natural but, indeed, warranted, and History shall be the judge. Secondly, the seemingly inorganic evolution of tikkunolam into its present metamorphosis is underscored by its divorce from genuine textual authority (indeed, we noted above that the search for sources began well after the metamorphosis) and, most crucially, halakha. Whatever the traditional ambivalence toward tikkunolam, the primacy of halakha in this area (as in all areas) has never been in doubt. (This point is particularly worth bearing in mind when we come to the exposition of Lurianic thought.) That contemporary tikkun olam activity, typically on the part of the non-Orthodox, is at variance with halakha, suggests, therefore, that, as far as the halakhic tradition is concerned, the present tikkun olam - if it is a coherent vessel at all - is an old vessel that 'does not contain even new wine'.

## The sources on tikkun olam

This section will review the traditional uses of the phrase 'tikkun olam' without reference to its contemporary substance, except insofar as observing the dissonance between the traditional understandings and the present-day uses as part of our argument that the latter are novel. We shall proceed through each relevant textual genre in turn and in a fairly chronological fashion. It may be pedantic to observe that the precise phrase, 'tikkun olam', barely appears in the traditional texts. This is important to note before we embark on our overview, since it gives license for a broader scope.

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## The Tanakh

One might expect an idea apparently as central as tikkun olam to appear prominently in the Bible, and yet it is entirely absent. (To reiterate, this refers to appearances of the phrase, not Biblical implorations for Jewish responsibility to the wider world.) The root t-k-n does appear, however, but only three times, all in Kohelet (*Ecclesiastes*):<sup>18</sup> 'A twisted thing cannot be straightened' (1:15), 'Observe God's doing, for who can straighten what He has twisted?' (7:13), and '...beside being wise, Kohelet also imparted knowledge to the people: he listened, and sought out, arranged many

proverbs' (12:9).<sup>19</sup> Of the three uses, only the second has any possibly normative implication; the first is proverbial, the third quasi-biographical. Moreover, even the second instance is largely abstract: granted, it serves a cautionary function, but it does not imply that any 'repair' or 'straightening' is presently or urgently called for, nor that some notion of tikkun has been necessitous from time immemorial.<sup>20</sup> Almost to the contrary, it speaks to the greatness of God's handiwork in a general sense, albeit warning of its vulnerability. It is evident, then, that 'tikkun' has multiple uses, and, in general, that the Biblical authority for tikkun olam is negligible.

## Aleinu

The identity of the composer of Aleinu is disputed: some point to Joshua following the conquest of Jericho, others to the *Tanna*, Rav (Abba Arika), who placed it in the blessing of Malkhiyut (kingship) in the Rosh Hashanah Mussaf (it later made its way into the daily prayers too).<sup>21</sup> Others attribute authorship to the Anshei Knesset HaGedola (Men of the Great Assembly): that it does not mention the destruction of the Temple and alludes to worship by prostration both suggest a provenance preceding the Temple's destruction.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of Aleinu's origin, its reference to tikkun olam is arguably the most famous. To understand the reference, we must examine it in context; in particular, we must ask to what the tikkun here refers, and who is to do it.

Aleinu proclaims, 'I taken olam b'malkhut Shaddai', translated as, 'to perfect the world under the kingship of Shaddai,' the name of God reflecting His aspect of sufficiency.<sup>23</sup> This is taken to mean the universal recognition of God's sovereignty and the abolition of idolatry; the line continues: '...when all humanity will call on Your name, and the earth's wicked will all turn to You. All the world's inhabitants will realise and know that to You every knee must bow and every tongue swear loyalty...' <sup>24</sup> This universalist vision complements the particularistic motif of chosenness in the first paragraph of Aleinu, an allegedly chauvinistic passage many American Reform and Liberal communities have abandoned. Contrastingly, many have left the second paragraph unedited, and indeed sometimes even in Hebrew.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Jill Jacobs, a non-Orthodox writer, has re-interpreted the prayer as calling for 'the manifestation of divinity in every corner of the world', citing the fourteenth-century Spanish liturgical commentator, David ben R. Yosef Abudirham, who comments on this line that 'when impurity is destroyed from the world, then the Divine presence will return

throughout the world.<sup>26</sup> This is uncontroversial, but Jacobs then goes on to elucidate such ‘impurities’ as ‘poverty and discrimination’, which not only have no basis in the text, but in the case of abolishing discrimination could actually hinder the cause of extirpating idolatry. This alludes to the general dangers of loose interpretation of Kabbalistic thought, more on which later.

The tikkun olam referred to in Aleinu, then, concerns the universal recognition of God’s kingship.<sup>27</sup> We can now turn to our second question: who is to do the tikkun? In Aleinu, the agent is, in fact, not the Jews or humanity, but God Himself. He is implored ‘I’taken olam b’malkhut Shaddai’.<sup>28</sup> There are at least two supporting observations behind this interpretation. First, it is the pattern of the eschatological prayers in the liturgy of the High Holydays.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, and most obviously, it features in a paragraph which opens with, ‘Therefore we hope to You’ (‘al ken nekaveh lekha’); God is the object of the prayer.<sup>30</sup> Aleinu, then, does not oblige Jews to engage in tikkun olam, let alone endorse its present-day connotations.

However, as Ballabon notes, this is not a ‘disqualifying flaw’, since Religious Zionism (as an ideology and a movement), for instance, holds that human activity can have an acceleratory impact on Redemption, and therefore just because Aleinu implores God I’taken olam does not necessarily exclude the Jewish People from contributing to that process. The dangers of utopianism aside, if Jews are also to be metakken ha-olam, are ‘poverty and discrimination’ the first ‘impurities’ that come to mind?<sup>31</sup> Aleinu is a Messianic call for God I’taken olam in His kingship, eradicating idolatry and imposing recognition of His malkhut over all mankind – a far cry from contemporary tikkun olam.

## The Mishna and Gemara

The Mishna refers to ‘tikkun ha’olam’ as the rationale for a number of pragmatic innovations often instituted to overcome behaviour which, while technically legal, was contrary to the spirit of the law. Jacobs explains the ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’ of the Mishna as justifying ‘forbidding a practice that, while technically legal, threatens to disrupt the system as a whole.’<sup>32</sup> While this interpretation is valid for several of the instances, it runs the risk of inferring generality from ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’, which in fact is used very sparingly in the Mishna, barely mentioned in the Gemara, and is always applied in very specific instances with no invitation to generalise.

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In the Mishna, the phrase appears exclusively in Tractate Gittin, and primarily in the fourth chapter. Gittin 4.2 famously comes to explain that, in the past, a man could send his wife a get (writ of divorce) via a messenger, but could also constitute a court and have the get annulled before the messenger managed to hand it over to the wife. Unaware of the annulment, the wife might remarry, her children designated mamzerim. Therefore Rabban Gamliel enacted (‘hitkin’) that this would no longer be possible ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’. Jacobs translates this phrase as ‘for the sake of the system as a whole,’ but other translators opt for a less overarching interpretation: ‘for the sake of the public weal’, or ‘... the public good’, or ‘... the social order’, ‘to prevent abuses’ or ‘for the better ordering of society,’ or ‘for the benefit of society.’<sup>33</sup> In any case, the Mishna goes on to explain that Rabban Gamliel also ‘hitkin’ that all the names by which the husband and wife are known be inscribed in the get to prevent any confusion over identity ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’.

Gittin 4.3 describes how Rabban Gamliel ‘hitkin’ that an oath be introduced, whereby a widow declares that she has not received her marriage settlement before taking it from the orphans’ estate. Witnesses sign in confirmation, ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’. Fear of confusion and conflict lie behind this close attention to detail. Hillel, we are told, enacted the Prozbul ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’. The Prozbul (from the Greek, πρόςβουλή, ‘prosboule’, meaning ‘at the office of the counsel of law’) was of course designed to spur lending to the poor in the sixth year of the septennial shemitta cycle.<sup>34</sup>

In Gittin 4.4, we learn about slaves who are kidnapped. If such a captive slave had been pledged by his master as security to another and the master redeems him as a freeman (rather than as a slave), then the slave is not liable to enslavement by the other. However, ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’, the other is obliged to write a document to the effect that the slave is free. Again, a matter of clarification.

In Gittin 4.5, we learn that the School of Hillel opined that a half-slave works for his master one day and for himself the next. The School of Shammai, however, retorted that this is unfair for the half-slave, since he cannot marry – he cannot marry a woman slave or a freewoman – and therefore cannot fulfil the purpose of the world, namely, reproduction. So, ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’, the master is compelled to free the slave and write him a bond for half his value. The School of Hillel retracts and teaches the view of the School of Shammai. The Gemara (Pesachim 88b) deals with this Mishna, but adds nothing as regards ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’.

The memorable next Mishna goes on to discuss captives, who, we are told, should not be ransomed for more than their worth ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’. Furthermore, they should also not be aided in escape ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’, though Rabban Gamliel disagrees, stating instead that it is ‘mipenei ha’shevuyim’, (‘because of the captives’), i.e. lest they be treated worse by their captors as a result. Finally, and seemingly unconnected, one should not purchase sefarim, tefillin or mezuzot from ovedei kokhavim (literally, star-worshippers, but generally understood as idolaters) for more than their worth ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’.

The Gemara (Gittin 45a), in considering this Mishna, inquires as to the meaning of ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’, but instead of providing a general interpretation – and it is at this unique elucidatory opportunity that we would expect it – the options the Gemara suggests are particular: it wonders whether ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’ in this case concerns the financial burden on the community or the fear that such a course might encourage further kidnapping. Thus, the argument of this essay is in line with the Gemara, namely, that the ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’ rationale of the Rabbis is designed only for very particular circumstances.

Gittin 4.7 deals with two reasons one may divorce a wife and not take her back, even if the charges turn out to be groundless. It goes on to discuss situations in which a man vows to divorce his wife, and illustrates a point with a man in Zidon who rashly vowed to divorce his wife, but the sages allowed him to take her back ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’ – since people make rash vows in anger and come to regret them.

Among other things, Gittin 4.9 rules that if a Jew sells his field to a non-Jew and a Jew then purchases the field back, the owner must bring from the field bikkurim (first fruits to the Temple) ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’ – to prevent Jews

from selling their fields to non-Jews to avoid the obligation of bikkurim.

Most of the references to ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’ feature in chapter four, but it also gets a mention in chapter five: Gittin 5.3 forbids making certain payments from pledged (i.e. mortgaged) land ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’. Furthermore, if one finds and returns lost property, and the owner complains that it is impaired, the finder need not take an oath disavowing responsibility, ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’. This is in order to encourage honesty.

It is noteworthy that mishnayot 5.8 and 5.9 deal with regulations prescribed ‘mipenei darkhei shalom’ (‘because/for the sake of peace’), which implies that ‘mipenei darkhei shalom’ and ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’ are distinct rationales, despite their sometime erroneous conflation.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, Gittin 9.4 deals with bills of divorce which are invalid but which do not, however, lead to illegitimate children (should the wife have remarried and conceived). In one case, if witnesses were present when the husband handed the get to the wife but did not sign it, she can claim the marriage settlement on any mortgaged property. The witnesses sign the get nevertheless, ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’.

It is clear that the cases of ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’ in the Mishna are diverse and their concerns are particular, hence it is difficult to draw out underlying principles or themes underlying the use of the term. Several of the instances seem to nurture a theme of avoiding confusion over legal status, hence the frequent attention concerning documentation. But evidently the claim that the rationale pertains to situations where the spirit of the law was under threat does not always apply. An alternative and inspiring – but hazardous – principle to draw is that the rationale is invoked to protect the most vulnerable in society, notably divorcees, widows and slaves.<sup>36</sup> This too, though, does not always apply, and certainly regardless of whether the motif pertains or not, we have no license for further regulations ‘mipenei tikkun ha’olam’ (i.e. to protect the perceived vulnerable in our societies) beyond those explicitly stipulated by the Mishna.<sup>37</sup>

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*The Mishna does not endorse some general or universal ethic: ‘tikkun ha’olam’ is only relevant to Jews.*

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Furthermore, the Mishna does not endorse some general or universal ethic: 'tikkun ha'olam' is only relevant to Jews. Halkin infers this from the fact that the rabbis' ability to enforce laws did not extend beyond the Jews, and therefore the Mishna's intentions must be particularistic.<sup>38</sup> This is not especially convincing; a more compelling reason emerges from the circumstances themselves: the Mishna is only concerned with rectifying apparent shortcomings of specifically Jewish practices – such as regarding mamzerim, shemitta and bikkurim. Therefore, 'tikkun ha'olam' is neither applicable beyond these particular scenarios nor relevant to gentiles – it is the rationale of 'mipenei darkhei shalom' which tends to designate legislation pertaining to the wider world.

## The Midrash

Several midrashim – the aggadic hermeneutics of the Rabbis – cite notions of tikkun and are cited by present-day advocates of tikkunolam. Bereishit Rabba 4:6<sup>39</sup> discusses the division of the waters (the sea and the sky) on the second day of Creation: "And let it divide the waters." R.Tabyomi said: If "for it was good" is not written in connection with that day, even though that division was made for the greater stability and orderliness of the world [tikkuno shel olam], then how much more so should this apply to a division which leads to its confusion! Jacobs highlights the use in this passage of the 'more literal understanding of "tikkunolam" as the physical repair or stabilisation of the world,<sup>40</sup> which is a dubious reading; the midrash is making an ethical point, not a technical one: if a schism with a positive purpose is not declared 'good', how much more so a schism with a negative purpose? As for the division of the waters qualifying as 'tikkun olam', this constitutes a Divine – not a human – activity. Its purpose – the sustainability of the world – is certainly close to some of the present-day political connotations of tikkun olam, but this midrash is not making halakhic prescriptions, and therefore there is little we can – or should – take away from it beyond the ethical comment.

Bereishit Rabba 11:6 has been cited as a reference for tikkun olam, but it is not at all clear why.<sup>41</sup> The website of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), the self-described 'leading Jewish environmental organisation in the United States', translates a line of this midrash as follows: 'whatever was created in the first six days [of creation] requires further repair.' Their translation of the Hebrew word, 'asiya', as 'repair', however, begs reassessment.<sup>42</sup> Not only is 'asiya' (literally, 'to make') rarely understood in this way, but this

translation is not loyal to the meaning of this midrash as a whole. The midrash describes a philosopher asking why Adam was not born circumcised, and R. Hoshaya's response is that whatever was created in the first six days needs further work or 'preparation', and the midrash brings examples, including the sweetening of mustard.<sup>43</sup> The notion that mustard requires 'repair' is surely rather far-fetched; rather, it needs further work. The COEJL's interpretation is therefore dubious.

Bereishit Rabba 13:13 is an abstruse midrash which considers a theme taken up also by the kabbalists.<sup>44</sup> Essentially, it explains that 'I [the Lord] have created it [the rain] for the benefit and stability of the world [l'tikkuno shel olam v'yishuvo]'.<sup>45</sup> It goes on to make mystical references to the masculine upper waters being received by the feminine lower waters, which is what it takes Yeshayahu 45:8 ('Let the sky pour down righteousness; let the earth open') to mean: it is 'like a female who receives the male', and the righteousness (tsedaka) is the rain, and it is created for the benefit and stability of the world.<sup>46</sup>

To the extent that we can infer anything relevant for our purposes from this midrash, it is that, again, a Divine action is the source of the 'tikkun', and, once again, the 'tikkun' is more a source of sustainability than repair. More importantly, though, this midrash is particularly recondite, and therefore we must be wary of inferring anything normative from it. Jacobs nevertheless reads tikkun olam in this midrash and in the first midrash we discussed as referring to the physical preservation of the earth. Though such a construal is arguably valid, again, it should be emphasised that, first, these are exclusively Divine activities (man was not even created yet), and, secondly, this is hardly a major theme running through the midrash literature in general – as the paucity of references in this genre testifies.

Next, we return to the second of our quotations from Kohelet (7:13), which Kohelet Rabba takes up:<sup>47</sup> 'At the time the Holy One Blessed be He created Adam He guided him through all the plants of the Garden of Eden and said to him, see My works, how pleasant and praiseworthy they are? And all that I created, I created it for you. Beware that you not spoil and destroy My world, for if you do, there is nobody to straighten/repair [l'taken] after you...'<sup>48</sup> Undoubtedly, the moral of this midrash is an important reminder of the need to safeguard the Garden, and its message is not dissimilar to the general ethos of the environmental responsibility that modern-day tikkun olam espouses. That said, there is no explicit guidance on how to do the safeguarding, nor is it

necessarily obvious that certain benefits of the world should be foregone for the sake of preservation.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, the midrash speaks only of the potential: it is simply a warning, and it is impossible to ascertain from the passage the urgency with which man must act – if indeed action is even necessary. So, while this may be the strongest support yet for one aspect of the contemporary tikkun olam agenda, it remains a lone source and it does not tell us a great deal.

The Midrash Tanchuma on Parashat Tazria (u'vayom hashemini) does not explicitly mention tikkun olam, but this midrash is taken up later by the Or Hachaim, which does mention 'tikkun'.<sup>50</sup> The midrash again explores the question of why Adam was not born circumcised, but this time Turnus Rufus 'the wicked' is asking Rabbi Akiva, who responds that the mitzvot were given to the people of Israel in order to refine (litsrof) them. The Or Hachaim writes how many of God's works require further 'tikkun' or improvement, and that since man is born uncircumcised, we can infer that it is His will that we engage in such tikkun, otherwise His creations would be created complete and man would simply be born circumcised.<sup>51</sup> This reference to tikkun is also unrelated to modern-day tikkun olam.

The final relevant midrash comes from the Midrash Hagadol, a late collection which also only became popularised relatively recently, hence its influence has been limited. The particular midrash of interest comments on Shemot 21:1, the opening of Parashat Mishpatim. Our passage begins with a reference to Mishlei 27:23: 'Know well the face of your flock; set your heart to the herd.' R. Yirmiya says in the name of R. Shmuel bar Yitzhak that this is a universal ethic, suggesting that the verse is speaking to kings, men, women and children. The message to kings is relevant for our purposes: God says to the king that his authority is not due to his anointment, but rather to the King of kings. And the passage goes on to explain how this is so: because there was no king and, consequently, no laws during the generation of the flood, that generation became utterly corrupt. They rebelled and came to hamas and gezel (theft), to sexual immorality, to murder, to roaming naked, to bestiality, and, as a result, they brought upon themselves their punishment, all because there was no fear of a king or prohibitions, hence God appointed a king in the world. The generation of the Tower of Babel, on the other hand, did not behave like animals or harm one another, as their predecessors had done. And so God said to the king that He has put him here 'l'taken olami (to be metakken My world), not l'hara olami (not to damage My

world), commanding him to ensure that nobody takes more than their due from another, most likely an allusion to the hamas and gezel which engulfed the world.<sup>52</sup> And 'know the face of your flock' by managing them with compassion, and 'set your heart to the herd' by ensuring that your servants are not harming their fellows.

This midrash is not typically cited by those advocating tikkun olam today, even though it calls for human agency and has a universalist aspiration.<sup>53</sup> That said, the message is specifically directed towards kings, rather than ordinary individuals, let alone Jews. Moreover, the likeliest meaning of the tikkun here is ethical, centering on the behaviour between man and his fellow: it seems to refer to the need to be metakken the world in the wake of the generation of the flood, i.e. to prevent the recurrence of such behaviour, by establishing fear of kingship and laws which prevent hamas and gezel. This understanding of tikkun does not concur with contemporary uses of the term.

Returning to the COEJL, we can illustrate the dangers of allowing a political agenda to inform readings of the tradition.<sup>54</sup> The COEJL lists ten (largely valid) 'Jewish teachings', the last of which – 'tikkun olam' – mentions the midrash we cited from Kohelet Rabba, but makes no inference. Instead, the teaching goes on to cite Aleinu, and notes that tikkun olam, 'the perfecting or repairing of the world, has become a major theme in modern Jewish social justice theology... it is an important concept in light of the task ahead in environmentalism. In our ignorance and our greed, we have damaged the world and silenced many of the voices and the choir of Creation. Now we must fix it. There is no one else to repair it but us.' Relevant for us is not the politics of these claims, but the juxtaposition of Jewish sources which *seem* to relate to the matter at hand as an acceptable substitute for rigorous interpretation; the agenda is already there, and the gloss of the Jewish tradition adds authenticity, even at the expense of validity. To quote Halkin: 'Judaism has value to such Jews to the extent that it is useful, and it is useful to the extent that it can be made to conform to whatever beliefs and opinions they would have even if Judaism had never existed.'<sup>55</sup>

## Maimonides

A passing reference to tikkun olam appears in Rambam's Hilkhos Melakhim (Laws of Kings) 11:4 which reads, 'and he [the messianic king] will prepare the whole world to serve the Lord [veyitakken et ha'olam kulo la'avod et Hashem].'<sup>56</sup> This reference appears to support the notion that tikkun olam is the product of human activity, albeit in this case of one particular individual. In fact, though,

this rendering of the line is distorted: in the original, uncensored version, the reference follows a long examination of the functions of Christianity and Islam in the Divine plan of history, and it is they who are here to prepare the world. The role of the messianic king goes unmentioned. So the result may be the outcome of human activity, but the process is clearly orchestrated by God.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the purpose is not social justice or environmentalism, but to bring the world to monotheism. This text is not, then, a source for present-day 'tikkun olam'.

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*The purpose is not social justice or environmentalism, but to bring the world to monotheism.*

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### The Kabbalistic tradition

The *Zohar* picks up on the subject of the Midrash about rain which we cited earlier.<sup>58</sup> The passage concerns the desire of the feminine for the masculine and is not amenable to practical application for the simple reason that the tikkun here is not a human activity – indeed these events precede the creation of man. In short, there are no concrete normative indications in this passage.

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*Previously, it was God doing the tikkun, now the Jewish people become seen as God's partners in repairing the world.*

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It is, however, Lurianic thought that is credited with popularising tikkun olam. The critical innovation with which R. Isaac Luria (the 'Ari') is credited – for instance by Howard Schwarz – is that, whereas previously, it was God doing the tikkun, now the Jewish people become seen as God's partners in repairing the world.<sup>59</sup> Setting aside the debate over his originality, the Ari framed the Creation as *tsimtsum*, a withdrawal or contraction of God into Himself, and the consequent creation of a space into which He could be revealed, which is the object of Creation.<sup>60</sup> Since evil is the product of boundaries, the Creation necessarily brought evil into existence, and the famous 'shevirat hakeilim' (the 'shattering of the vessels') was an inevitable and necessary 'accident', but it nonetheless caused the inner deficiency inherent in everything that exists, since most of the 'sparks of light'

escaped from the vessels and either diffused back to their source or flowed downwards. 'The restoration of the ideal order, which forms the original aim of creation, is also the secret purpose of existence.'<sup>61</sup> That process is referred to as 'tikkun'. Certain parts of this process are allotted to the Jew: it is he who perfects the Maker, and he does so through fulfilment of the mitzvot and through prayer, which, if so intended (i.e. performed with 'kavana'), unify the name of God. The appearance of the Messiah is the consummation of the process, and 'the redemption of Israel concludes the redemption of all things'.<sup>62</sup>

Theosophical thought always tempts misinterpretation or, worse, misappropriation. To return to Howard Schwartz, he suggests that 'the idea of God creating humans to remedy a Divine error suggests a more universal meaning: a repaired world can be realised only if *the whole of humanity* engages in collecting the sparks' (emphasis added), a universalist distortion of an originally particularistic idea.<sup>63</sup> Just because the Ari 'now attributed a beneficial spiritual effect' to the rituals and prayers should not be understood as implying that those practices have undergone any change (except insofar as our kavana can now be more appropriately focused on the theurgic consequences of our actions in light of the Ari's revelations). Indeed, Adlerstein has biting noted that when Adam and Eve were evicted from Eden, there were not yet any wars or famine or social oppression, no holes in the ozone layer or threats to blue whales or excessive greenhouse gas emissions, and yet 'no moment in history better defined the need for tikkun olam than that one.'<sup>64</sup> Notably, Jacobs does stress the connection between tikkun and halakha in Lurianic thought, and understands that the 'emphasis on realising Divine perfection, rather than on improving the condition of humanity, complicates the application of the mystical concept of tikkun to contemporary social justice work.'<sup>65</sup> Moreover, there is even a view that Lurianic thought sees the Jewish People as mending the world, but specifically not the nations: the Jewish People is tasked not with bringing the nations to holiness but rather with sapping any holiness and vitality from them.<sup>66</sup> Caution in interpretation and application of kabbalistic ideas is, therefore, critical, especially as concerns Lurianic thought; the modern-day tikkunolam agenda is not the first time the notion of sparks has been misappropriated – the Sabbatean episode serves as a famous and regrettable instance.<sup>67</sup>

R. Moshe Haim Luzatto also drew on the notion of tikkun in his *Derekh Hashem*. He explains that God made 'the transcendental forces' amenable to 'tikkun' (rectification) and 'kilkul' (spiritual damage), but this tikkun and

elevation of all creation is totally dependent on the Jews: only they can reveal His light, which is the cause of goodness, or maintain His concealment, which is the cause of evil.<sup>68</sup> Reminiscent of Aleinu, he writes how ‘the ultimate rectification [tikkun] of all creation depends on the revelation of God’s unity. He was, is, and will be One, Alone and Unique, even though at the present this is not as universally recognised as it should be. In the ultimate future, however, this will be revealed to all creation, as it has been foretold (Zecharia 14:15), “On that day, God will be One, and His Name shall be One”.<sup>69</sup> – which is, of course, the closing line of Aleinu.

Chapter four goes on to connect these ideas with the role of the Shema as a confession ‘that God is the ultimate King and Ruler of all creation’, which is further reminiscent of the context of Aleinu in the Malkhiyut blessing of the Rosh Hashanah Mussaf. One can rectify (litaken) man’s state in general by speaking of them (the words of the Shema) while at home and on one’s way, as the Shema commands, and one can rectify one’s house by putting mezuzot on its doorposts, as the Shema also commands.<sup>70</sup> Tikkun, here, clearly goes well beyond present-day connotations. Indeed, the 248 ‘concepts’ of man’s essence parallel the 248 ‘parts of his body’, and they mirror the 248 parts of ‘all creation’ and the 248 positive commandments, hence recitation of the 248 words of the three paragraphs of the Shema perfects ‘every element of man’s being... with the Light of God’s unity,’ and also all the concepts of creation.<sup>71</sup> All of this correlates with the Lurianic idea that tikkun is achieved through prayer and the practice of the 613 mitzvot. There is no mention of a role for gentiles in this process, nor any obligation to the wider world beyond that of the mitzvot, and certainly none contrary to the halakha. Indeed, the Exodus must be recalled because that event was the ‘primary’ and ‘permanent’ rectification of Israel, as the evil of Adam’s sin still blackened man until Israel became a nation through the Exodus and was forever elevated from its degraded state.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, mention of a couple of recent appearances of tikkun olam should further dispel the notion that the modern-day understanding is rooted in the tradition. First, R. Tsevi Hirsch Chajes writes in his Torat Ha’Nevi’im that a king has the right to kill the innocent children of a rebel, because of tikkun olam, and the Hatam Sofer agrees.<sup>73</sup> (This may be connected to the midrash from Midrash Hagadol cited earlier.) Secondly, one of the works of the hasidic Rabbi of Munkacz, R. Haim Elazar Shapira, published in 1936, is titled ‘Sefer Tikkun Olam’. However, this work also has no relevance

to contemporary understandings of tikkun olam; rather, it primarily chronicles the correspondence between him and the Gerer Rebbe over the increasingly pervasive ideology of Zionism, which the Munkaczer Rav vociferously opposed.<sup>74</sup>

## Concluding remarks

We can see from this survey how little the traditional sources support modern ideas about tikkun olam: there is no consensus on the substance of tikkun, no role in it for humanity at large, little evidence that the gentile world is even the target of such tikkun, no agreement on whether tikkun olam is practically relevant even to the Jewish People, and certainly no endorsement of any anti-halakhic activity – on the contrary, the references seem to concur only on the primacy of halakha in all our endeavours. Moreover, the relative paucity of the sources and the variety of uses indicate that tikkun olam is not, in fact, a central concept in the Jewish tradition.

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Tikkun olam is today in vogue, and some of the activities pursued in its name (where they concur with the halakha), as well as the motivating sentiment, may be admirable. However, that does not mean that these activities fulfil a fundamental Jewish imperative embedded in the tradition. As it happens, though, a more honest and exacting examination of the traditional texts would in fact reveal genuine sources for some of these activities, without the need to misappropriate a term and distort a concept.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Ben Elton for his insightful comments on an earlier draft.

<sup>2</sup> J. Karanek, 'What does Tikkun Olam actually mean?' in (eds) O. N. Rose, J. E. Green Kaiser, M. Klein, *Righteous Indignation: a Jewish call for Justice* (Woodstock, VT: 2008), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Nuclear disarmament and feminism were part of the New Jewish Agenda. Universal healthcare was officially endorsed by the Union for Reform Judaism. For an example of the association of tikkun olam with interfaith, see

<http://cruciality.wordpress.com/2011/01/02/to-mend-the-world-tikkun-olam-a-confluence-of-theology-and-the-arts/> (accessed 6 March 2011); on foreign aid, see <http://www.tikkunnews.org/> (accessed 06.03.11)

<sup>4</sup> A. J. Wolf, 'Repairing Tikkun Olam – Current Theological Writing', *Judaism*, Fall 2001.

<sup>5</sup> H. Halkin, 'How Not to Repair the World', *Commentary*, July/August 2008. Halkin's conception of tikkun olam as a tension between pragmatic and utopian agendas is interesting, but rather simplified.

<sup>6</sup> M. Spiro, 'Being a Politically Conservative Reconstructionist', *Reconstructionism Today*, Spring-Summer 2004, Vol. 11, No. 3, at <http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=533> (accessed 27.01.11).

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise referenced, the following is based on L. Fine, Tikkun Olam in Contemporary Jewish Thought, at <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices> (accessed 20 January 2011), reprinted from 'Tikkun: A Lurianic Motif in Contemporary Jewish Thought', in (eds) J. Neusner et al., *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, Vol. 4, (Atlanta 1989).

<sup>8</sup> J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007.

<sup>9</sup> *Tikkun Magazine*: Core Vision, at <http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/core> (accessed 19 January 2011).

<sup>10</sup> See 'Reader's Guide to Jewish Renewal and Tikkun Olam', by Rabbi A. Waskow, 4 January 2003, at <http://www.shalomctr.org/node/1049> (accessed 27 January 2011).

<sup>11</sup> S. Breger, 'How Tikkun Olam Got its Groove', *Moment*, May/June 2010, at

<http://ftp.momentmag.com/Exclusive/2010/06/Jewish%20Word.html> (accessed 8 January 2011).

<sup>12</sup> E. L. Fackenheim, *To Mend a World: foundations of post-Holocaust Jewish thought*, (New York 1982). See especially Part IV. Fackenheim saw in tikkun olam a concept which conveys both the bewildering rupture of the Holocaust and also the hope and possibility of reconstruction. Thanks to Dan Rickman for drawing attention to this usage.

<sup>13</sup> See 'Social Action: Tikkun Olam: The Backstory, an RJ conversation with Howard Schwartz', *Reform Judaism Online*, Winter 2009. J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007. Also A. Green, *These Are The Words: a vocabulary of Jewish spiritual life* (Woodstock 1999), 175 ff., cited in Wolf, 2001. J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007 is a rare, honest consideration of the sources on tikkun olam from an advocate.

<sup>14</sup> On Bill Clinton and Cornel West, see J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007. On Barack Obama, see 'Barack Obama: Jewish Faith and Tikkun Olam', at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/blog/2008/06/barack-obama-jewish-faith-and.html> (accessed 1 February 2011). On Chief Rabbi Sacks, see S. Breger, 'How Tikkun Olam Got its Groove', *Moment*, May/June 2010 and Rabbi J. Sacks, 'Tikkun Olam: Orthodoxy's Responsibility to perfect God's World', speech delivered at the Orthodox Union West Coast Convention December 1997 – Kislev 5758, available at <http://www.ou.org/public/Publib/tikkun.htm> (accessed 8 January 2011). On the Israeli Consul-General, see S. Breger, 'How Tikkun Olam Got its Groove', *Moment*, May/June 2010. On Orthodox Jews, see T. Snyder, 'Social Justice – An Orthodox Cause?', *The Jewish Week*, 18 June 2008, at [http://www.thejewishweek.com/special\\_sections/new\\_activism/social\\_justice\\_%E2%80%94\\_orthodox\\_cause](http://www.thejewishweek.com/special_sections/new_activism/social_justice_%E2%80%94_orthodox_cause) (accessed 8 January 2011).

<sup>15</sup> A. J. Wolf, 'Repairing Tikkun Olam – Current Theological Writing', *Judaism*, Fall 2001. See also Z. Rivkin 'Tikkun Olam: The Rest of the Story', [C:\search\keyword.asp?kid=13680](http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/708521/jewish/Tikkun-Olam-The-Rest-of-the-Story.htm) by (audio lecture), at [http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media\\_cdo/aid/708521/jewish/Tikkun-Olam-The-Rest-of-the-Story.htm](http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/708521/jewish/Tikkun-Olam-The-Rest-of-the-Story.htm) (accessed 27 January 2011).

<sup>16</sup> L. Fine, Tikkun Olam in Contemporary Jewish Thought, at <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices> (accessed 20 January 2011), reprinted from 'Tikkun: A Lurianic Motif in Contemporary Jewish Thought', in

(eds) J. Neusner et al., *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, Vol. 4, (Atlanta 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.answers.com/topic/tikkun-olam> (accessed 8 January 2011).

<sup>19</sup> 1:15: 'me'uvat lo yukhal *litkon*'; 7:13: 'ki mi yukhal *l'taken*'; 12:9: 'v'izen v'hiker *tiken meshalim harbe*'

<sup>20</sup> This shall be further explored when we examine the Midrashic commentary on this verse.

<sup>21</sup> Maimonides does not mention it as part of the order of daily prayers, but the Mahzor Vitridoes, suggesting that Sefaradim followed Ashkenazim in incorporating it into Shaharit, and subsequently into the other two daily prayers as well. See

<http://www.jewishmag.com/135mag/aleinu/aleinu.htm> (accessed 20 January 2011).

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.aleinu.org/intro\\_history.html](http://www.aleinu.org/intro_history.html), accessed 20 January 2011).

<sup>23</sup> See Rashi on Bereshit 17:1.

<sup>24</sup> Translation is from the Sacks Siddur. See also R.-E bat-Avraham, 2009 at

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/21571291/Tikkun-Olam>

(accessed 10 January 2011), and S. Breger, 'How Tikkun Olam Got its Groove', *Moment*, May/June 2010..

<sup>25</sup> J.D. Bleich, 'Tikkun Olam: Jewish Obligations to Non-Jewish Society', in (eds)D. Shatz, C. I. Waxman, and N. J. Diament,, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Northvale, NJ 1997), 98-99. See also J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007.

<sup>26</sup> R. David ben R. Yosef Abudraham, *Seder Tefillot Rosh Hashanah, Dibbur HaMathil 'Alken*, cited in J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007.

<sup>27</sup> We will consider this further on discussing tikkun olam in the Kabbalistic tradition.

<sup>28</sup> S. Breger, 'How Tikkun Olam Got its Groove', *Moment*, May/June 2010. This assessment shall be reconsidered in the discussion of the kabbalistic tradition.

<sup>29</sup> G. Bildstein, 'Tikkun Olam', in (eds)D. Shatz, C. I. Waxman, and N. J. Diament,, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Northvale, NJ 1997), 26 and notes ad loc.

<sup>30</sup> J. H. Ballabon, 'A View of Tikkun Olam from Capitol Hill', in (eds)D. Shatz, C. I. Waxman, and N. J. Diament,, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Northvale, NJ 1997), 224-225.

<sup>31</sup> For a critique of modern-day tikkun olam as dangerously utopian, see H. Halkin, 'How Not to Repair the World', *Commentary*, July/August 2008.

<sup>32</sup> J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007. For a similar sentiment, see J. Karanek, 'What does Tikkun Olam actually mean?' in (eds) O. N. Rose, J. E. Green Kaiser, M. Klein, *Righteous Indignation: a Jewish call for Justice* (Woodstock, VT: 2008)..

<sup>33</sup> J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007. The other translations are taken from Philip Blackman [1951], (New York 2000); M. Simon, *The Soncino Talmud*, (Hindhead 1935-48) and the Artscroll Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud (New York 1990-2004).

<sup>34</sup> H. Halkin, 'How Not to Repair the World', *Commentary*, July/August 2008. See Mishnah Shevi'it 10:3ff.

<sup>35</sup> For an example of such conflation, see <http://www.suite101.com/content/tikkun-olam-terrorism-and-the-reality-of-life-in-israel-a318398> (accessed 27.1.11).

<sup>36</sup> This interpretation is suggested by Jacobs, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> See J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007, for a call to just that.

<sup>38</sup> H. Halkin, 'How Not to Repair the World', *Commentary*, July/August 2008

<sup>39</sup> J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007, cites this Midrash as 4:7.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. It is not clear why she attributed this Midrash to R. Hanina rather than R. Tabyomi.

<sup>41</sup> The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), at <http://www.coejl.org/programbank/displayprog.php?id=140> (accessed 20 January 2011). See, however, note 50 below.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.coejl.org/programbank/displayprog.php?id=140> (accessed 20 January 2011).

<sup>43</sup> *Midrash Rabbah Genesis* trans. M. Simon, Volume 1, (Hindhead 1961)

<sup>44</sup> J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007, cites this Midrash as 13:16.

<sup>45</sup> *Midrash Rabbah Genesis* trans. M. Simon, Volume 1, (Hindhead 1961)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> This Midrash is cited by <http://www.coejl.org/programbank/displayprog.php?id=140> (accessed 20 January 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Writer's translation.

<sup>49</sup> H. Halkin, 'How Not to Repair the World', *Commentary*, July/August 2008

<sup>50</sup> Or HaHaim on Tazria 12:3. Thanks to Alistair Halpern for drawing my attention to this. Arguably, the COEJL should have cited this version of the question on Adam's

circumcision, and particularly the gloss of the Or HaHaim. Incidentally, some have argued that another interlocution (Bava Batra 10a) of R. Akiva and Turnus Rufus is a better source for Jewish responsibility to the wider world, but it too is not explicitly connected to tikkun olam in the text. See A. Dorfman, 'Beyond Good Intentions: a values proposition for Jewish-service learning', *Zeek*, at <http://zeek.forward.com/articles/117067/> (accessed 8 March 2011).

<sup>51</sup> In a similar vein, Sefer HaHinuch (Mitsva 2) explains how man is born uncircumcised to show that just as it is left to man to perfect his physical self through circumcision, so man learns from this that he can also perfect his spiritual self.

<sup>52</sup> See also Rashi on Bereshit 6:11.

<sup>53</sup> G. Bildstein, 'Tikkun Olam', in (eds) D. Shatz, C. I. Waxman, and N. J. Diamant, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Northvale, NJ 1997), 26 and notes ad loc

<sup>54</sup> [http://www.coejl.org/learn/je\\_tenje.php](http://www.coejl.org/learn/je_tenje.php) (accessed 20 January 2011).

<sup>55</sup> H. Halkin, 'How Not to Repair the World', *Commentary*, July/August 2008

<sup>56</sup> G. Bildstein, 'Tikkun Olam', in (eds) D. Shatz, C. I. Waxman, and N. J. Diamant, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Northvale, NJ 1997), 26 and notes ad loc.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Zohar 1:35a.

<sup>59</sup> 'Social Action: Tikkun Olam: The Backstory, an RJ conversation with Howard Schwartz', *Reform Judaism Online*, Winter 2009. J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007. See also <http://learningtogive.org/papers/paper169.html> (accessed 6 March 2011)

<sup>60</sup> See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, [1941] revised edition, (New York 1996), 258ff., and 260 ff. The subsequent discussion is based on 'The Seventh Lecture', 244-86.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>63</sup> These references are taken from 'Social Action: Tikkun Olam: The Backstory, an RJ conversation with Howard Schwartz', *Reform Judaism Online*, Winter 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Y. Adlerstein, 'The Hijacking of Tikkun Olam', *Cross-Currents Blog*, 4 May 2007, at <http://www.cross-currents.com/archives/2007/05/04/the-hijacking-of-tikkun-olam/> (accessed 8 January 2011); Scholem, 1996, 275; cf. Rabbi M. Luzzatto *Derekh Hashem* 1:3:8. All

translations are from R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *Derech Hashem (The Way of God)*, trans. Aryeh Kaplan, (New York 1997), sixth edition

<sup>65</sup> J. Jacobs, 'The History of "Tikkun Olam"', *Zeek*, June 2007

<sup>66</sup> G. Bildstein, 'Tikkun Olam', in (eds) D. Shatz, C. I. Waxman, and N. J. Diamant, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Northvale, NJ 1997), 48ff.

<sup>67</sup> See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, [1941] revised edition, (New York 1996), 'The Eighth Lecture', 287-324.

<sup>68</sup> Rabbi M. Luzzatto *Derekh Hashem* 1:5:7 and 2:4:9. Tikkun is also much more difficult since Adam's sin. See 1:3:8..

<sup>69</sup> Rabbi M. Luzzatto *Derekh Hashem* 4:4:1.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 4:4:1-8.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 4:4:10.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 4:4:9.

<sup>73</sup> Rabbi Ts. H. Chajes, *Torat Ha'Nevi'im* chapter 7, Rabbi M. Sofer, *She'elot u'Teshuvot Hatam Sofer, Orach Hayyim* no.108. Thanks to R. Anthony Knopf for drawing my attention to this.

<sup>74</sup> For more on the Munkaczer Rav, see, for instance, A. L. Nadler, 'The War on Modernity of R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz', *Modern Judaism* 14 (Baltimore 1994), 233-264.

<sup>75</sup> A good place to start is the Orthodox Forum volume on tikkun olam, (eds) D. Shatz, Ch. I. Waxman, and N. J. Diamant, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Northvale, NJ 1997), esp. the essays by Gerald Bildstein, J. David Bleich and Jeffrey Ballabon. The other contributions explore the Jewish responsibility to the wider world in the context of various particular ethical questions, such as healthcare and the market.

# *Israel's decadence, the destruction of the Temple and lessons for today*

RAV YAAKOV ETTLINGER, translated and edited by JOSHUA FREEDMAN

**R**av Yaakov Ettliger (1798 –1871) was a leader of Orthodoxy and a founder of Modern Orthodoxy. He attended R. Abraham Bing's yeshiva in Würzburg and the university at the same time. He became one of the first Orthodox rabbis with an advanced, formal secular education, as well as a Rav with a foot firmly in the Old School. He pioneered the path that would become known as Torah in derekh erets, or Neo-Orthodoxy, and taught its leaders, including R. Esriel Hildesheimer and R. Samson Raphael Hirsch.

He became Rabbi of Landenberg in 1826 and in 1836 moved to the post he would occupy for the next 35 years, as Chief Rabbi of Altona. The Beth Din of Altona was the last to retain pre-Emancipation secular powers and R. Ettliger was therefore the last German rabbi to be a civil judge, until those rights were abolished in 1863.

At Altona R. Ettliger became renowned as both a scholar and a doughty defender of Orthodoxy. He published *hiddushim* on Talmud (including *Arukh LaNer*) and *teshuvot* (*Binyan Tsion*). For all his modernity he adhered strictly to traditional beliefs, and was influenced by Kabbala. He led the protests against the Reform conference in Brunswick in 1844. He defended tradition using modern means. He preached in a literary and polished German and in 1845 founded the first publication to promote Orthodox Judaism, '*Der Treue Zionswächter, Organ zur Wahrung der Interessen des Gesetzestreuern Judenthums*'. This contained many of his sermons, including the piece presented below. It was delivered on Shabbat Parashat *Maasei* shortly before Tisha B'Av. It was published in 1845.

Just as R. Ettliger's *sefarim* reflect his achievement as a *talmid hakham*, so his sermons express his agenda as an Orthodox leader in a time of challenge and change. This

sermon is a good example of his approach. Even in translation the poetry of R. Ettliger's language is apparent. He wanted to show that Orthodox leaders, no less than advocates of Reform, could express themselves in a sophisticated and elegant way. R. Ettliger identifies and seeks to address the problems he finds in contemporary Jewish life, especially the challenges to tradition. He takes verses from the second chapter of *Sefer Yirmiya* and shows how their ancient words tackle the challenges of the day.

He lambasts Reform for its rejection of authentic Judaism and its attempt to replace authentic Torah with valueless alternatives. He chides parents who do not show their children a proper example. He condemns the unthinking imitation of non-Jewish ways. R. Ettliger was revolutionary in welcoming all that was truly wholesome from the outside world into Jewish life, but he disdained simply aping non-Jewish fashion. Finally, he rejects the simplistic view that a life of Torah discipline is incompatible with human freedom. For Rav Ettliger it is the only way to achieve true liberty.

**S**prings gushing into streams, rivers meandering along their bed – at first in majestic silence, then with a thundering roar – follow the laws of nature that rule and direct them.<sup>1</sup> So too the springs of the heart, gushing out as streams of thought and the outpourings of emotion, are expressions of inner human nature, whether they take the form of a silent expression of devotion or a piercing cry of joy or despair. Human nature rules and governs them.



R. Yaakov Ettlinger

All of nature follows an eternal law breathed into it by the Creator on the day the world was formed. That law has no concept of emotionless, wholly rational decision making. Every person has a life replete with outside influences and feels the impact of external forces and events. He will be touched by them – sometimes painfully, sometimes pleasurable – and their immediate results will vary. They will also have lingering reverberations, as feelings of bliss or misery, joy or sadness. These feelings express themselves through shouts of joy or cries of despair, or through silent devotion and humility.

If feelings are not evoked by the moment, if they are not a result of the moment (and did the wise king not say *עת רקוד* ועת *ספור*,<sup>2</sup> that there is a time for grief and a time for joy?), they must be feelings of pleasure and sadness provoked by events from a lost past. We grasp hold of them and bring them to the forefront of our minds, because of the positive effect they have on our thoughts and lives.

## Grieving for Jerusalem

One such feeling of grief is that felt for the fall of Jerusalem, the city of God, for the destruction of the holy Temple and the dispersion of Israel to every end of the earth, events which we mark in the coming days. These events have been buried by so many centuries that they have long since vanished from reality, and so has their relevance. At best they are part of history. This is how many in our degenerate era regard this grief, and they shrug their shoulders as they do so.

Others, even those whose hearts have faith, intellect and emotion, think of such sorrowful memories as admirable features of our national and human consciousness but consider them of no relevance for the religious standing of the Jewish people. This grief is also becoming rarer and, even where it is still observed according to the commanded ritual, is practised with less feeling and does not have the uplifting influence that it engendered among our pious predecessors even a few decades ago. Yet no time was ever more fitting than this to take this sense of grief and use it to be something truly productive, to revitalise religious consciousness and heal a surviving but corrupted spirit.

In the era that preceded and triggered those grief-inducing events, the prophet Jeremiah cried: ‘The priests said not, “Where is the Lord?”’<sup>3</sup> That was how the prophet lamented millennia ago. That was the melancholy way he depicted the decadence of his people. In a fiery blaze, he spoke those telling words. Yet they passed by the sinner’s stubborn ear unheard. Jerusalem descended into rubble, the sanctuary went up in flames.

## Israel’s decadence

Jeremiah was aware of Israel’s decadence, first through heresy, secondly through mistaken education, thirdly in the desire to imitate, fourthly through erroneous spiritual direction and fifthly through misunderstood liberty. We should consider further how this evil expressed its poisonous influence in those days, and how it does so today, how it exerts its destructive force on Israel’s faith, and eats away at the root of its salvation.

Anything that carries the seed of life, the seed of growth, needs cultivation to bring this seed to maturity and protect it from harm. The gardener tends to a plant, ensuring that it receives the right amount of moisture and warmth, to help it thrive. The human spirit is a plant, a precious plant in the garden of the Lord. From above, it receives the energising dew of God’s word and the warmth of God’s love. God has appointed servants on Earth to cultivate it, formerly the Priests, who served in His sanctuary on Earth and taught the people the Law, and his Prophets, who with heavenly zeal ignited a flame within his children to serve Him and, through the power of their words, obliterated the proliferating parasite of sin. Later the all-loving One appointed teachers, who kept His word fresh and healthy, taught it with warmth to the people and gave vigour to religious ritual. How beautiful is the task of cultivating such flowers in the Lord’s garden; how uplifting the goal of raising fine children here on

earth for the all-loving Father in heaven, children worthy of His grace and loving-kindness!

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*The human spirit is a plant, a precious plant in the garden of the Lord*

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### Wicked teachers

Yet there were teachers who, instead of exterminating the parasite of immorality from the world, inject yet more of it into life. People who renounced the Lord, Whose Name they should have been expounding. Teachers who distanced the Law from the hearts of those entrusted into their care and distorted the Divine word. As the Lord bewails in Scripture when He says: "They that handle the law knew me not: the shepherds transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things of no value."<sup>4</sup>

Teachers responsible for preparing the way for Israel's salvation instead lead it astray. Those who should be teaching our faith in Israel's midst are bringing the people to the depths of heresy, of denial of religion.

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*Teachers responsible for preparing the way for Israel's salvation instead lead it astray. Those who should be teaching our faith in Israel's midst are bringing the people to the depths of heresy, of denial of religion.*

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But does not our present era, in the section of the Jewish people closest to us, display the same sad phenomenon that the prophet deplored so bitterly millennia ago? Teachers responsible for preparing the way for Israel's salvation instead lead it astray. Those who should be teaching our faith in Israel's midst are bringing the people to the depths of heresy, of denial of religion. They make darkness into light and try to tell us that light is darkness. If we left such teachers to behave as they please, would they not do the same as those who stoked the devastating flames that consumed God's sanctuary of faith?

### Failing parents

A second cause of the decadence of religion at the time of the destruction of the Temple was the ruinous example given by parents to their children. Propagating faith in God by propagating humankind is one of the most beautiful and holiest tasks given to the Israelites here on earth. We are instructed: "Within your children, to whom you gave worldly existence, should you also plant eternal life; teach them my Law at home and on the way, when you rise up and when you lie down."<sup>5</sup> This command is so important we are obliged to read it twice a day.<sup>6</sup> What can be a better education than a living example? What theoretical teaching can impress itself deeper upon an impressionable youth than a father's pious way of life or a mother's religion of the home, inscribed on a blackboard of memories?

Just as good role models are instructive and beneficial, wicked ones have a damaging and permanent influence. Even the most diligent care from those who teach and nurture the young will not lead them towards respect for the Law if their charges see it treated with contempt in their parents' lives. We are responsible not only for our own salvation but also for the salvation of our children's and grandchildren's souls, as the Lord warns in Scripture: "I shall be forced to quarrel with you forever because of your degenerate ways; and with your children's children I shall have to quarrel." Surely an important reminder for anyone for whom the welfare of his offspring lies close to his heart; and for anyone who is careless about sacrificing his *own* salvation, but might be less indifferent were he to consider that his progeny's eternal welfare is tied up in his.

### Thoughtless imitation

We can see from Scripture a further cause of the decadence of religion, namely the addiction to imitation. It can surely only benefit and give honour to mortal man for him to strive constantly to expand his knowledge and draw on other people's experiences. The human race, through such an exchange, becomes ever wiser, its nurturing of natural talent ever more perfect. But this can only take place on two conditions: that human wisdom does not displace the Divine word, and that we accept only what we are certain is truly good, and not merely what comes from trying to imitate others. We should only accept what our intellect determines to be proper; only incorporate that into our way of life. Not because others do it. Not because fashion demands it.

Scripture confronts this destructive desire to imitate others, this desire to serve alien gods: 'For pass over the isles of Hittim, ... and see if there is such a thing. Has a nation changed their gods, which are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which has no value.'<sup>7</sup> You desire to copy strangers' religion – why do you not imitate their steadfastness? Why do you not copy their faithfulness to what they (albeit mistakenly) consider right? Do you not wish to heed this warning, you with a senseless craving for Reform, who wish to crush everything established, however old, venerable and sacred it might be? You who desire to eradicate all identifying features of our nation from the lives of the Jewish people, so that our lives completely mirror the customs and way of life of others? To you German Reformists, too, I wish to repeat the words of the prophet: 'Pass over to the people of the isle, across the channel, and see the firmness with which they protect each and every reminder of the peak of their fame and grandeur, however antiquated these symbols appear.'<sup>8</sup> You wish to eradicate from the life of your people every symbol that can – and must – provide a reminder of its former greatness and holiness and invigorate its spirituality.

Were Israel's aberration only a sin of omission, had it been a matter of forsaking the service of the Lord, it would still have been a great deviation – but straightforward, and simpler to cure. Rarely is a man's heart so degraded that a desire for self-improvement never stirs inside it, so that even in testing times the voice of conscience is not awoken inside him. What is more natural than for man, enfeebled and fatigued by the bustle of the bloated earth, to long for spiritual nourishment, to seek out the forsaken spring of faith and quench his thirst with it?

## Falsity in place of truth

The more dangerous kind of aberration places the false in place of the true, the human in the stead of the Divine, and ensnares the deviant man in the net of non-belief – a situation which is that much more difficult to return from, for then even an awoken conscience can no longer tell what is false. Thus the Lord bewails: 'For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me – the fountain of living water – and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.'<sup>9</sup>

This applies to today's corrupters of the people, who have distanced Israel from the living fountain of the eternal word and offered them the futile work of man as a replacement. You hew out cisterns into which you pour water collected from dirty wells, to quench the thirst of

their souls, while the Lord's spring, His holy Torah, gushes out towards them with eternal freshness. What are your meagre efforts? Do they last? Even the few who, to their detriment, have put their confidence in you – will they gloat in the end? They shall not – they are broken cisterns that cannot hold even the small amount of water placed in them. Anything that does not receive its vitality from the spirit of the Lord withers away and, together with its creators, soon disappears without leaving a trace.

## Misunderstood liberty

Finally we have reached what Scripture points to as the last cause of the downfall of faith: the misunderstood concept of human liberty. Freedom is often and enticingly unfurled as a flag to rally fools together – simply to make it easier to domineer them and to rip their free will to shreds. We are told that because man is born with free will and free spirit, bending one's life to the yoke of faith is incompatible with human dignity. Such trickery was heard back then, as we hear it today. But the Lord says: 'Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave?'<sup>10</sup> Is the service of my religion really a slavish one, one that restricts true freedom? Is he free who stands entangled in the net of hedonism, imprisoned in the dark dungeon of animalistic sensualism? Or rather, is not the free man he who chooses to following the advice of his heavenly Father and takes pleasure in renouncing whatever chains him to the earth and hinders his ascent to spiritual bliss?

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## *Is he free who stands entangled in the net of hedonism, imprisoned in the dark dungeon of animalistic sensualism?*

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We can demonstrate how the reproofs given by the prophet in the name of the Lord to Israel who were sinful in his day are still applicable today.

If we keep in mind that the Temple sank into rubble because these admonitions remained unheard, the memory of that painful event can motivate us to understand these teachings more deeply than those who went astray in ancient times.

He by whose will Jerusalem succumbed to desolation; He by whose will the holy Temple, the place where His grandeur was enthroned, succumbed to flames; now shall He let the city of God blossom into the crown of beauty

again, and His majesty shall radiate from Zion to all ends of the earth.

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<sup>1</sup> *Der treue Zions-Wächter. Organ zur Wahrung der Interessen des orthodoxen Judenthums*, Hamburg, 12 August 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Kohelet 3:4

<sup>3</sup> Yirmiya 2:8

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> A paraphrase of Devarim 6:7

<sup>6</sup> In the Shema

<sup>7</sup> Yirmiya 2:10-11

<sup>8</sup> A paraphrase of Yirmiya 2:10-11

<sup>9</sup> Yirmiya 2:13

<sup>10</sup> Yirmiya 2:14

# *Moses Mendelssohn's demystified Judaism and Max Weber's disenchanting world*

GABRIELLE NEJAD STERN

The eighteenth century saw the emergence of a cluster of philosophical developments that have come to be known as the Enlightenment. One aspect of which was the Religious Enlightenment, which in turn had its Jewish element. Perhaps the most important figure in the Jewish Enlightenment was Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786). He set out a highly rational form of Judaism, which he hoped could co-exist with the general trend towards reason advanced by Enlightenment thinkers.

Over a century after Mendelssohn's death, Max Weber (1864-1920) advanced theories about the nature of modernity. He posited that modernity was characterised by the supremacy of reason, and the driving out of non-rational elements from society and culture. I contend that Mendelssohn's conception of Judaism is an important



*Moses Mendelssohn*

example of the modern approach that Weber later identified and Mendelssohn should be understood as one of the creators of the modern condition that Weber described.

## **Weber and Modernity**

Max Weber's life witnessed the emergence of the nation state, the change in the mode of living of most Europeans from the village to the city life and the rise of organised factory systems, as well as the bureaucratic organisation of clerical work.<sup>1</sup> His thought was a response to these changing times. Weber wished to understand the fate of man in the

modern world.<sup>2</sup> His aim was to try and decipher meaning in the 'post critical disenchanting world' in which he believed he lived, which he regarded as the result of the extravagant misuse of reason.<sup>3</sup> He believed that the modern, civilised person was surrounded by a culture in a continuous process of rationalisation in every sphere of life, which led to the demystification of the world.<sup>4</sup> Weber argued that human experience would take place in an age increasingly and continuously dominated by technical progress and 'instrumental rationality', an 'age of subjectivist culture'.<sup>5</sup> It was this rationalistic spirit that characterised modern culture, and affected all spheres of the individual's life.<sup>6</sup> This included religion. Previously, the way one lived one's life was strongly influenced by Christian morality.<sup>7</sup> However, the rationalisation of 'behaviour, belief and the structure of society' created a world which was untainted by belief or spontaneous action, replacing them with reason and calculation.<sup>8</sup> There was a transition from a world ordered by the church to one where individuals could decide 'to become keepers of their own ethical conscience and conduct'.<sup>9</sup> Reason was

applied to all spheres of life, to ensure that all aspects of society were founded in that reason.

Weber argued that this 'charismatic glorification of reason...based on the idea of the self-sufficiency of the intellect' led to the domination of the secular over the religious and the loss of the meaning and truths religion contained.<sup>10</sup> There was an assumption that religion and reason were mutually exclusive.<sup>11</sup> Thus the notion that the world could be mastered through empirical knowledge simultaneously thereby created a world void of meaning and significance, yet the human desire for meaning remained.<sup>12</sup> Weber's pessimism and despair was rooted in his belief the modern world had been divided into opposed life orders and value spheres, without genuinely new prophetic truths, yet racked by endless searches for absolute experience and spiritual wholeness.<sup>13</sup> This search for meaning would prove to be fruitless in the new modern condition, yet the need for it would still remain present and profound.<sup>14</sup> As there is no longer meaning or significance in the world, man can no longer find meaning and significance in life.

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### *Mendelssohn's understanding of Judaism is an example of the modern condition that Weber identified: the triumph of reason and its conquest of religion.*

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I will argue that Mendelssohn's understanding of Judaism is an example of the modern condition that Weber identified: the triumph of reason and its conquest of religion. I will demonstrate how Mendelssohn, heavily affected by his context, attempted to paint a picture of Judaism that was solely founded in reason. Thus, Mendelssohn's Judaism not only conformed to Weber's idea of modernity, it helped to create the condition Weber described, because, though he may not have wished it, Mendelssohn's Judaism was so rational that it sacrificed the meaning that the Jewish religion had previously provided for its followers. Mendelssohn had wished to equip Judaism to survive the Enlightenment, but he may have sacrificed much of what made it valuable in so doing.

Mendelssohn's thought was one stream within the Enlightenment, and specifically its religious aspect. I will therefore set out the general Enlightenment context in which Mendelssohn thought and wrote, and look at Mendelssohn's own definition of the Enlightenment. I



Max Weber

will then turn to Mendelssohn's restatement of Judaism to show how it relates to Weber's understanding of modernity.

## The Enlightenment

The once popular notion that the Enlightenment was a European and unitary project led by French thinkers has been replaced with a more complex understanding. The Enlightenment movements, though they had much in common found different expressions in different nations. Even in the eighteenth century, contemporaries were conscious that the Italian definition for this genre of ideas, *Illuminismo*, meant something different to the French word *Lumieres* and the German concept of *Aufklärung*.<sup>15</sup> Peter Gay was the first to show Enlightenment activity in Britain's American colonies, taking the Enlightenment debate outside the realm of Western Europe.<sup>16</sup> The Enlightenment should also be understood thematically and in this article I will be focusing on the theme of the Religious Enlightenment.

## Religious Enlightenment

The Enlightenment had a somewhat paradoxical influence on religion and religious life. It is seen both as 'not only compatible with religious belief, but conducive to it,' and as marking 'the most dramatic step towards secularisation

in Europe's history.<sup>17</sup> The definition of secularisation itself provides challenge as it is notoriously difficult to define.<sup>18</sup> Secularisation could simply be synonymous with a decline in religious belief, exacerbated by what appears to have been a sustained attack on Scripture, revealed religion and superstition. However, understanding secularisation as an attack on religion fails to grasp its nuances. The 'facile yet tenacious notion' that religion lost its influence and power as a result of the Enlightenment, should be rejected for a more sophisticated perspective, which we can achieve through the concept of the Religious Enlightenment.<sup>19</sup> We can use that model to track the fundamental shifts in religious concepts from the start of the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

While the eighteenth century did not face entirely new religious problems, they were particularly severe. Europe was still recovering from the religious wars that left much of the continent devastated.<sup>21</sup> The struggle between 'Catholicism and Protestantism in the name of God and religious truth' precipitated the spiritual crisis that followed.<sup>22</sup> This was exacerbated by new theories and ideas which focused primarily on scientific developments. The establishment of Newtonian science and Lockean political principles at the beginning of the eighteenth century established the foundations of scientific thought and political reasoning throughout the Enlightenment.<sup>23</sup> Newton's theory on the laws of nature formed the basis of a new theory of natural religion; natural laws implied a world that was created by order and design, and not simply by chance. This did not imply a complete secularisation, but it did encourage a movement from traditional religion to a naturalised form. Revelation was understood to be only one form of truth and no longer a sufficient foundation for religion by itself. A combination of revelation and reason was necessary to obtain a higher and more total truth about God and the universe.<sup>24</sup>

Enlightenment philosophy 'asserted man's ability to understand the world around him without supernatural revelation'.<sup>25</sup> Doctrines needed to be tested by reason and only accepted if they adhered to the rational framework of the universe.<sup>26</sup> According to Gottfried Leibniz and his principle of sufficient reason, if something is true it can be discovered to be true through reason. For example, if God exists then reason will prove He exists.<sup>27</sup> Thus while the Enlightenment did not reject the notion of God nor see the end of religious belief, it did lead to reinterpretations of religion in order to make it fit with the new climate of reason and science.

One strategy was to remove dogma from religion. Religious dogma was seen as uncritical and contrary to Enlightenment values. It dressed itself up as truth and attempted to pass as truth.<sup>28</sup> In addition, it encouraged an acceptance of superstition. This was perceived to be the antithesis of an attitude of the Enlightenment, which condemned blind belief and those who did not question or open their minds.<sup>29</sup> Dogma needed to be replaced by reason, because reason was understood to be the only tool that could 'separate truth from falsehood'.<sup>30</sup> This effort was by no means secular. Rather it was an attempt to discover the essence of religion beneath the excrescences that had built up over the years and obscured pure religion. The rationalisation of religion, in this sense, created a much more individual-centred belief in religious ideals, one that 'should not dominate man like a foreign power, but freely arise from interior forces such as conscience as reason'.<sup>31</sup>

## Jewish Enlightenment

As Outram has observed, 'Jews essentially responded to the Enlightenment rather than fashioned it'.<sup>32</sup> Modernisation in Europe as a whole established a new sense of the past that approached sources and history with a more critical perspective.<sup>33</sup> This secularisation of sources found a new use for history: it was to be reworked in order to 'serve modern social and political ideologies'.<sup>34</sup> The Jewish Enlightenment, or Haskalah, like the Enlightenment as a whole, is a complex concept. Its advocates, the maskilim, approached their own Jewish sources in the same manner, using traditional texts to fashion a better future. They sought to modernise Judaism and revive culture and language in order to create a religion suited to the new climate of reason.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the maskilim sought a renewal and redefinition of faith 'using the new science and philosophy to promote a tolerant, irenic understanding of belief that could serve a shared morality and politics'.<sup>36</sup> The Haskalah was thus an attempt, at least in part, to resolve the 'philosophical and political tensions between Judaism and the Enlightenment'.<sup>37</sup>

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The optimism of the maskilim reflects their historical circumstances. Discrimination against Jews has been a common theme throughout European history.<sup>38</sup> However, the Enlightenment's emphasis on religious tolerance provided hope for change. Discussion on the equality of man and natural rights theory generated hope for Jewish political emancipation. Such desires were encouraged by enlightened rulers, such as Frederick the Great of Prussia who established an attitude of religious toleration in his country.<sup>39</sup> Some extreme maskilim had complete faith in the Enlightenment and believed that it could only be beneficial for Jews, although whether Judaism itself survived was a lesser concern.<sup>40</sup> However, more moderate maskilim who retained a distinctively Jewish faith had to respond to the aspects of the Enlightenment that could undermine religion, in particular the absolute insistence on the supremacy of reason, to the exclusion of everything else. This challenge came both from general Enlightenment currents and the specifically Jewish critique launched by Spinoza in the seventeenth century.

## Spinoza

Barukh Spinoza had a profound effect on the philosophy of religion, and especially on Jewish thought. As argued by Jonathan Israel, the more radical elements of the Enlightenment stemmed from Spinoza's assertions that faith and reason are essentially irreconcilable.<sup>41</sup> Spinoza argued that human history, and therefore Jewish history, was 'a thoroughly *secular* phenomenon determined by rational and natural causes alone'.<sup>42</sup> This proved to be the springboard for his attack on concepts such as miracles, Providence or the idea of a 'chosen people'. Spinoza argued that the Mosaic religion was merely a political constitution in which the Jews decided to declare God as their political sovereign by means of a social contract.<sup>43</sup> Therefore religion and politics were one and the same; God's commands would be manifested in the state and therefore Judaism could not exist without the state. This argument had the potential to undermine Judaism entirely, as did Spinoza's insistence on the 'universal re-evaluation of all values in the name of reason, tolerance and equality'.<sup>44</sup> Understandably, therefore, Eighteenth century thinkers were significantly affected by Spinoza's challenge to traditional beliefs.

## Moses Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn was born in Dessau in 1729, the son of a sofer. He mastered traditional Jewish learning at an early age. He studied with the rabbi of Dessau, R. David Frankel, who introduced him to Maimonide's *Guide of the*

*perplexed*. R Frankel moved to Berlin and Mendelssohn and followed him in 1743. In Berlin, Mendelssohn learned Mathematics, French, English and Latin, read the works of Locke, Leibnitz and Wolff. Mendelssohn earned his living as a tutor and book keeper. Through Gotthold Lessing, a leading liberal author, Mendelssohn joined Berlin intellectual society and soon became its star. He wrote and widely and received great acclaim becoming known as the 'German Socrates'.<sup>45</sup>

Germany was a particularly conducive environment for Mendelssohn's intellectual development.<sup>46</sup> The Enlightenment in Germany lacked the aggression and sarcasm that was so prevalent in the writings of the French deists.<sup>47</sup> While French thinkers harboured a great hostility to religion, German theorists, deists and writers such as Wolff and Leibniz engaged seriously with theological questions.<sup>48</sup> This encouraged religious thinkers, including Jews to become involved in Enlightenment movements. Berlin and Konigsberg were the main centres of the German Enlightenment, and became focuses of the *Haskalah*. As Feiner has written, 'Berlin symbolised the *Haskalah*, and Mendelssohn was its landmark'.<sup>49</sup> Mendelssohn was both a leading figure in the general Enlightenment, as well as the 'first philosopher of modern Jewish times'.<sup>50</sup> His strict adherence to Jewish practice combined with his presence in European culture intrigued the society in which he moved.<sup>51</sup> Mendelssohn was seen as straddling two worlds; on the one hand, the world of traditional Judaism, on the other hand the world of the European Enlightenment; worlds which appeared to many to be irreconcilable.<sup>52</sup>

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## *Mendelssohn was the first thinker to confront the fundamental question of the modern Jew: how to harmonise Jewish tradition with contemporary thought?*

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Mendelssohn was the first thinker to confront the fundamental question of the modern Jew: how to harmonise Jewish tradition with contemporary thought?<sup>53</sup> In the Eighteenth century, to many, 'the Jewish religion involved a body of beliefs which seemed outmoded or contrary to reason'.<sup>54</sup> This was the problem that occupied Mendelssohn's works. He tried to provide a rational basis for faith and belief, and for maintaining traditional aspects of Judaism. He not only tried to make the

Enlightenment and Judaism compatible, he tried to fuse the two.<sup>55</sup> In his attempt, he created the conditions that led to the disenchanting word identified by Weber.

Mendelssohn wanted to bring the 'ghetto Jew' into the modern world.<sup>56</sup> This required religious toleration, but it also depended on the transformation of the Jew. The Enlightened person, no less the Enlightened Jew, was on a mission to achieve self-realisation, which could only come through *bildung*; crudely translated as 'education'. This was essential to each person's achievement of their personal vocation as a human being.<sup>57</sup> Mendelssohn therefore advocated educational for the masses, an idea prevalent in the general Enlightenment.<sup>58</sup> He placed particular emphasis on language. Up until that point, Jews in Germany and Prussia spoke a dialect of Hebrew and German, which according to Mendelssohn, only exacerbated their pariah status; 'in order to be able to join the mainstream of contemporary culture, they [Jews] had to discard their ghetto language.'<sup>59</sup>

His desire to educate Jews in the German language prompted his translation of the Pentateuch alongside a commentary composed by a team of associates, published as the *Biur* in 1783. This translation into German written in Hebrew characters not only enabled Jews to reconnect with the simple meaning of the Biblical text, an aspect of study he felt had been neglected, but also taught them German.<sup>60,61</sup> The *Biur* is an example of Mendelssohn pursuing his aim to create a modernised Judaism, Enlightened but maintaining all of its essential beliefs and practices.

## Jewish religious liberty

Mendelssohn asserted that the aims of the Enlightenment could only be obtained if there was freedom of the individual. This freedom would only be possible if the two main sources of power and influence, the state and church, were separated. For Mendelssohn the Enlightenment was therefore closely bound up with Jewish emancipation. Both required the separation of church and state, the granting of religious toleration and the absence of restriction on theological or philosophical thought.<sup>62</sup> By definition, an enlightened society would grant freedom of thought and civil rights to religious minorities, including, of course, the Jews. That did not mean that an enlightened society would be atheistic. As Arkush has argued, Mendelssohn believed that that 'reason could demonstrate the fundamental truths of natural religion; that is, the existence of God, Providence, and immortality.'<sup>63</sup> That meant there was no need for religious coercion for there was no need to enforce beliefs

that could be proven on a rational basis. Controversially from a Jewish perspective, Mendelssohn not only advocated religious toleration towards Jews on the part of the general population, he also decried religious coercion within the Jewish community.

Marcus Herz's translation in 1781 of Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel's *Vindiciae Judaearum*, included a highly controversial preface by Mendelssohn.<sup>64</sup> The preface explicitly stated Mendelssohn's opposition to excommunication and made a plea for religious toleration. This applied principally to the state, which Mendelssohn argued should renounce religious powers, but he applied it to the Jewish community too, a stance that provoked strong opposition.<sup>65</sup> In his preface he stated that excommunication and religious coercion by the state are 'diametrically contrary' to religious principles.<sup>66</sup> Instead, states must uphold the principle of religious toleration. Mendelssohn believed that faith was an entirely personal and individual decision, and thus not a part of the state's jurisdiction.<sup>67</sup> In addition, in an echo of Spinoza, he understood the destruction of the Temple as ending the relationship between religion and politics; at that point religion took on a 'voluntary character...depending only on the individual's heart and inner will'.<sup>68</sup> This emphasis on individuality was also picked up on by Weber; who held this development partly accountable for the subjective, cold nature of the modern condition he described.<sup>69</sup>

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*Mendelssohn could not be a genuine believer in Judaism; he had 'wrenched the cornerstone, by stripping...the synagogue of its original power...he had renounced the religion of [his] forefathers'.*

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Mendelssohn's preface was attacked by the non-Jewish Berlin writer August Friedrich Craz, who stated that if Judaism was a personal relationship with God, void of coercion, 'what becomes of rabbinical statutes and laws that Jews are bound to observe?'<sup>70</sup> He argued that Mendelssohn could not be a genuine believer in Judaism; he had 'wrenched the cornerstone, by stripping...the synagogue of its original power...he had renounced the religion of [his] forefathers'.<sup>71</sup> This attack was a prompt to Mendelssohn to write his great philosophical work, *Jerusalem*. Mendelssohn felt he had to prove his position

as both a man of the Enlightenment and as a committed, traditional Jew.<sup>72</sup>

## *Jerusalem*

*Jerusalem* was not just a response to his critics, but an attempt to demonstrate how 'the spirit of the enlightenment could be reconciled with the spirit of Judaism'.<sup>73</sup> *Jerusalem* is split into two sections, connected by Mendelssohn's attempt to obtain civic emancipation and cultural integration for German Jewry, and to prove that there was no contradiction between the rejection of religious power and Judaism.<sup>74</sup> Section one is essentially a Jewish concern, a critique of laws that deny Jews civil equality.<sup>75</sup> Having shown that Judaism should be free of outward interference, Mendelssohn goes on to argue that Judaism itself requires no religious coercion within the Jewish community.

In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn demonstrates his unflinching commitment to liberty of conscience, which is essential to his belief in an individual approach to religion, and the basis for his refutation of the right of religious coercion. He first defines the source of the state and church's power over individuals, in order to show how they have no right to interfere in an individual's liberty of conscience. Mendelssohn, like many other Enlightenment theorists and philosophers, used the concept of the state of nature as a tool to make his point. Before society, man lives a solitary existence, but something is lacking, he is left with 'a sense of wretchedness' as a result man 'is obliged to leave that condition and to enter into society with those in a like situation in order to satisfy their needs through mutual aid and to promote their common good by common measures'.<sup>76</sup> Thus, man needs society in order to fulfil his duties. According to Mendelssohn, fulfilment of one's duties requires the ability to carry out an action and the will to do so; the former 'accomplishes what duty demands', and the latter 'causes that action to proceed from the proper source, that of pure motives'.<sup>77</sup>

Actions that pertain to relationship between man and man come under 'the province of the state'; those that relate to man and his Creator are under the jurisdiction of religion.<sup>78</sup> Both religion and the state have the same goal, that of 'the promotion of human welfare and happiness', however their realms are different.<sup>79</sup> Mendelssohn defines the role of the state in social contract terms. In the state of nature man is 'the master of all that is his, of the free use of his powers and capacities...it depends on him alone, how much, when, and for the benefit of which of his fellow men he will dispense with some of the goods which he can spare'.<sup>80</sup> However, man cannot maintain such an

independent lifestyle in society, whose main aim is the maintenance of the common good. Thus men in society 'renounce this right of independence by means of a social contract...men may agree...and determine how much of his rights every member may be compelled to use for the benefit of society'.<sup>81</sup> It thus becomes the role of the state to determine these rights and the duties each man has towards his fellow man. Thus the state obtains 'rights and prerogatives with regard to the property and actions of men'.<sup>82</sup> However, the church does not obtain such authority; no contract is established between the church and its citizens giving the church rights to coerce individuals. The rights of the church are instead to 'admonish, to instruct, to fortify, and to comfort'.<sup>83</sup>

The role of the church is therefore severely restricted. It cannot interfere in an individual's actions; that power rests solely with the state. However even the state may not attempt to interfere with a person's convictions, for, according to Mendelssohn, 'the right to our own conviction is inalienable, and cannot pass from person to person'.<sup>84</sup> This right, which exists in the state of nature can neither be relinquished, nor transferred by means of a contract. Similarly, 'neither the state nor the church is authorised to judge in religious matters; for the members of society could not have granted them that right to them by contract whatsoever'. Thus, using the popular contractual argument, Mendelssohn disqualified both the state and the church's ability to coerce an individual in religious matters, including Jews. The case for Jewish religious liberty is thereby made.

In the second part of *Jerusalem* Mendelssohn turned specifically to Judaism, and introduced themes that would become integral to Weber's theory of modernity and his lament that reason has infiltrated into all aspects of society, including religion, which resulted in a life void of meaning, a condition he termed 'the disenchantment of the world'.

Mendelssohn's critics claimed his philosophical views were inconsistent with traditional Judaism. Mendelssohn asserted that the reality was precisely the opposite. Mendelssohn stated that he recognised 'no eternal truths other than those that are not merely comprehensible to human reason but can also be demonstrated and verified by human powers'. However, he argued that these assertions did not depart from traditional Judaism but were actually 'the essential point of the Jewish religion and...the characteristic difference between it and the Christian one'.<sup>85</sup> This is based on his understanding of the place of revelation in Judaism. Mendelssohn stated: 'I believe that Judaism knows of no revealed religion in the

sense in which the Christians understand this term. The Israelites possess a divine *legislation*...propositions of this kind were revealed to them by Moses in a miraculous and supernatural manner, but no doctrinal opinions, no saving truths, no universal propositions of reason'.<sup>86</sup> In other words, only legislation was revealed at Sinai. He dismissed the idea of a revealed *religion*, replacing it instead with the notion of a revealed *law*. In other words, Jewish doctrines were true and therefore could be proved to be so. Only Jewish law required revelation.

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Mendelssohn continued this argument by differentiating between eternal truths and historical truths. The former 'remain the same in all eternity...they are true in this and no other way because they are *conceivable* in this and no other way', and example of which are the laws of nature.<sup>87</sup> Such truths 'are taught by God...through creation itself'.<sup>88</sup> The latter are truths 'which occurred once and may never occur again...they can only be perceived, by means of the senses, by those who were present at the time and place of their occurrence in nature'.<sup>89</sup> From these arguments, Mendelssohn concluded that 'the powers of human reason are [not] insufficient to persuade men of the eternal truths which are indispensable to human felicity'.<sup>90</sup>

Thus man, through the use of his reason, is able to understand the eternal truths taught to him by God, without the need for revelation; 'Judaism boasts of no exclusive revelation of eternal truths'.<sup>91</sup> What makes Judaism a unique and distinct religion is its legal structure, the revealed laws that the Jewish people

obtained at Sinai. These laws did not include any regarding belief: 'faith is not commanded...all the commandments of divine law are addressed to man's will, to his power to act'.<sup>92</sup> If individuals chose not to engage in reflection and thereby reason out the truth of Jewish doctrine that was regrettable, but not disastrous for Jewish life. Thus, the law 'did not impel them to engage in reflection; it prescribed only actions, only doing and not doing'.<sup>93</sup> It was the act of *doing* that Mendelssohn considered the most significant and profound proof of faith.

That does not mean that Mendelssohn denied that Judaism had essentials of faith. In *Jerusalem* he argued:

Present-day Judaism, like the ancient one, possesses no proper creed. Only a very few principles and doctrines are prescribed to us. Maimonides enumerates thirteen, Albo only three, and nobody will accuse him of heresy on this account. Laws, customs, rules of life are prescribed to us, [but] so far as doctrines are concerned we are free...The spirit of Judaism demands conformity in action and freedom in respect of doctrine, except for a few fundamental tenets on which all our teachers are agreed and without which the Jewish religion simply could not exist.<sup>94</sup>

Alexander Altmann suggests that these 'few fundamental tenets' are Albo's: belief in God, Divine Providence and Revelation.<sup>95</sup> Thus, even Mendelssohn held that there were some dogmas without which Judaism would not be Judaism. They could not be commanded, because they were arrived at through reason, and there might not be many of them, but there was nonetheless an irreducible doctrinal core to Judaism, which could not be set aside. As Michael Meyer has put it, for Mendelssohn Judaism does not have any 'super rational dogmas', beliefs that require a leap of faith or to be taken on trust, but dogmas there are.<sup>96</sup>

Mendelssohn wanted to demonstrate that Judaism 'could possess the highest religious consciousness', based in universal reason, and not divine revelation.<sup>97</sup> By doing so, Mendelssohn wanted to achieve two of his aims: to harmonise the Enlightenment ideal of reason with traditional Judaism, and to dispel the fear of secular knowledge. If Judaism is a religion of reason, then no rational inquiry can threaten it because its beliefs will not be denied but will be demonstrated.<sup>98</sup> Thus Jews should have no qualms in educating and immersing themselves in secular knowledge.<sup>99</sup> In this way, Mendelssohn used education yet again as a tool to bridge the gap between the insular Jewish community and the general European society around it.

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Even Mendelssohn's defence of the idea of the immortality of the soul, at first glance a profoundly mysterious and non-rational doctrine, displays his complete commitment to rationalism. Mendelssohn's thesis on the immortality of the soul is presented primarily in *Phaedon, or the Death of Socrates*, published in 1767. *Phaedon* presents the reader with Socrates' last conversation before his death, regarding the essence of the soul and the concept of an afterlife. Mendelssohn, through Socrates, states at the beginning that God planted 'a rational soul' in human beings.<sup>100</sup> From the outset, then, Mendelssohn presents his two central contentions about the soul: it has been given by God, and it is rational. Furthermore, once it has been created it must continue to exist, for, Mendelssohn claims 'nature can neither create nor annihilate'.<sup>101</sup> Thus the soul, like anything else, cannot be lost completely, for that would necessitate 'a leap from existence into nothing; a transition which is inconsistent with nature'.<sup>102</sup>

However, there is a more fundamental reason for the immortality of the soul. Mendelssohn argued that the purpose God set for each soul He created was to reach perfection, through perceiving the complete truth.<sup>103</sup> However, Mendelssohn asserted, due to the 'ills' of the body in life man can only decipher impressions 'mere sensations, not truths'.<sup>104</sup> The soul is unable to contemplate truth in this life.<sup>105</sup> If the soul died with the body, life would have no meaning because the soul would be doomed to fail in its task of reaching truth and perfection.<sup>106</sup> It is therefore irrational to suppose that the soul and its mission are ended by death and such an occurrence 'could not be the design of the Creator'.<sup>107</sup> Rather, Mendelssohn argued that after death, which is 'the separation of the soul from the body'; the soul must perceive the undiluted truth and wisdom denied it in life and therefore fulfil its task.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, the soul must be immortal and there must be an afterlife in order to fulfil man's ultimate aim. The afterlife gives life purpose and meaning. Man must 'prepare himself in this world' in

order to obtain pure truth and thorough perfection in the next life.<sup>109</sup>

All this would suggest that a Mendelssohnian view of Judaism, rational though it is, does not create a life without meaning and significance as depicted by Weber. According to Mendelssohn this life does have meaning: it is a preparation for the full recognition of truth and the achievement of perfection in the afterlife. However, it is important to ask why Mendelssohn chose Socrates as the vehicle for presenting his theory of the soul and the afterlife. For Mendelssohn, Socrates is the personification not of faith but of reason.<sup>110</sup> For Mendelssohn, the afterlife, like all other doctrines, is not a matter of belief but of rational deduction. Once again in Mendelssohn's thought, reason reigns supreme and faith is relegated, even irrelevant.

Ultimately, Mendelssohn wanted to prove that 'the central religious tenants - God's existence and Providence, and the immortality of the soul - can be demonstrated rationally'.<sup>111</sup> His intention was to stop the temptation he saw amongst Jews to renounce their faith in order to become part of German society by accepting the teaching of reason and the Enlightenment. He wanted to show that it was possible to be both a traditional Jew and an Eighteenth century rationalist.

However, in rooting Judaism in reason, Mendelssohn's created a Judaism that Weber later described as the modern condition. Mendelssohn's Judaism had lost the mystery of supernatural belief and transcendent faith that gave meaning and significance to life. It was a Judaism philosophically acceptable to Enlightenment thinkers, but without the awesome and inspiring other-worldliness that characterised traditional Judaism. In Weber's words, it was a Judaism 'without genuinely new prophetic truths 'though Jews remained in search of 'absolute experience and spiritual wholeness'.<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusion

'No era has presented the Jew with a greater challenge to his traditional beliefs and way of life than the modern period'.<sup>113</sup> The profound changes taking place in Europe throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries changed the political and religious outlook that continued and developed well into the eighteenth.<sup>114</sup> The belief that 'reason was the supreme judge and arbiter of all human affairs', the rejection of dogma and the belief in progress, had a profound influence on the thinkers of the time. They pressed for the rationalisation of society and in the process, argued Weber, promoted the 'disenchantment of

the world' he later identified<sup>115</sup>I have argued here that Moses Mendelssohn was one such figure.

Moses Mendelssohn attempted to reconcile religion, specifically Judaism and reason. He sought to 'win respect and recognition for the Jews and Judaism' and ensure that the Jews emerged from their 'separate social and cultural existence'.<sup>116</sup> He tried to create a political and intellectual context in which Jews could 'live a meaningful and creative life as a Jew in the modern world'.<sup>117</sup> In doing so Mendelssohn created a religion that contained every ingredient needed to establish the modern condition described by Weber. Traditionally, religion responded to 'people's cosmic wonderment and anxieties'. Mendelssohn's Judaism responded to their Enlightenment sensibilities and political aspirations. He disregarded the need for the numinous and mysterious.<sup>118</sup> By disqualifying the notion of a 'revealed religion', and instead rooting Judaism in a reason based revealed law; Mendelssohn created a religion that facilitated the conditions Weber observed in modernity a century later. He may have succeeded in 'bridging the Jewish world and European culture', but it came at a cost.<sup>119</sup>

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Whether he intended, or was even aware of the impact of his interpretation of Judaism is uncertain. What can be established is that the factors and forces that once protected 'the cohesion of the Jewish people and the continuity of its doctrines were radically changed by the movement of the Jew in the modern world', a change that was propelled forward by Mendelssohn himself.<sup>120</sup> The post-Enlightenment world promotes the rationalised and impoverished existence that Weber described. Mendelssohn aligned himself with the movements that brought this about that were so influential in his context. Thus, whatever his best intentions, his approach led the way to a 'non-theological, non-mystical version of Judaism' and the movement away from traditional Jewish life that he cherished and advocated.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Whimster, in *The Essential Weber: A Reader* (New York, 2004), 4

<sup>2</sup> L.A. Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (London, 1991), 4

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

<sup>4</sup> S. Whimster, in *The Essential Weber: A Reader* (New York, 2004), 208

<sup>5</sup> L.A. Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (London, 1991) 186, 150

<sup>6</sup> A. Sica, in (ed) S. Turner *A Cambridge Companion to Weber*, (Cambridge, 2002) 45

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 110

<sup>8</sup> S. Whimster, in (ed) R. Schroeder, *Max Weber: Democracy and Modernisation* (London, 1998), 63-64

<sup>9</sup> W. Schluchter, *The Rise of Western Rationalism* (London, 1981), 256

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 262

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 255

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 256

<sup>13</sup> L.A. Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (London, 1991), 224

<sup>14</sup> M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, Ed. G. Roth, and C. Wittich, (Berkeley, 1978), 506

<sup>15</sup> D. Outram, *The Enlightenment*, (Cambridge, 2005), 1

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>17</sup> D. Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton 2008), 3; J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2001), vi

<sup>18</sup> A. Thompson, *Bodies of Thought* (Oxford, 2008), 14

<sup>19</sup> D. Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton, 2008), 3

<sup>20</sup> D. Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2005), 110

<sup>21</sup> J. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford, 2006), 63

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> A. Thompson, *Bodies of Thought* (Oxford, 2008), 13

<sup>24</sup> E. Cassir, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 2009), 173

<sup>25</sup> S. Noveck, *Great Jewish Personalities in Modern Times* (New York, 1961), 5

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> L. Loemker, *Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters* (Reidel, 1969), 717

<sup>28</sup> E. Cassir, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 2009), 166

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 164

- <sup>30</sup> J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2001) 338
- <sup>31</sup> D. Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2005), 115
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 10
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 2
- <sup>36</sup> D. Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment* (Princeton, 2008), 6
- <sup>37</sup> A. Sutcliffe, A., *Judaism and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003), 11
- <sup>38</sup> D. Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment* (Princeton, 2008), 170
- <sup>39</sup> D. Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2005), 116
- <sup>40</sup> S. Feiner, in (ed) S. Feiner, and D. Sorkin, *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, (London, 2001) 189
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 39; J. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford, 2006), 27
- <sup>42</sup> Y. Yovel, *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche and the Jews* (Cambridge, 1998), 7
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> J. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford, 2006), 37
- <sup>45</sup> See A. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (London, 1973)
- <sup>46</sup> S. Noveck, *Great Jewish Personalities in Modern Times* (New York, 1961), 7
- <sup>47</sup> M. Pelli, *The Age of the Haskalah* (Lieden 1979), 15
- <sup>48</sup> D. Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2005), 3
- <sup>49</sup> S. Feiner, *Haskalah and History* (London, 2004) 11
- <sup>50</sup> D. Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment* (Princeton, 2008) 167; A. Altmann, in (ed) J. Reinharg, and W. Schatzberg *The Jewish Response to German Culture*, (New England, 1985), 24
- <sup>51</sup> A. Jospe, in (ed and translated) E. Jospe, *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings*, (New York, 1975), 24
- <sup>52</sup> A. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (London 1973), 195
- <sup>53</sup> S. Noveck, *Great Jewish Personalities in Modern Times* (New York, 1961), 11
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 15
- <sup>55</sup> A. Arkush, in (ed) M. Morgan, P.E Gordon, *Modern Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2007), 36
- <sup>56</sup> A. Jospe, in (ed and translated) E. Jospe *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings* (New York, 1975), 5
- <sup>57</sup> L. Dupre, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (Yale, 2004), 8
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 109
- <sup>59</sup> A. Jospe, in (ed and translated) E. Jospe *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings* (New York, 1975), 14
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 15
- <sup>61</sup> A. Altmann, in (ed) J. Reinharg, and W. Schatzberg *The Jewish Response to German Culture*, (New England, 1985), 18
- <sup>62</sup> E. Shmueli, *Seven Jewish Cultures: A Reinterpretation of Jewish History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1990), 167-169
- <sup>63</sup> A. Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (Albany, 1994), xiii
- <sup>64</sup> D. Paterson, in (ed) A. Altmann, *Between East and West: Essays Dedicated to the Memory of Bela Horowitz* (London, 1959), 50
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 153
- <sup>66</sup> M. Mendelssohn, 'On the Curtailment of Jewish Juridical Autonomy', trans. M. Samuels, in (ed) P.R. Mendes-Flohr, and J. Reinharg, *The Jew in the Modern World* (Oxford, 1980), 77-78
- <sup>67</sup> A. Arkush, in (ed) M.I. Morgan, P.E. Gordon, *Modern Jewish Philosophy*, (Cambridge 2007), 38
- <sup>68</sup> Y. Yovel, *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche and the Jews*, (Cambridge 1998), 11
- <sup>69</sup> M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* trans. T. Parsons, (New York 1958), 54
- <sup>70</sup> A. Jospe, in *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings*, Ed. and translated E. Jospe, (New York 1975), 25
- <sup>71</sup> F. Cranz, 'Search for Light and Right: An Epistle to Moses Mendelssohn', in (ed) P.R. Mendes-Flohr, and J. Reinharg *The Jew in the Modern World*, (USA 1980), 83
- <sup>72</sup> D. Paterson, in (ed) A. Altmann, *Between East and West: Essays Dedicated to the Memory of Bela Horowitz* (London 1959), 153
- <sup>73</sup> A. Arkush, in (ed) M.I. Morgan, and P.E. Gordon, *Modern Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge 2007), 37
- <sup>74</sup> A. Jospe, in *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings*, Ed. and translated E. Jospe, (New York 1975), 11; A. Altmann, 'Introduction' in M. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. A. Arkush, (London 1983), 3
- <sup>75</sup> A. Altmann, 'Introduction' in Mendelssohn, M., *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism*, Trans. A. Arkush, (USA 1983), 14
- <sup>76</sup> M. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. A. Arkush, (London 1983), 40
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

- <sup>79</sup> A. Jospe, in *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings*, Ed. and translated E. Jospe, (New York 1975), 27
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 57
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 59
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 51
- <sup>85</sup> M. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. A. Arkush, (London 1983), 89
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 90
- <sup>87</sup> M. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. A. Arkush, (London 1983), 90
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 93
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 93
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 94
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 97
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 100
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 118
- <sup>94</sup> A. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A biographical study* (London, 1973), 544
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>96</sup> M.A. Meyer, 'Modernity as a crisis for the Jews' *Modern Judaism* (9/2, May 1989), 151-164
- <sup>97</sup> Y. Yovel, *The Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews* (Cambridge 1998), 10
- <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 12
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 13
- <sup>100</sup> M. Mendelssohn, *Phaedon or the Death of Socrates*, trans. C. Cullen (London, 1789), 17
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 80
- <sup>103</sup> A. Jospe, in *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings*, Ed. and translated E. Jospe, (New York 1975), 180
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 29
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 38
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 179
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 180
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 25, 30
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 40
- <sup>110</sup> C. Cullen, 'Preface', in M. Mendelssohn, *Phaedon, or the Death of Socrates* (London, 1789), 6
- <sup>111</sup> A. Jospe, in *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings*, Ed. and translated E. Jospe, (New York 1975), 28
- <sup>112</sup> L.A. Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (London, 1991), 224
- <sup>113</sup> S. Noveck, *Great Jewish Personalities in Modern Times* (New York, 1961), viii
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 3
- <sup>115</sup> A. Sutcliffe, *Judaism and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003), 12
- <sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 4; D. Feldman in (ed) B. Cheyette and L. Marcus, *Modernity, Culture and the Jew* (Cambridge, 1988), 172
- <sup>117</sup> A full analysis of Mendelssohn and Lessing's friendship is beyond the scope of this article, however, see A. Jospe, in (ed and translated) E. Jospe *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings* (New York, 1975), 43 and *passim*.
- <sup>118</sup> Y. Yovel, *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche and the Jews* (Cambridge, 1998), 14
- <sup>119</sup> A. Jospe, in *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings*, Ed. and translated E. Jospe, (New York 1975), 39-40
- <sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 43
- <sup>121</sup> A. Altmann, 'Introduction', in M. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism* (London 1983) 28

# *The early history of the Hambro Synagogue of London, 1704 – 1750*

RABBI DAVID KATANKA

There was an undercurrent of mixed emotions on Shabbat 25 April 1936, for it was the last Shabbat on which worshippers would come to pray in the Hambro Synagogue, Adler Street, E1 (formerly Union Street).<sup>1</sup> The Torah reading was divided into many sections so that as many people as possible might take an active part and for the rest of their lives have a vivid memory of this historic service. The Valedictory Address of Rev. Wolf Esterson, Minister for 38 years, expressed the thought that the march of time had crushed one of the links of Anglo-Jewry with the early history of London's Jewish Community. He asked the congregation to accept the position and join the services at the Great Synagogue, Dukes Place (from which they had broken away at the start of the eighteenth century) but never to cease to pray that for a third time a new synagogue might be built.

My grandfather and great uncle Harry and Saul Katanka were both members from the 1920s. Saul was a noted contributor on the beautiful illuminated address presented to Rev. Esterson on achieving twenty-five years' service.<sup>2</sup> This is in the possession of his daughter Mrs M Lew, wife of the late Dayan Lew. Saul's daughter Sarah is recorded as the last bride to marry at the Synagogue.<sup>3</sup> My late uncle Myer (Michael) Katanka was a regular officiant at the famous Shabbat afternoon childrens' services organised by Rev Esterson and through his encouragement would often read Haftarat well before his barmitsva. My family connections encouraged me to carry out this research.

The first Hambro Synagogue was opened in Magpie Alley, Fenchurch Street, in 1707. This closed in 1893 because it was no longer financially viable in that location as many of the families had left the area. It was demolished and

moved to a fresh area. The second synagogue was erected in Union Street in 1899. After its closure it became the premises of the Jewish Free Reading Room. In the interval between buildings the congregation held their own services in the Vestry Room of the Great Synagogue. Unfortunately, by this point, much of the valuable Hambro property deposited at the Central Synagogue, Great Portland Street, was damaged or lost. This study will address a much earlier period, the first half of the eighteenth century, and the foundation and early years of the Hambro Synagogue.<sup>4</sup>



*Interior of the Hambro Synagogue in 1892*

## The Great Synagogue and the origins of the Hambro

Prior to the establishment of the Hambro there were only two congregations in London, the Spanish and Portuguese, whose synagogue was at Bevis Marks, and the Ashkenazi synagogue in Mitre Square, Dukes Place.<sup>5</sup> Although Hambro was the third post-expulsion Jewish congregation in London, in name and tradition it came from the cradle of the London Ashkenazi community.<sup>6</sup> Just as English Sephardim were originally an offshoot of the Amsterdam kehilla, their Ashkenazi brothers and sisters were branches of the German congregation of Hamburg. Driven westward by the persecutions of Khmelnytsky, they came to England via Hamburg. They brought with them a loyalty to that city which they preserved for several generations. The wealthier amongst them even retained seats in the synagogue in Hamburg which they bequeathed to their children. The first Rabbi of what became the Great Synagogue, Rabbi Judah Anshel Cohen, was chosen from that city. He was at loggerheads with Abraham London or Reb Aberle, lay leader of the synagogue and a learned man. One day the tallit which the Rabbi was wearing was seen to be pasul. One of the tsitsit had been deliberately cut off by the shammas acting on the instructions of Reb Aberle (this had been done to convey an evil omen, for so is treated the tallit in which a corpse is wrapped). Soon after, Rabbi Judah fled to another position in Rotterdam. This synagogue, later known as the Great, never had the title Hambro/Hamburg, probably because it did not stick too rigidly to Hamburg traditions. In contrast the Hambro strictly followed Minhag Polin (the usage of the Polish Jews of Hamburg) from its beginnings.<sup>7</sup>

*The key communal positions were filled by relatives and friends of the Rabbi who seem to have used their influence less for communal benefit and more to injure competitors in business.*

The next Rabbi to serve was Rabbi Uri Pheivish, or to anglicise, Aaron Hart. He was a brother of Moses Hart, later lay head of the Ashkenazim, and one of twelve Jewish brokers in London. He won the lottery, bought a house in Isleworth and later lived in Richmond. R. Hart



Front page of *Maase Rav* by Dayan Hollischau

had not been on good terms with the previous Rabbi so it was thought right to give him a trial period of three years. As he seemed to get along with the difficult element of the congregation, he was soon made permanent. R. Hart married a daughter of Samuel of Schidlow, Rabbi of Fürth, known for his commentary *Bet Shmuel* on *Even Haezer*, one of the four volumes of Shulhan Arukh. The key communal positions were filled by relatives and friends of the Rabbi who seem to have used their influence less for communal benefit and more to injure competitors in business.<sup>8</sup>

Early in his rabbinate murmurs were heard from the most observant.<sup>9</sup> One morning they learned that that, unlike in Hamburg, there was a question regarding the kashrut of London milk which was never supervised and might sometimes contain small quantities of asses' milk. When approached, R. Hart had said that his influence was not strong enough to change local custom. It was further reported with concern that Reb Aberle had been seen drinking in a coffee house on the Fast of Esther. This had led to others taking his example and eating publicly on the Fast of Tammuz. Reb Aberle excused himself by saying that his doctor had ordered him to eat, but in any event

had he to eat he should have done so privately. The reprisal soon came.<sup>10</sup>

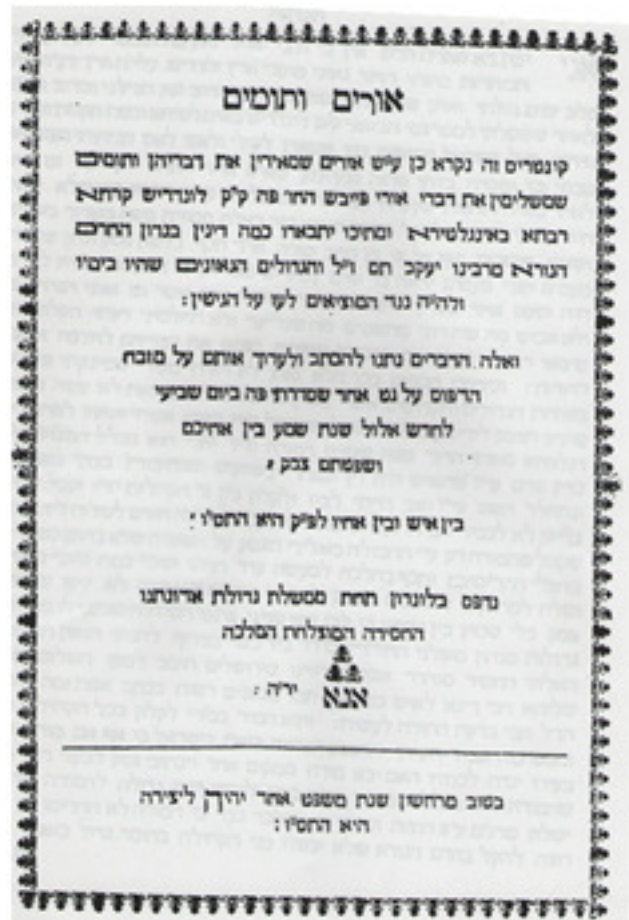
## The Katz get controversy

In 1704, Mordecai Hamburger (also known as Marcus Moses), Abraham Nathan and Samson Mears attempted to convert Nathan's house in St Mary Axe into a synagogue.<sup>11</sup> This was frustrated by a combined opposition of the Sephardim and the established Ashkenazi community, who had them summoned to attend the Court of Aldermen of the City of London. The court ordered them to cease. Cecil Roth suggested that the building may have been intended to function solely as a Bet Hamidrash on the model of the Hamburg Klaus.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless it was a threat to the establishment. It was also thought that an additional synagogue might cause anti-Jewish feeling amongst the general population, which was a concern during this period.<sup>13</sup>

Let us examine another tension that fanned the flames of inter-communal strife. Marcus Moses was a gem dealer and so prosperous that he was considered a dangerous rival by Reb Aberle. In addition, years earlier, both men had been rivals for Freudchen, the daughter of Glückel of Hameln, whose memoirs entitle her to be called the German-Jewish Pepys. Eventually these pressures exploded.<sup>14</sup>

In August 1705, R. Hart arranged a conditional get (bill of divorce) for Anshel Cohen (Katz). Anshel was heavily in debt as he was an inveterate gambler. He was likely to end up in prison because, on this occasion, his brother Berl could not bail him out. His only option was to sail for the West Indies, but he wanted to prevent his wife becoming an aguna and thereby unable to remarry should Anshel disappear for good without proof of his death. The get was signed and sealed, presented and torn according to Jewish law presided over by R. Hart.<sup>15</sup>

When Mordecai Hamburger heard that R. Hart had arranged what was considered a difficult and complex conditional get, he said publicly that the Rabbi was not capable of arranging such a document and consequently it was worthless.<sup>16</sup> This was naturally offensive to the Katz family and led to the Rabbi warning him that were there to be anymore slander, he would be placed in herem (a ban of excommunication). Most bans were for 30 or 60 days in order to encourage the offender to change his position. In this case, however, the most serious ban possible had been chosen, the herem of Rabbenu Tam.<sup>17</sup> This edict says that 'any Jew who casts doubt on the validity of any divorce after it has been delivered would be



Front page, *Urim VeTumim* by R. Aaron Hart

subject to a most drastic herem. He and his family would be shunned until such time as the High Priest stands dressed in the Urim and Tummim [part of the High Priest's vestments]'. This was generally understood to mean until the times of the Messiah.<sup>18</sup>

R. Hart convened his Beth Din, examined witnesses and confirmed evidence. Mordecai Hamburger declined a request to attend the court. In due course he was accused of slandering Aaron Hart by saying he was incapable of arranging a legally valid divorce, and consequently the Beth Din pronounced Mordecai Hamburger to be under the herem of Rabbenu Tam.<sup>19</sup>

The herem started just before Rosh Hashana and Mordecai was shunned. Wherever he appeared there were cries of 'apikorus' – heretic. His business was at a standstill. He was even denied the privilege of giving charity, as the paupers no longer visited him. He was not called to the Torah over the High Holidays and he was not allowed to have his newly born daughter named. When the festival of Succot arrived, the consignment of etrogim ordered by the Ashkenazim did not come in time. The congregation were given a gift etrog from the Sephardim

but Mordecai was not allowed to use it. He was the talk of Jewish Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Realizing the gravity of the situation, he begged R. Hart to remove the ban. He offered to retract and guaranteed a payment of £500 if only he could be called to the Torah during the Festivals. R. Hart might have complied but for two factors. First, Reb Aberle opposed any compromise, and secondly, the herem of Rabbenu Tam could not be revoked. Rabbanim from the continent soon became involved, including former London Rabbi, R. Judah Leib Cohen of Rotterdam, who saw the opportunity of avenging himself on his former enemy Reb Aberle. Another was the Haham Tsevi, who was indignant of the treatment given to such a distinguished man.<sup>21</sup>

## Foundation of the Hambro

Reb Aberle would not relent. Instead of annulling the decree, he demanded the ban be confirmed, so that when the time arrived Mordecai Hamburger should be refused proper burial. At this point the Sefardi community enacted a rule that Tudescos (non-Sephardim) were forbidden to enter their synagogue. Now a major problem had arisen: where would Mordecai worship? Mordecai had only one option. Unsuccessful at making peace, he opened his own Synagogue in his house in Magpie Alley, Fenchurch Street. The Moravian Dayan Johanan Hollischau was appointed as Rav as well as religious tutor to Hamburger's children. A piece of land was acquired in Hoxton on a 150-year lease at a rent of ten shillings per annum and the story is well documented in the collection of Hebrew pamphlets *Maase Rav* by Dayan Hollischau and *Urim ve Tumim* by R. Hart.<sup>22</sup> From now on we will see how, in the words of Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz, 'Anglo-Jewry stood on three pillars: Hambro, the Great Synagogue and Bevis Marks'.<sup>23</sup>

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We are well informed about Mordecai's later life.<sup>24</sup> The herem period was difficult for business but it later picked up. Six years later, in 1712, again in financial trouble, he decided to go to India, leaving his wife with nine children and pregnant with a tenth. He made himself a second

fortune in India. He was entrusted with the fashioning of a jewel to honour Lieutenant John Roach after his recapture of Tiruvottiyuron 12 December 1717. In 1718 an action was brought against him by Chevalier Pierre Dullivier, former Governor of Pondicherry. Mordecai was accused of overcharging Dullivier's friends. Mordecai showed that his prices compared favourably with those in Europe and he had made no secret profit. He was acquitted.<sup>25</sup>

When Mordecai visited France in 1712, Thomas Pitt, grandfather of Prime Minister William Pitt, sent him to Paris with a model of a great diamond in his possession, probably the famous Pitt diamond or Regent diamond, which was eventually sold to the Regent of France for £135,000. There is the possibility that Mordecai effected the sale. A portrait by Kneller of Thomas Pitt depicts the diamond in his hat and shows him wearing a specially enlarged heel on one of his shoes to carry the stone.<sup>26</sup>

## A new building

After ten years away, Mordecai returned to London, and in 1725 built a synagogue in the garden of his home in Magpie Alley, also known as Church Row, off Fenchurch Street. Once again the Sefardim of Bevis Marks and the congregation of Dukes Place took exception to the new synagogue.<sup>27</sup> Two petitions were presented to the Lord Mayor and the Court of Aldermen, one by Moses Hart on behalf of Dukes Place and the other by the parishioners. Moses took the line that the division of membership would weaken the community and also the building so near to St. Katherine Coleman Parish Church would block up Magpie Alley, which was less than three foot wide. Counsel in response merely advised them to wait until they could show it was a public nuisance. Hamburger offered the parishioners £100 immediately and £20 each year for 20 years if they would drop their opposition. He may also have appealed to the King, whose permission is prominently noted on the foundation stone. The Jews of the other synagogues were warned not to stir up any more opposition and the matter rested.<sup>28</sup>

The Synagogue remained on this site until 1892 and is now occupied by the Fenchurch Station Chambers. The building was a distinguished one, although its architect is unknown.<sup>29</sup> We do not know the outer appearance but fortunately some photographs were taken before it was demolished. It was similar to Bevis Marks although smaller. Possibly because of the initial differences with the Great, a Sefardi design was preferred. Others say it was modelled on the 'Hamburger Schul' on the Neuer Steinweg in Hamburg.<sup>30</sup> It was furnished tastefully,

commensurate with the little group of gem merchants who controlled it. There was a central bima and seating for 218 men and 55 women in a gallery on three sides. The benches had no cushions. The Wardens sat in the box between the ark and bima. There was a large skylight in the roof. There was a recess above the ark and there was an urn, probably the Ner Tamid. The building was candlelit, with four large candlesticks on each corner of the bima as well as two further reader's candlesticks at the front.<sup>31</sup>

When the old building was excavated before the new commercial buildings were erected on the site of the old Hambro, the architect Delissa Joseph discovered the foundation stone. The Hebrew inscription, roughly translated, reads as follows: 'O Lord our God. This multitude who have made ready to build You a house to Your holy Name, from Your hand it is, and everything is Yours. By permission of our lord, the King, the mighty, the pious, the meek George, May God bless him. Tuesday the third of Sivan in the year "And I will be unto them for a small sanctuary".<sup>32</sup> Zev Wolf the son of R. Isaac Bimas of Bomsla 5485.<sup>33</sup> As he came from Bomsal in Prague, this Zev was known as Wolf Prager or Benjamin Isaac. He was an original Warden of Hambro in 1725 along with Founder Mordecai Hamburger, Abraham Nathan and Sampson Moses. He was reputed to be the son-in-law of Mordecai Hamburger. This stone was eventually taken to the New Hambro and after its closure was kept in Woburn House from where it disappeared.<sup>34</sup>

## Communal peace restored

For almost fifty years after the herem was pronounced, the Great Synagogue considered the Hambro to be under a ban of excommunication.<sup>35</sup> In 1722 Dukes Place had offered to readmit members who had left for the Hambro if they made peace within three months. Regulations forbade attendance at rival synagogues. The penalty was the denial of religious honours at celebrations under the auspices of the congregation, for example circumcisions, weddings and so on. Even Purim gifts could not be accepted from them (a proclamation was made to this effect every Fast of Esther).<sup>36</sup>

When Mordecai returned to India in 1731, the Hambro was transferred to his son-in-law Benjamin Isaac. It is not clear why he went back as he was nearly 70 years old. The five-month journey on one of the East India Company 480-ton ships could hardly be attractive at his age. Probably he wanted to strengthen his business interests so that one of his sons could take over. After the death of Hamburger the estate went to Wolf and it is clear from his

will dated 1745 that he eventually inherited Mordecai's residence. In his will he refers to the synagogue as 'my' synagogue. At his death in 1750 the property went to his son Henry Isaac and the synagogue was called the 'Henry Isaac Synagogue'.<sup>37</sup>

In the same year a new law was made rescinding the solemn herem pronounced in 1706 against Mordecai Hamburger and extended to his friends and supporters. It was confirmed in 1756 when Moses Hart, leader of Dukes Place, was found to have left a legacy to the synagogue in opposition to his own. In 1758, on the appointment of Rabbi Hart Lyon to Dukes Place, his authority was recognised and accepted by Hambro who shared his services and contributed to his salary. A reciprocal gesture took place in 1773 when Henry Isaac, son of Benjamin, now head of the Hambro, left a legacy of £100 to the poor of the Parish of St. Katherine Coleman at the discretion of the Gabbai of Shoemakers Row (Dukes Place) and a further £100 to the Dukes Place Synagogue. From then on the two communities worked together on common projects such as shehita, and in 1759 the Hambro agreed to contribute a third to the cost of looking after the Ashkenazi poor of London.<sup>38</sup>

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## *The conflict between the Great and the Hambro never fully died down.*

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The conflict between the Great and the Hambro never fully died down. Controversy between the two synagogues erupted in 1765 when there was an argument about who should serve as Rabbi: Rabbi Israel Meshullam Zalman, son of Rabbi Jacob Emden, or Rabbi David Tevele Schiff. This was an argument that even affected Portsmouth, then the largest provincial community. Feeling ran so strong it led to a rival synagogue being opened up there!<sup>39</sup>

## Epilogue

A few highlights of the later history of the Hambro are worthy of mention. Among the most famous ministers to serve at the Hambro was Rev. Herman Hoelzel, appointed in 1845. He was Principal Reader until 1852. He was an acknowledged Hebrew scholar with testimonials from four distinguished rabbis, including Rabbi Moses Sofer of Pressburg (Hatam Sofer). He wrote an English translation of all four volumes of Shulchan Aruch. Later he became Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler's deputy in Australia. Rev. Samuel Marcus Gollancz was Reader from 1854 to 1899. He studied under Rabbi Akiva Eger and Rabbi Israel Lipshitz (Tiferet Yisrael). His son, Rabbi Sir Hermann

Gollancz, was the first Rabbi to be knighted. Rev. Wolf Esterson took over in 1899 as Second Reader and as Minister a couple of years later. Chief Rabbi Hertz said of him: 'He worthily closed the roll of religious leaders and guides of that great and historic Synagogue. He was a quiet, humble, untiring servant of the community.'<sup>40</sup>

The Hambro was an original constituent member of the United Synagogue in 1870, but even before that difficulties had arisen as influential members moved from the City and new communities formed in other parts of London. The Hambro tried to amalgamate with the Great in 1863 but the Great did not wish to take on the financial burden. The Hambro's building closed in November 1892 and the congregation moved its services to the vestry of the Great Synagogue. At the Valedictory Service the curtain and bima cover were those used on Yom Kippur.<sup>41</sup> The Service concluded with the passages recited on a death-bed and at the end of Neilah. Many older members were in tears.

The second Hambro or New Hambro took seven years of struggle and argument to come about. It was opened in 1899 just before Rosh Hashanah and proved highly popular at first. In 1925 the Congregation celebrated its Bicentenary in style with a banquet and ball at the famous Bonns Hotel, Great Prescott Street, East London.<sup>42</sup> Chief Rabbi Hertz remarked: 'It had been said that the Hambro was "Ichabod" – its glory had departed, but the great men of Anglo-Jewry wished to give it a new sphere of labour and make it a power for spiritual good.'

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*The mahogany doors taken from the old Hambro Synagogue finally closed in 1936. Hambro had come full circle when it amalgamated with the Great Synagogue.*

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The mahogany doors taken from the old Hambro Synagogue finally closed in 1936. Hambro had come full circle when it amalgamated with the Great Synagogue. Aubrey Newman notes that when the future of the Hambro was in doubt even before the foundation of the United Synagogue in 1870 the delegates bound themselves to transfer the name Hambro to the first Synagogue to be founded after its closure.<sup>43</sup> A resolution to that effect was formally written into the first council meeting minutes. A little late maybe, but the idea could be implemented today!<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 May 1936, 14

<sup>2</sup> Hambro Synagogue collection (HS) of Mrs M Lew with thanks

<sup>3</sup> HS Marriage records

<sup>4</sup> W. Esterson, Bicentenary of the Hambro Synagogue (London 1925), 7

<sup>5</sup> W. Esterson, Bicentenary of the Hambro Synagogue (London 1925), 4

<sup>6</sup> L Wolf, 'Origin of the Hambro Synagogue', *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 November 1892, 7

<sup>7</sup> Laws of the congregation 5605 (1845): 'The form of prayer through the year shall be in conformity to Minhag Polin as already established by the congregation from the earliest period.'

<sup>8</sup> C. Roth, *History of the Great Synagogue 1690-1940*, (London 1950), 33

<sup>9</sup> G.W. Buss, 'Herem of Rabbenu Tam in Queen Anne's London' *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 20, 140

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 139

<sup>12</sup> C. Roth, *History of the Great Synagogue 1690-1940*, (London 1950), 36

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 36

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 37-38

<sup>15</sup> G.W. Buss, 'Herem of Rabbenu Tam in Queen Anne's London', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 20, 140

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Jacob ben Meir, grandson of Rashi (1100-1171). A major scholar amongst the Tosafists in France.

<sup>18</sup> G.W. Buss, 'Herem of Rabbenu Tam in Queen Anne's London', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society* 20, 140

<sup>19</sup> For a later herem in England see 'The Great Secession', in M. Persoff, *Faith against Reason* (London 2008), 9-18. Thanks to Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple. The 1791 Takkanot of the Great Synagogue (number 35) forbade any Chief Rabbi to pronounce a herem even with the permission of the community. Thanks to Rabbi Shlomo Katanka. Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler and all his successors were appointed on the condition they would not issue a herem.

<sup>20</sup> G.W. Buss, 'Herem of Rabbenu Tam in Queen Anne's London' *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 20, 142

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 143

<sup>22</sup> First book entirely in Hebrew to be published in England (1706)

<sup>23</sup> *Jewish Guardian* 3 June 1925, 5

<sup>24</sup> R.J. D'arcy 'The family of Mordecai Hamburger' Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England, 57ff

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>27</sup> A.S. Diamond, 'Hambro Synagogue' Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England 21, 58

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 59

<sup>29</sup> E Jamilly, 'Synagogue Art and Architecture', in Salman S Levin, *A century of Anglo-Jewish life 1870-1970* (London 1970), 75

<sup>30</sup> C Roth, *History of the Great Synagogue 1690-1940* (London 1950), 115

<sup>31</sup> Photographs in the Jewish Museum

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<sup>32</sup> Yehezkel 11:16. The numerical value of the letters in the verse amounted to the number of the year.

<sup>33</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 August 1893, 9

<sup>34</sup> Told to me by Elkan Levy

<sup>35</sup> C. Roth *History of the Great Synagogue*, (London 1950) 119, 288

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 119

<sup>37</sup> W. Esterson Bicentenary of the Hambro Synagogue, 5

<sup>38</sup> C. Roth *History of the Great Synagogue* (London 1950), 120

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 128

<sup>40</sup> *Jewish Chronicle* 4 July 1958, 27

<sup>41</sup> *Jewish Chronicle* 11 November 1893, 8

<sup>42</sup> *Jewish Chronicle* 5 June 1925, 13

<sup>43</sup> A. Newman *The United Synagogue 1870-1970* (London 1977), 28

<sup>44</sup> Thanks to Erla Zimmels, LSJS librarian, for her help.

# PIONEERING THE ZIONIST MISSION IN THE 21ST CENTURY



For 110 years, JNF has worked tirelessly to develop the State of Israel. Our focus today is on the development of the Negev, an area of land that represents 60% of the country but contains less than 10% of the population. Our projects are helping change the face of the Negev, turning a dry, arid desert green. This is the defining Zionist challenge of the 21st century.

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## Pesah at Alei Tzion - 5771



|                    |                                    |   |  |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Monday 18 April    | <b>Erev Pesah/ Taanit bekhorot</b> | Fast starts<br>Shaharit followed by siyum<br>Last time for eating hamets<br>Last time for burning hamets<br>Minha/Ma'ariv<br>Yom tov begins | 04:04<br>06:50<br>10:40<br>11:50<br>19:30<br>19:48 |
| Tuesday 19 April   | <b>Pesah I</b>                     | Shaharit<br>Sof Zeman Keriat Shema<br>Minha<br>Ma'ariv<br>Candle lighting – day 2   | 09:15<br>09:27<br>19:50<br>20:30<br>20:55          |
| Wednesday 20 April | <b>Pesah II</b>                    | Shaharit<br>Sof Zeman Keriat Shema<br>Minha<br>Ma'ariv and Motsa'ei yom tov   | 09:15<br>09:26<br>19:50<br>20:56                   |
| Thursday 21 April  |                                    | Shaharit<br>Minha/Ma'ariv   | 08:15<br>19:30                                     |
| Friday 22 April    |                                    | Shaharit<br>Minha, Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma'ariv<br>Shabbat begins   | 08:15<br>19:15<br>19:54                            |
| Shabbat 23 April   | <b>Shabbat hol ha'moed</b>         | Rabbi Roselaar's Halakha habura<br>Shacharit<br>Sof Zeman Keriat Shema<br>Minha<br>Ma'ariv and Motsa'ei Shabbat                             | 08:45<br>09:15<br>09:23<br>19:55<br>21:02          |
| Sunday 24 April    |                                    | Shaharit<br>Minha/Ma'ariv<br>Yom tov begins   | 08:15<br>19:30<br>19:58                            |
| Monday 25 April    | <b>Pesah VII</b>                   | Shaharit<br>Sof Zeman Keriat Shema<br>Minha<br>Ma'ariv<br>Candle lighting – day 8   | 09:15<br>09:20<br>20:00<br>20:40<br>21:08          |
| Tuesday 26 April   | <b>Pesah VIII</b>                  | Shaharit<br>Sof Zeman Keriat Shema<br>Minha<br>Ma'ariv and Motsa'ei yom tov   | 09:15<br>09:20<br>20:00<br>21:08                   |