

# DEGEL

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

תשרי תשע"ד  
TISHREI 5774



VOLUME 6 ISSUE 1



# שנה טובה

RABBI DANIEL AND NA'AMAH ROSELAAR  
DEVORAH, ELISHEVA, NETANEL AND CHANANYA  
TOGETHER WITH KEHILLAT ALEI TZION  
WISH THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY A שנה טובה

Anna-Leah and Raph Cooper

Lauren, Simon and Tamar Levy

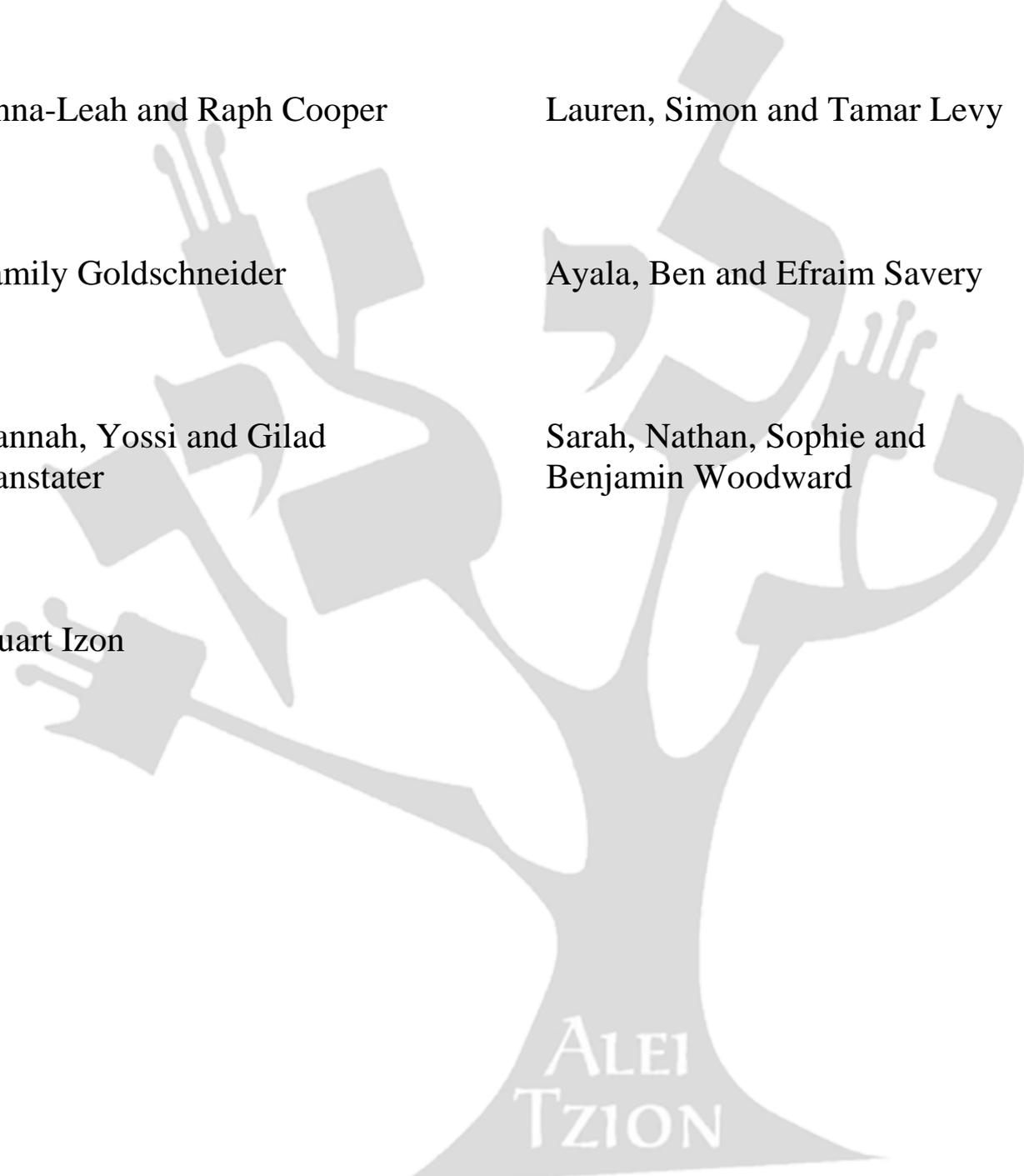
Family Goldschneider

Ayala, Ben and Efraim Savery

Hannah, Yossi and Gilad  
Hanstater

Sarah, Nathan, Sophie and  
Benjamin Woodward

Stuart Izon



ALEI  
TZION

# DEGEL

## CONTENTS

<i>Editor</i> Elana Chesler	4	Notes from the editor ELANA CHESLER
<i>Editorial Team</i> Judith Arkush Simon Levy	5	Voices of Awe: The Sound of the High Holy Days MIRIAM LEVENSON
<i>Design</i> Simon Levy	9	Koren-Sacks Mahzorim – A Review RABBI DANIEL ROSELAAR
<i>Founding Editor</i> Ben Elton	14	Can a Royal Decree be Revoked? BEN FREEDMAN
<i>Front cover illustration</i> Yolanda Rosalki	22	Eschatology, Nationalism and Religious Zionism - Accelerating the End SIMON LEVY
<i>Yolanda Rosalki is an artist and illustrator. For more information on how her designs can enhance your simha, or if you wish to purchase the original of the front cover artwork, email: yolros@googlemail.com</i>	32	‘A child born in Paris in 1933...’ Rav Aharon Lichtenstein at 80 – A Tribute RABBI JOE WOLFSON
	37	Last Words Yael Unterman

## *Notes from the editor*

The High Holy Days present a range of formidable themes to stir our thoughts and challenge us. This year, with an “early” Yom Tov, the important preparation of the Ellul period might otherwise be undermined by the breezy mood of summer. As a result, we have chosen to focus this Rosh Hashana edition of Degel on the twin themes of prayer and repentance.

Prayer, the internal process of judging oneself and baring one’s soul in front of God is relevant to the introspective Jew through the year but intensely so during the Yamim Nora'im when so much time is dedicated to formalized prayer services. Personal experience of prayer is developed and matured throughout life and there is no better time in the year to consider how we can best tap into the rich meaning of prayers and the opportunity they present than Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

Rabbi Roselaar has undertaken a review of the recently published Koren-Sacks Machzor and investigated its utility and Miriam Levenson provides a fascinating understanding of the role that the melodies play in our services.

In terms of repentance, Degel offers two source based treatments, both examining the idea of national repentance. Ben Freedman examines the link between Yom Kippur and Purim and explains how insights from Megillat Esther can hone our understanding of the messages of the Yamim Nora'im. Simon Levy presents an in-depth analysis of the necessity of the role of Teshuva in the Messianic process.

Given the close ties that Alei Tzion has with Yeshivat Har Etzion (Gush) it was only appropriate that we include a tribute to Rav Lichtenstein, the Rosh Yeshiva, who celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday this year and we thank Rabbi Joe Wolfson for his contribution.

We would also like to thank Eve Grubin of the New York University in London and Poet in Residence at the London School of Jewish Studies, who introduced the idea of including a seasonally inspired poem in this edition and we hope you enjoy the verses by Yael Unterman.

I want to close by expressing a personal thanks to all the authors, our sponsors and the editorial team without whom Degel would simply not exist.

We welcome feedback and future submissions. Please contact us at [degel@aleitzion.co.uk](mailto:degel@aleitzion.co.uk)

With best wishes for a K'tiva v'Hatima Tova and a wonderful, uplifting and inspiring Yom Tov.

Shana Tova U'Metuka.

ELANA CHESLER

# *Voices of Awe: The Sound of the High Holy Days*

MIRIAM LEVENSON

Whatever the extent of our intellectual and emotional preparation for the Yamim Nora'im, it is hard to feel that the Days of Awe are truly upon us until we have arrived in shul and heard the first few notes of the powerful High Holy Days melodies. The emotive force of these melodies is such that even if we have no comprehension of the words of the tefillot, it is possible to sit back and let the tunes infuse us with a sense of their meaning.

Those leading the services on the High Holy Days know that there are certain moments when they must stick to the traditional melodies. A number of our Yamim Nora'im tunes have been passed down through the generations for hundreds of years – some reaching as far back as the eighth century. Given our 'religious' commitment to these tunes, it is worth taking some time to discover more about the provenance of these melodies. I would like to focus on answering three questions: firstly, why do we sing in shul at all? – is there a halakhic obligation? Secondly, where do our melodies come from? And finally, how far is there actually a connection between the text of the tefillot, and their respective melodies?

***Singing in Shul: Halakhic obligation or just a nice thing to do?***

---

*In the mythology of many civilisations, music is presented as a divine, celestial gift from the gods*

---

In the mythology of many civilisations, music is presented as a divine, celestial gift from the gods to humanity. Apollo, the Greek god of music, was adopted by the Romans and worshiped as a 'Giver of Music', whose mastery of the golden lyre made him the champion at musical contests between the gods. In a number of other traditions, including Judaism, the angels and planets are described as continually praising God through music. In the blessings preceding the Shema we speak of how the

ministering angels proclaim the word and will of God from 'the heights of the universe':

All of them open their mouths in holiness and purity, **with song and melody**, and bless, praise, glorify and revere, sanctify and ascribe sovereignty to the name of the great, mighty and awesome God...<sup>1</sup>

This angelic praise serves as the paradigm of how we should be conducting our own prayers. If 'song and melody' are the media through which the angels express themselves to God, then we strive to emulate the angelic model by praising God through music.

The idea that God prefers to listen to prayers which are sung can be found in Talmudic literature. The Gemara teaches us that

A man's prayer is heard [by God] only in the Synagogue. For it is said: "To hearken unto the song and to the prayer" (I Kings 8:28). The prayer is to be recited where there is song.<sup>2</sup>

Rashi explains the meaning of the words: "'The prayer is to be recited where there is song' as 'the song of the community and of the officiating Cantor'".<sup>3</sup> The implication that God only 'hears' prayer which is sung demonstrates the high import which is placed on melody in our communication with God. In the Temple itself, which provides the model for our synagogues today, there was a constant atmosphere of music and song, with the Levites chanting each daily psalm according to the unique cantillation of the book of Psalms, and providing instrumental groups for special occasions.

Having established that singing in shul is an ideal method of prayer, we can take this one step further by placing it in the context of the Yamim Nora'im. According to R' Nahman of Breslov,

Music sweetens the harsh judgments. When you sing the words of the prayers in a clear, bright voice, the Shechina is robed in radiant garments,

and this is how the harsh judgments are sweetened.<sup>4</sup>

I think it is possible to understand the words of R' Nahman in two different ways. From our perspective, when we sing tefillot we are giving ourselves more confidence and enthusiasm in our prayer, and strengthening our belief in God that He will forgive us. Another way of looking at this is more literally – that by singing our tefillot, we are increasing God's glory and therefore creating a Kiddush Hashem, which helps our plea for forgiveness to be heard favourably.

The Shulhan Arukh instructs us further that singing alone is not enough; we must also ensure that we are singing the right melodies: *'One should not deviate from the custom of their city even with the tunes or poems said there'*.<sup>5</sup> The Mishna Berura explains that unfamiliar tunes should be avoided because *'it would confuse people'*.<sup>6</sup> This highlights an added dimension to the High Holy Days services: the importance of familiar melodies in helping people find focus and meaning in their prayers. This might seem of little consequence in the grand scheme of things, but the fact that the great halakhists discussed the need to use traditional tunes demonstrates that melody is more than just an accessory to prayer.<sup>7</sup>

### ***An overview: where do our melodies come from?***

Broadly speaking, there are three main categories of melodies that we use today in our tefillot.

The melodies held in highest esteem are the 'Nigunim MiSinai'. These are our most ancient melodies which over time have become inseparable from our prayers, and have developed a degree of 'sanctity' of their own – treated with a level of regard which would have befitted their being given to Moshe at Sinai! High Holy Days melodies in this category include the tune for the Kadish which precedes Musaf and Ne'ila on Yamim Nora'im; tunes for Aleinu, HaMelekh, and Ve'haKohanim; and the famous Kol Nidre melody. The fact that MiSinai tunes are common to all Ashkenazim, from both Eastern and Western European communities, hints to the age of these melodies.

The dissemination of these tunes is attributed to the Maharil (Rav Yaakov Molin), who lived in Mainz during the 1300s – so we know that the MiSinai melodies were already in existence 800 years ago. Not only was the Maharil a major halakhic authority in his time, but he was also a well-known Hazan. In his book Sefer HaMinhagim, the Maharil laid down many instructions detailing the correct way to chant various prayers. A remarkable number of these 800-year-old practices are still followed today.

The second category of synagogue tunes predates even the ancient MiSinai tunes. These are the 'Nusha'ot' –

different musical modes. Whereas MiSinai tunes are complete melodies, a 'nusach' will provide only the skeleton or outline of a melody, allowing a certain amount of freedom for the Hazan. A musical mode is similar to a musical scale; it has a very distinctive mood and style as a result of specific intervals between its notes. In our tefillot, nusach changes according to the mood, atmosphere and intent of the prayer – for example, the nusach used on a Friday night creates an atmosphere of peace and majesty; the nusach used for Selichot expresses a feeling of solemnity. A given nusach can be distinguished by the way in which blessings are concluded, and how the community responds 'Amen'. If a person had, for some reason, completely lost track of the date and time, a regular shul-goer could probably identify the point in the week and time of day just from hearing one berakha of the Amidah. The nusach therefore plays a crucial role in setting the tone of the day, and focusing the concentration of the congregation in an appropriate manner. Most of our nusha'ot can be traced back at least as far as the eighth century C.E. This means that they tend to be common to Oriental, Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews – although the specifics of each nusach have evolved differently between the communities.

---

### ***The fact that the great halakhists discussed the need to use traditional tunes demonstrates that melody is more than just an accessory to prayer.***

---

The third and final group of melodies in our liturgy are the 'modern' compositions. These tunes are set pieces which have been composed over the last few hundred years. Some of these have become so beloved that they are almost regarded as having MiSinai status, but given their relatively recent acceptance into the liturgy they are not universally 'Jewish' or even Ashkenazi melodies. Examples of such pieces in our Yamim Nora'im tefillot include the special High Holy Days tune for Yigdal; the chant for Ve'al Hata'im; the opening of Ashrei preceding Musaf. Different Ashkenazi communities tend to have their own preferred compositions for Unetaneh Tokef – but once again, this varies between communities as it has not been in the liturgy long enough to have gained MiSinai status.

### ***How far do the melodies of the Yamim Nora'im reflect the content of the Tefillot?***

The Gemara in Rosh Hashana discusses the often-asked question of why Hallel is not recited on the High Holy Days:

What is the reason? R' Abbahu replied: The ministering angels said in the presence of the Blessed Holy One: Sovereign of the Universe,

why should Israel not chant hymns of praise before You on New Year and the Day of Atonement? He replied to them: Is it possible that the King should sit on the throne of justice with the books of life and death open before Him, and Israel should chant hymns of praise?<sup>8</sup>

R'Abbahu's reasoning for not singing Hallel on the Yamim Nora'im is that it would be wholly inappropriate to regale God with songs of praise whilst our lives hang in the balance. Along these lines, one would assume that the melodies of the High Holy Days are reflective of the sombre nature of the day. In many instances, this is the case; however there are a number of surprises during the course of tefillah.

The Rosh Hashana prayers commence with a distinctive melody which starts low, winding its way up to a glorious declamation of 'Barekhu'. Each paragraph of Ma'ariv continues this stately and majestic tune, which is based on motifs from the special MiSinai tune of the Musaf Aleinu. The way in which we bring in the Yom Tov is significant, and the majesty of Rosh Hashana Ma'ariv perfectly sets the tone for the world's 'coronation' of God. This atmosphere is continued with the 'HaMelekh' tune at the beginning of Shaharit, with melody once again building up the presence of majesty. The closing Kaddish of Shaharit is uplifting rather than sombre, and the first real moments of solemnity only come with 'Hineni' and the Kaddish preceding Musaf. These melodies create the perfect mood for us to get ourselves in the right frame of mind for the private Amida on the Day of Judgment. Perhaps the climax of the day, in terms of both melody and tefillot, is the Great Aleinu in the Musaf repetition. This everyday prayer comes to life on Rosh Hashana, with the melody descending as we prostrate ourselves, and soaring up to reach 'Hakadosh Barukh Hu'. On the whole, the melodies of Rosh Hashana are motivational rather than melancholy – befitting a festive day of coronation. There is no Hallel – but neither is there Vidui, as we balance the 'Yom Tov' aspect of the day against the 'Yom HaDin'.

---

*These melodies create the perfect mood for us to get ourselves in the right frame of mind for the private Amida on the Day of Judgement.*

---

On Yom Kippur the melodies are perhaps slightly less in line with expectations. The opening tefilla of Kol Nidre presents a tremendous dichotomy between the dry legal text of the prayer and its magnificent MiSinai melody. As mentioned previously, the way in which we usher in a day is extremely significant. In the case of Kol Nidre, we have instructions from the Shulhan Arukh and Rema on how to conduct the inaugural prayer of Yom Kippur:

We have the custom to say Kol Nidre when it is still day, and we continue singing Kol Nidre until nightfall, reciting it a total of three times. [Rema: At each subsequent recitation the Cantor raises his voice louder than the previous recitation.<sup>9</sup>

This is possibly the ultimate example of the role played by melody in setting the scene of the day. The beautiful and powerful tune used by Ashkenazim for Kol Nidre has inspired some of the most renowned works of Classical music; and it is there in our shuls each year to provide that special, spine-tingling atmosphere which touches us far more deeply than the words it conveys.

Vidui, the archetypal Yom Kippur prayer, has a mode of its own. It is introduced by the rousing tune for 'Ki Anu Amekha', and the melody for Vidui itself is remarkably upbeat. At a time when our bodies are cowed in submission before God, when we confess before Him all the shameful things we have done over the last year – why do we start singing a happy tune built on major thirds, which is astonishingly similar to the tune used for Shirat HaYam! How could Vidui be further from the victory and joy of the Song by the Sea?

Rav Soloveitchik explains as follows:

When the individual confesses, he does so from a state of insecurity, depression and despair in the wake of sin. For what assurance has he that he will be acquitted of the sin? In contrast, Knesset Yisrael (and each Jewish community is considered to be a microcosm of Knesset Yisrael) confesses out of a sense of confidence and even rejoicing, for it does so in the presence of a loyal ally, before its most Beloved one. In fact, in many communities it is customary for the entire congregation to sing the confession in heart-warming melodies.<sup>10</sup>

Seen in this light, the melody we use for Vidui encourages us to trust in God's desire to forgive us, and feel victorious as our efforts are rewarded.

### ***Conclusions and Implications***

With the melodies of the High Holy Days, it would seem that they are operating on two different levels. At times, particularly on Rosh Hashana, the tunes are closely bound up with the meaning of the tefillot. Prayers describing our reverence for God, and praising His Majesty, are accompanied by appropriately uplifting melodies; moments of solemnity and awe are created through similarly relevant music. However, on occasion the melodies of the High Holy Days seem to supersede what we might think is the plain meaning of the tefillah, and come to convey a far deeper significance than the surface meaning of the words. Jewish musicologist Abraham Idelsohn defined 'genuine music' as 'the offspring of

profound emotions: of exaltation, pain, or joy [...] Genuine music is the tonal expression of the life and struggle of a people'.<sup>11</sup> The development of our High Holy Days melodies over the centuries reflects to a great extent the life and struggle of the Jewish people in exile; the piyutim with their ancient melodies that were composed from the depths of persecution still resonate with us today. By Idelsohn's definition, our High Holy Days melodies are undoubtedly 'genuine music' – but they are also more than that. They are 'Voices of Awe', bound inextricably to the meaning of the tefillot which they represent.

*Miriam Levenson studied Music at Cambridge University and has just completed a Masters in Performance from the Royal College of Music (bassoon). She works for the Music Teacher magazine and gives private music lessons. Miriam is a graduate of the LSJS Susi Bradfield Educators Programme.*

<sup>1</sup> Translation taken from *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth* (1998), p.62.

<sup>2</sup> Masekhet Berakhot 6a.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Likutei Me'haRan, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Shulhan Arukh, 619:1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere in the Shulhan Arukh (53:24), we find the instruction that if a community is too poor to engage both a Rabbi and a Hazan, the engagement of the Hazan must take precedence unless the Rabbi is a famed Torah scholar. Of course, this must be understood within its historical context – but it nevertheless highlights the importance placed on ensuring meaningful communal prayer.

<sup>8</sup> Masekhet Rosh Hashana, 32b.

<sup>9</sup> Shulhan Arukh. 619:1.

<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Teshuva Derasha of 1973 (see [www.jewishwordpress.com](http://www.jewishwordpress.com)).

<sup>11</sup> Abraham J. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development*, pp.194-5.

Mook are the exclusive uk retailers for Rinati Lakel, french israeli scarf designer extraordinaire



beautiful creations for shabbat @ simchas



reds and yellows and pinks and greens, oranges, purples and blues

volumize caps

Bat Ayin scarves

israeli tichels Accessories

velvet bands

squares triangles rectangles not so many circles actually

everyday chic

**MOOK HEAD SCARVES ARE LOVINGLY HANDPICKED IN ISRAEL THEN FLOWN ALL THE WAY OVER TO OUR BRITISH SHORES AND BROUGHT TO YOU FOR THEIR BEAUTEOUS COLOURS PATTERNS AND WONDEROUS JOY SOMETIMES WE LOVE THEM SO MUCH WE WANT TO KEEP THEM BUT WE LOVE YOU MORE SO WE'LL CONTINUE TO OFFER THESE JEWELS WITH GREATEST P L E A S U R E**

**regular boutique events in hendon, edgware & golders green.  
 to host a MOOK scarf event or to book a private veiwing please contact us:  
 newdelly27@yahoo.co.uk . 07794579558**

www.ilovemook.com

# *Koren-Sacks Mahzorim – A Review*

RABBI DANIEL ROSELAAR

**Y**amim Noraim 5772 (2011) and 5773 (2012) presented us with the newly-published Koren-Sacks mahzorim for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur respectively. These volumes were eagerly anticipated in the mainstream United Synagogue communities for two main reasons. Firstly, no other “Anglo-Jewish” mahzor existed. The well-known Routledge edition had gone out of print some years previously, and even though many shuls still have numerous copies, it is outdated both in terms of presentation and translation. Furthermore, it no longer accurately reflects the standard minhagim in most shuls<sup>1</sup>. The Artscroll edition, which has become a well-established mahzor in all shuls, is even less consistent with normative Anglo-Jewish practices and minhagim<sup>2</sup>, and though its translation may be technically accurate, it is often clumsy and inelegant. Secondly, Chief Rabbi Sacks had already made a valued contribution to Anglo-Jewry’s appreciation and understanding of prayer and liturgy with both numerous essays and a new translation of the siddur, so it was hoped that a “Sacks edition” of the mahzor would be equally inspiring.

---

## *The well-known Routledge edition ... no longer accurately reflects the standard minhagim in most shuls*

---

The purpose of this review is to consider the new Koren-Sacks mahzorim from three perspectives – i) the translation, ii) the commentary and accompanying essays and iii) the presentation of the prayers and the ease of use of the volumes.

### *The translation*

Large portions of the translation in the mahzorim are not new, having being copied from Rabbi Sacks’ previously published translation of the siddur. Furthermore, Rabbi Sacks was not the sole translator for the mahzor and their introductions identify a team of translators for the piyutim. However, all parts of the translation combine the traditional elegance and poetry of the original Hebrew with clarity and simplicity that is in tune with the modern worshipper.

One example is the Melekh Evyon stanza recited immediately before Unetane Tokef in Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah. The Hebrew reads:

מֶלֶךְ אֲבִיוֹן -- תְּנוּמָה תְּעוּפָנוּ -- תְּרַדְמָה תְּעוּפָנוּ  
תוהו יִשׁוּפָנוּ -- עַד מָתִי יִמְלֹךְ

The Routledge translation reflects the five short stitches of which the stanza is composed and renders it as follows:

Lowly humanity, sleep is his daily end, deep  
sleep is his final goal, darkness flows over  
him, sovran of vanity.

Whilst the various Hebrew expressions for sleep and darkness are closely translated, poetic license has been utilised for the various verbs that appear. In fact, it could be said that this is a fairly typical example of how the Routledge frequently re-renders passages (albeit, paying close attention to the original text), rather than actually translating them. Furthermore, whilst lowly humanity and sovran of vanity rhyme nicely, neither expression makes it clear that the Hebrew text is referring to a lowly mortal king whose reign is not eternal. The word sovran does appear in modern dictionaries, as an old spelling for sovereign, but has fallen out of use. The argument in favour of retaining archaic spellings might be that the Hebrew, which is being translated, is also archaic and thus the original style is being retained. But the counter-argument is surely more compelling – that the purpose of a modern translation is to make the text accessible and meaningful to the modern reader and worshipper.



The Koren-Sacks Mahzorim

The Koren-Sacks translation of the same lines reads as follows:

The destitute king, sleep hovers over him,  
deep sleep envelopes him, confusion  
overwhelms him, until when will he reign?

This rendering is equally as poetic as that provided by the Routledge, far less archaic and it also accurately reflects the brevity of the individual phrases as they appear in the Hebrew. It is also far more faithful as a translation of the original text and pays greater attention to the particular verbs and nouns that are used. Whereas a worshipper using the Routledge who wished to accurately understand the meaning of the word *העופפנו* would have been misled into believing that it has something to do with a final goal, the Koren-Sacks translation correctly depicts it as a form of being smothered.

Comparisons with the Artscroll translation are also favourable. The opening stanza of the third of the selihot at Maariv on Yom Kippur reads

אמנם כן יצר סוכן בנו  
בך להצדיק רב צדק וענגו סלחתי

Artscroll's translation is:

It is indeed true that passion rules us; so it is  
for You to justify, O abundantly just, and to  
answer us, 'I have forgiven!'

The Hebrew phrase *בך להצדיק* is difficult to understand and the Artscroll translation has managed to retain those difficulties. However, the Sacks translation is not only more elegant but it has also managed to interpret the words as well as translate them:

It is surely true that our impulse controls us;  
You alone can clear us, abundantly righteous  
One, answer us: 'I have forgiven.'

"So it is for You to justify" seems to suggest that we are demanding of God that He justify why mankind is ruled by his passions. "You alone can clear us" is much more representative of a prayer to the Almighty. Since we are controlled by our impulses, we need Him to absolve and exonerate us.

A further example of how Rabbi Sacks' translation avoids the clumsiness of the Artscroll can be found in the Avinu Malkeinu prayer. One of the lines which is usually recited responsively reads,

אבינו מלכנו זכרנו בזכרון טוב לפניך

Artscroll translate this as:

Our Father, our King, recall us with a  
favourable memory before You.

Whilst the technical accuracy of this line cannot be disputed, it displays a certain inelegance and certainly does not reflect the way that one would speak in this day and age. The addition of an explanatory word in the Sacks translation improves the rendering quite significantly:

Our Father, our King, remember us with a  
memory of favourable deeds before You.

---

*It is also far more faithful as a translation of the original text and pays greater attention to the particular verbs and nouns that are used.*

---

Interestingly though, none of the three translations under consideration feel comfortable confronting the plain meaning of the term *גילוי עריות* that appears in the Al Het. The Artscroll uses the term "immorality" and thus implies that tax-evasion, under-paying foreign workers and the enormous amount of food that is wasted at Jewish weddings is somehow less embarrassing than indulging in forbidden sexual relations. Rabbi Sacks has decided that the translation employed by Routledge one hundred years previously still fits the bill, being technically accurate but sufficiently indistinct to be included in a religious prayer book, and uses the term "unchastity".

### *The commentary and accompanying essays*

One of the most outstanding features of these new mahzorim is the commentary that appears beneath the prayers, as well as the introductory essays that appear at the beginning of the volumes. The commentary is exactly what its name implies, i.e. a series of comments and observations about themes that appear in the prayers, rather than just an explanation of what the words and phrase mean and where they came from. Whilst the latter model does appear at times, as often as not the main text is used to introduce and illustrate a thematic idea. Two particularly notable things struck me when reading the commentary. Firstly, I was intrigued by the simplicity of what Rabbi Sacks wrote. In the main, the points that he makes are clear and concise without reference to complicated philosophical or theological ideas. We can conjecture that this is so that the worshipper in shul can read these comments without being unduly distracted from the continuity of

the service. But the simplicity perhaps reflects the ultimate nature of what our tefillot should be – straightforward and uncomplicated approaches to the Almighty without pretentious sophistry. Secondly, I was intrigued by the sources referenced in the commentary. Whilst many of the comments are clearly Rabbi Sacks' own insights, he has not been shy to include ideas from a range of other thinkers. These stretch from classical commentaries on the prayers, such as Abudarham and Rokeah, to twentieth-century thinkers such as Rabbi J H Hertz, Rav J B Soloveitchik and Rav A I Kook, and also include personalities such as Rav Levi Yitshak of Berditchev, as well as some unattributable hasidic stories and parables.

Examples of how Rabbi Sacks develops thought-provoking ideas around the themes that appear in the mahzor include his comments on the line סתום פיות ומקטרגינו משטיננו ומקטרגינו in the Avinu Malkeinu prayer, as well as his introduction to the leining for the first day of Rosh Hashanah. He uses the reference “the mouths of our adversaries and accusers” to address the issue of anti-Semitism and makes the observation that

The “oldest hatred” is ultimately dislike of the unlike – the fear, mutating into hate, of the stranger.

Then, in a manner that has been evident in many of his writings and addresses over the years, he expands the concept from the parochial to the universal and explains why anti-Semitism is not just a Jewish problem:

Anti-Semitism, though it begins with Jews, never ends with Jews. It is the paradigm case of the hatred of difference. And since difference is constitutive of our humanity, a society that has no room for Jews has no room for humanity. It must be fought in the name, and for the sake, of our shared humanity.

---

*In a manner that has been evident in many of his writings and addresses over the years, he expands the concept from the parochial to the universal.*

---

Rabbi Sacks uses the leining for Rosh Hashana to make a point with a similar universal application. In the course of discussing why the account of Creation is not chosen as the Torah reading on the day which we celebrate as the anniversary of the creation of the world, he posits that the story of the birth of a child enables us to understand the meaning of creation. He suggests to us that the accounts of the birth of Isaac in

the Torah reading, and the birth of Samuel in the haftara, represent enduring symbols of Judaism:

There is no gift like the gift of a child, no responsibility greater than the responsibility of a parent, no miracle more profound than the way love brings new life into the world, and no question a better guide to life than to ask: Will my next act make the world a little better for our children?

Whilst the commentary to the mahzor was presumably written with the intention of it being readable during the course of the service, the introductions to the two volumes were clearly written as studies in their own right. Comprising twenty-three pages for Rosh Hashana and a further sixty-five pages for Yom Kippur, they could well have been published as a volume in their own right and need to be read carefully rather than in snatched moments during the rabbi's drasha or the hazan's operatics. The Yom Kippur introduction addresses the concept of Teshuva at length and also compares and contrasts various classical understandings of the concept. It also gives particular attention to three particular passages in the mahzor – the Kol Nidrei passage (“the prayer-that-is-not-a-prayer”), the Seir La'azazel that was sent into the wilderness as part of the Avoda of the Kohen Gadol, and the Ki Hinei Kahomer poem that is recited as part of the selihot on Yom Kippur night.

In his treatment of the Kol Nidrei passage, Rabbi Sacks cites the familiar theories about its origins and why it is included in the Yom Kippur service. He even entertains the notion that it is not so much the text which is sacred but the ancient melody, but notes that such a thesis only serves to compound the problem rather than solve it – why set a legal declaration about the absolvment from vows to such a sacred and haunting melody? He thus suggests that the legalistic nature of the Kol Nidrei declaration serves the purpose of turning the shul into a courtroom for the duration of Yom Kippur. His thesis is that this passage is not actually part of the prayer service of the day, but that it forms part of the rubrics for the mahzor and paints the scene for what will take place over the course of the next twenty-five hours. He also explains why the annulment of vows specifically was chosen as the legal model which would set the scene. Hatarat Nedarim requires an expression of remorse indicating that standing from his current perspective the petitioner would never have made the vow in question<sup>3</sup>. This is also the basis of Teshuva, as he writes,

This is precisely what we do when we confess our sins and express our remorse for them. We thereby signal retroactively that full intent was lacking from our sins. Had we known then what we know now, we would not have acted

as we did. Therefore we did not really mean to do what we did.

A review of the commentary to this mahzor would be incomplete without reference to the very excellent translation and commentary to the relevant mishnaic tractates, Tractates Rosh Hashana and Yoma. These were compiled by other scholars and are highly useful commentaries for the layman and scholar alike. Besides referencing the obvious sources in the Rishonim, they also reference less well-known early authorities, as well as comparing the mishnaic description of the Avoda with the description that appears in the Musaf Amida.

### ***The presentation of the prayers and the ease of use of the volumes***

Presumably the primary purpose of a mahzor is as a prayer book for synagogue use on the relevant festivals. It is in this regard that this reviewer feels that these newest offerings fall seriously short of what might have been expected of them. This edition of the mahzor is valuable as a scholarly companion to the prayers and is worthy of study in advance of the festivals, but does not serve the worshipper well in shul. Besides the fact that the Yom Kippur mahzor is overly heavy for shuls where worshippers do not have the use of lecterns or tables, further reservations are as follows:

a) The layout of the pages is confusing. Different lines begin at different points from the edge of the page. Presumably this is supposed to indicate when phrases are direct quotations from Tanakh or simply responses to introductory clauses. If one was to be studying the prayers, this would be a useful way of appreciating the structure of the passages, but if one is praying it would be rather distracting. I suspect that the average Anglo-Jewish worshipper who is blissfully unaware that the prayers are structured in this way will only be confused to find the text roaming all over the page. One of the pages of the brakhot following the Maariv Shema (YK p. 73) has lines starting at four different points along the width of the page and this leaves me wondering why this is so, rather than helping me focus on the meaning of my tefilla. On occasion the cleverness of the Hebrew text can be infuriating. The phrase *השיבנו ה' אליך ונשובה* is obviously a direct quote of the final verse of Megillat Eikha, but spelling it *ונשוב* as the word appears in Tanakh is distracting. If the Koren approach were to be taken to its logical conclusion, all scriptural quotations would appear as they do in the original Hebrew.

b) The rubrics are too scholarly for synagogue use. For example, the instructions for the Kerovot in Shaharit for Yom Kippur (YK p. 603, 607, 611, 613) are fascinating explanations of how these piyutim are

structured and related to each other, and I was previously unaware of the significance of Magen, Mehayeh and Meshaleh in the first three brakhot of the repetition of the Amidah, as well as the addition of a Tokheha on Yom Kippur. But if one is trying to work out if one should be saying or omitting them in one's own shul, by the time I have finished reading (and contemplating) the notes the service has moved on a couple of pages. The instructions during Neila are equally confusing, if not more so. Different traditions exist regarding the series of piyutim commencing *ומי עמוד* (and some mahzorim combine several selihot into one lengthy seliha) but referencing three different practices (without indicating which should be followed), as well as telling me the authorship of the passage produces a lengthy preamble which is difficult to scan during a fast-moving service (YK p. 1153, 1157, etc.). It is genuinely interesting to discover that prayers that I have been reciting and leading for many years are structured as quatrains, but it would have been far better for these valuable explanations to be included in the commentary at the bottom of the page, or even to be the subject of an independent essay at the beginning or end of the volume.

---

### ***The reality of contemporary orthodoxy is that there is no absolutely uniform practice even within Anglo-Jewry***

---

c) The UK version of the Koren-Sacks mahzor was produced in association with the United Synagogue and was edited by Dayan Ivan Binstock, an expert in the field, with the intention of reflecting Minhag Anglia. Whilst the founding fathers of the United Synagogue might have been aghast at the thought of different shuls following different liturgical traditions and customs, the reality of contemporary orthodoxy is that there is no absolutely uniform practice even within Anglo-Jewry<sup>4</sup>. For example, some shuls recite Shir Hama'alot Mimamakim prior to Barekhu in Shaharit and others do not. This means that it is virtually impossible to create a mahzor that will be suitable for every shul that might align itself with Rabbi Sacks and Koren.

In many respects, this new mahzor represents a significant improvement on the Routledge. Very few, if any, shuls open the Aron Hakodesh for the entire duration of the repetition of the Amidah and the Koren edition reflects this change from the old minhag. Similarly, the ancient minhag (found in the Tosafot to Masekhet Rosh Hashana 33b) of blowing only twelve shofar notes rather than thirty during the repetition of the Amidah has fallen into disuse and the rubrics in the new mahzor are in accordance with prevailing practice.

On the other hand, certain minhagim which are universal within Anglo-Jewry and characteristic of our traditions are not recognised as such within this mahzor. Our siddurim all contain a short version of the Korbanot prior to Pesukei Dezimra but the Koren mahzor has a more lengthy version (as well as the Akeida passage), resulting in more pages being omitted during the course of the service, as well as adding to the confusion of unseasoned worshippers. It also seems unnecessary to include the Shir Hayihud at the beginning of the Rosh Hashana mahzor when very few traditional Anglo-Jewish congregations recite this. Another example would be the order for the conclusion of the service on Kol Nidre night. I presume that to date most congregations will have sung Yigdal before Adon Olam as they appear in the Routledge, but the Koren edition has reversed the order and this will no doubt lead to confusion. Whilst I was glad to see that the yotsrot that are said before the Shema of Shaharit are included as a standard part of the text (as opposed to the Artsroll edition that notes that many congregations omit them), I was disappointed to discover that some of the short alphabetical piyutim before the Shaharit kedusha on Yom Kippur are relegated to the back of the mahzor. On the other hand, it seems eminently sensible that the selihot for Shaharit, Musaf and Minha on Yom Kippur, which are part of the traditional Anglo-Jewish liturgical minhag but rarely recited nowadays, have been included as an appendix to the mahzor.

---

*The Koren-Sacks mahzor is somewhat disappointing as a prayer book for shul use. But it undoubtedly an excellent study companion that will greatly enhance our understanding and appreciation of the tefillot*

---

### **Conclusion**

The Shulhan Arukh<sup>5</sup> states that there is a requirement that a person should review the tefillot in advance of the festivals in order that he will be able to pray with fluency. Though the Rama qualifies this and writes that if a person prays from a text, rather than by heart, this requirement is redundant, the Taz and Mishna Berura note that one must still study the complicated piyutim in advance of Yom Tov so that they can be recited with fluency and comprehension. As I have already suggested, the Koren-Sacks mahzor is somewhat disappointing as a prayer book for shul use. But it is undoubtedly an excellent study companion that will greatly enhance our understanding and appreciation of the tefillot in the way that the halakha requires and I

would recommend it to anyone who is seeking to prepare in advance for a meaningful tefilla experience over the Yamim Noraim.

*Rabbi Daniel Roselaar has been the Rav of Kehillat Alei Tzion since July 2010. He is also the Rosh Kollel of the Kinloss Community Kollel and teaches semikha students at the Montefiore Kollel. Rabbi Roselaar is a graduate of Yeshivat Har Etzion and received semikha from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. He also has an MA in Jewish education.*

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, *Mizmor Shir Hanukat Habayit* does not appear before *Barukh She'amar*, *Berikh Shemei* is omitted and the rubrics indicate that less than one-hundred shofar blasts are sounded on Rosh Hashana (in accordance with the custom of Tosafot in Masekhet Rosh Hashana). This clearly illustrates the fluidity of minhag and also raises the question whether siddurim and mahzorim should dictate or reflect minhag.

<sup>2</sup> For example, it incorporates far more sacrificial passages prior to Pesukei Dezimra than appear in any Anglo-Jewish siddurim and it indicates that many of the yotsrot and piyutim that have traditionally been recited are optional or normally omitted.

<sup>3</sup> A somewhat similar idea is suggested by Rav Soloveitchik and appears in *Al Hateshuva*.

<sup>4</sup> How and why this has developed would be an interesting religious, halakhic and sociological study in its own right.

<sup>5</sup> Shulhan Arukh, O.H., 100:1

# *Can a royal decree be revoked?*

## *The message of repentance, prayer and charity as revealed through the book of Esther*

BEN FREEDMAN

The Zohar links Purim to Yom Kippur by noting that Purim is named after Yom Kippurim.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there are a number of striking parallels between the themes of Megillat Esther and the Yamim Nora'im. Firstly, the Purim story abounds with imagery from the Bet Hamikdash. The Talmud suggests that Ahashverosh wore the special priestly garments during his banquet.<sup>2</sup> The text describes Esther's reluctance to stand before the King in his "inner chamber" using language that evokes the Kohen Gadol who was only allowed into the Kodesh Kodashim on Yom Kippur.<sup>3</sup> On Yom Kippur the 'lots' were drawn for the two goats that were used as part of the special service, paralleling the 'lots' that are drawn by Haman. In chapter six, at the climax of the Purim story, a reference is made to the 'ספר זכרון' (Book of Remembrance)<sup>4</sup> which is referred to during the Mussaf repetition on the Yamim Nora'im as the book in which all of our deeds are recorded and written by God, together with the appropriate Divine reward or punishment.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most striking comparison is the idea that on Yom Kippur our sins can be absolved and as a result, Divine decrees can be revoked and rewritten. Megillat Esther tells the story of how a decree for Jewish annihilation was revoked and rewritten.

---

### *Evil decrees of suffering against the Jewish people have their roots in Divine anger and retribution over Jewish sinfulness*

---

To anyone even vaguely familiar with stories that are told in Tanakh, the Megillat Esther stands out as an anomaly. It is not just the lack of an explicit reference to God or the Land of Israel that is perplexing, rather the entire story seems almost antithetical to the central message of Tanakh. If there is one central idea linking every Biblical book it is that historical events do not occur randomly. In particular evil decrees of suffering against the Jewish people have their roots in Divine anger and retribution

over Jewish sinfulness. This message is seemingly absent from Esther. Taken on face value the evil decree against the Jewish people happened because of Haman's anger over Mordechai's refusal bow to before him combined with Haman's close relationship with the King which enabled him to actualise his agenda of persecution. Moreover any annulment of a harsh decree is usually attributed to a process of repentance and Divine appeasement. Megillat Esther seems to suggest that that the annulment came about through the coincidence that Esther was uniquely placed to make an appeal on behalf of her people to King Ahashverosh.<sup>6</sup>

In this article I aim to show how, through using a particular literary technique, a closer reading of Megillat Esther reveals that it was indeed a process of repentance, prayer and charity that led to the reversal of the evil decree. This is true even in the case of Haman's decree and moreover this is the central theme of the story. I hope that through understanding some of the concealed messages in Megillat Esther in greater depth one can better appreciate the meaning of the phrase "Repentance, prayer and charity revoke the evil decree" and how this can apply today.

### *Where was God? Why was the decree of annihilation written?*

As mentioned, one of the most striking aspects of the Megillat Esther is the absence of any explicit mention of God. In relation to this peculiar facet of the book the Talmud makes the following remark on the first verse of chapter six:

בלילה ההוא נדדה -- שנת המלך, אמר רבי תנחום נדדה שנת מלכו של עולם. ורבנן אמרי: נדדו עליונים, נדדו תחתונים. רבא אמר: שנת המלך אחשורוש ממש.

'On that night the king was turning in his sleep'. Rabbi Tanhum says [this refers to] the sleep of the King of the world (i.e. God). The Rabbis say [it

refers to] the sleep of those on High and those below. Rava says [it refers to] the sleep of Ahashverosh himself.<sup>7</sup>

Rabbi Tanhum is arguing that the Megilla should be read metaphorically; where the king in the story is meant to refer to God. Rava argues that that it should be read literally; and the king in the story, refers, as one would expect, to King Ahashverosh. The Rabbis argue that the story can be read on multiple levels and can be understood both metaphorically and literally. Rava's opinion requires little explanation. The opinions of Rabbi Tanhum and the Rabbis requires further explanation. How can the verse or the book make sense if 'the King' were referring to God rather than Ahashverosh? One could answer that God was, metaphorically speaking, turning over events in His mind to determine whether, given the actions of Mordekhai, Esther and the Jews of Shushan, He should forgive them and revoke the decree of their impending destruction.

---

*God was ... turning over events in His mind to determine whether, given the actions of Mordekhai, Esther and the Jews of Shushan, He should ... revoke the decree of their impending destruction*

---

However this explanation raises as many problems as solves. It is now necessary to find some Divine involvement in the decree itself. When Haman first raises his idea for the annihilation of the Jewish people he makes the following suggestion to Ahashverosh:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ, לְמַלְכֵּךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ--נִשְׁנוּ עִם-אַחַד מְפָרָזִים  
וּמְפָרָדִים-- בֵּין הָעַמִּים, בְּכָל מְדִינֹת--מְלָכוֹתֶיךָ; וְדַתֵּיהֶם--  
שְׁנוֹת מִכָּל-עָם, וְאֵת-דַּתֵּי הַמְּלָכִים אֵינֶם עֹשִׂים, וְלְמַלְכֵךְ--  
אֵין-שָׁוֶה, לְהַנְיָחָם.

And Haman said unto king Ahashverosh: 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are different from those of every people; **but they do not keep the king's laws;** therefore it does not profit the king to tolerate them.<sup>8</sup>

Supposing that the metaphor is extended and 'the king's laws' actually refers to God's laws. In this case, the Megilla is hinting at profoundly religious causes for the decree. It is suggesting that the Jewish people's impending doom is a direct result of their abandonment of the Torah. This is a recurring theme throughout Tanakh. It echoes the verses at the end of Vayikra:

אִם-בְּחַקְתִּי תִמְאַסּוּ, וְאִם אֶת-מִשְׁפָּטֵי תִגְעַל נַפְשְׁכֶם, לְבַלְתִּי עֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתַי, לְהַפְרֹכֶם אֶת-בְּרִיתִי. אִף-אֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה-  
זֹאת לָכֶם, וְהִפְקַדְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם בְּהִלָּה אֶת-הַשְׁחָפָת וְאֶת-הַקְדָּחַת,  
מִכְלוֹת עֵינַיִם, וּמְדִיבַת נֶפֶשׁ; וְזָרְעֶתֶם לְרִיק זְרָעְכֶם, וְאֶכְלָהוּ  
אִיבֵיכֶם.

But if you shall reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances, so that you will not do all My commandments, but break My covenant; I also will do this unto you: I will appoint terror over you, even consumption and fever, that shall make the eyes to fail, and the soul to languish; and you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.<sup>9</sup>

***Repentance: The reaction to the decree***

If, as has been suggested, the decree has intimations of Divine justice for the people's iniquities one would expect to find some form of Divine appeasement prior to lifting of the decree. The Jewish reaction to the decree is found at the start of chapter four, immediately after its passing and publication:

וּמְרֻדְכַי, יָדַע אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה, וַיִּקְרַע מְרֻדְכַי אֶת-  
בְּגָדָיו, וַיִּלְבַּשׁ שֵׁק וְנֹאֶפֶר; וַיֵּצֵא בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר, וַיִּזְעַק זֹעָקָה  
גְּדוּלָה וּמְרָה. וַיָּבֹאוּ, עַד לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ: כִּי אֵין לְבוּא  
אֶל-שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ, בְּלִבּוֹשׁ שֵׁק. וּבְכָל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה, מִקּוֹם  
אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מִגִּיעַ--אֶבֶל גְּדוּל לַיהוּדִים, וְצוּם  
וּבְכִי וּמִסָּפָד; שֵׁק וְנֹאֶפֶר, יֵצֵעַ לְרַבִּים.

Now when Mordekhai knew all that was done, Mordekhai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; and he came even before the king's gate; for none might enter within the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.<sup>10</sup>

Mordekhai's reaction to the news of the decree is to go into mourning, an action which was echoed by the rest of the Jews. This is reminiscent of an event much earlier where a king of a city hears of their impending destruction and takes on signs of mourning imploring his subjects to follow.

וַיַּחַל יוֹנָה לְבוּא -- בָּעִיר, מִהֲלֵךְ יוֹם אֶחָד; וַיִּקְרָא,  
וַיֹּאמֶר, עוֹד אַרְבַּעִים יוֹם, וְנִינְוָה תִהְפָּקֵת. וַיֵּאמְרֵנוּ  
אֲנִשֵׁי נִינְוָה, בְּאִלְקִים; וַיִּקְרָאוּ-צוּם וַיִּלְבְּשׁוּ שִׁקִּים,  
מִגְדוּלָם וְעַד-קִטְנֵם. וַיִּגַע הַדָּבָר, אֶל-מֶלֶךְ נִינְוָה,  
וַיִּקָּם מִכִּסְאוֹ, וַיַּעֲבֵר אֲדָרְתוֹ מֵעֲלָיו; וַיִּכַּס שֵׁק, וַיִּשָּׁב

על-האפר. ויזעק, ויאמר בנינה, מטעם המלך ויגדלו, לאמר: האדם והבהמה הבקר והצאן, אל-טעמו מאומה--אל-גרעו, ומינס אל-ישתו. ויתכסו שקים, האדם והבהמה, ויקראו אל-אלקים, בחרקה; וישבו, איש מדרכו הרעה, ומן-החמס, אשר בכפיהם. מי-יודע ישוב, ונחם האלקים; וישב מחרון אפו, ולא נאבד.

And Jona began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he proclaimed, and said: 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.' And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying: 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water; but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God; **let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence** that is in their hands. Who knows whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not?'<sup>11</sup>

In both stories the reaction to the news is very similar. It involves fasting, wearing sackcloth and ashes and crying out. The significant difference in the two stories is that in the book of Jona, the king of Ninveh implores his people to be self-introspective and to turn from their evil ways in the hope that God will forgive and revoke His decree. In using similar language and through describing similar actions it is possible that the author of the Megilla is trying to indicate to us that the Jews under Mordechai's direction and example were starting the process of repentance in the hope that God might reverse His decree, similar to events that transpired in Ninveh.

### *Prayer: Supplication before the 'King'*

Following his initial reaction of mourning and repentance, Mordechai appeals to Esther to beseech the king on behalf of her people. The wording used to describe Mordechai's intentions are particularly interesting:

ואת-פתשגן כתב-הדת אשר-נתן בשושן להשמידם, נתן לו--לחראות את-אסתר, ולהגיד לה; ולצוות עליה, לבוא אל-המלך להתחנן-לו ולבקש מלפניו--על-עמה.

Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given out in Shushan to destroy them, to show it to Esther, and to declare it unto her; and to charge her **that she should come to the king, to beseech him, and to make request before him, for her people.**<sup>12</sup>

Following the opinions that the Rabbis and Rabbi Tanhum, if we allow an understanding of the words "the king" in the Megillat to allude to God, then Mordechai is telling Esther to supplicate before God and to beseech God on behalf of her people.

### *Essentially Mordechai is telling Esther that she should pray to God to save her people*

Essentially Mordechai is telling Esther that she should pray to God to save her people.<sup>13</sup> In chapter eight Esther explicitly accedes to this request of supplicating before the King that the decree be revoked.

ותוסף אסתר, ותדבר לפני המלך, ותפל, לפני רגליו; ותבדך ותתחנן-לו, להעביר את-רעת המן האגגי, ואת מחשבתו, אשר חשב על-היהודים.

And Esther spoke yet again before the king, and she fell down at his feet, cried and **besought** to him to revoke the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.<sup>14</sup>

### *The King's seal is irrevocable*

The response Ahashverosh gives to the Esther's supplication comes after her outburst in chapter eight.

ויאמר המלך אחשוורוש לאסתר המלכה, ולמרדכי היהודי: הנה בית-המן נתתי לאסתר, ואתו תלו על-העץ על אשר-שלח דוד, ביהודים. ואתם כתבו על-היהודים פטוב בעיניכם, בשם המלך, וחתמו, בטבעת המלך: כי-כתב אשר-נכתב בשם-המלך, ונחתום בטבעת המלך אין להשיב.

Then the king Ahashverosh said to Esther the queen and to Mordechai the Jew: 'Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews. You may write as you like concerning the Jews, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the

king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, no man may reverse.<sup>15</sup>

Although Ahashverosh allows Esther to destroy the house of Haman and to write concerning Jews as they see fit this request is granted on the proviso that the king's law is absolute and irrevocable. Anything decreed with the king's seal can never be undone. It is for this reason that Esther could not call off the battles entirely. The battles had to be fought but new additional decrees could be written that would allow the Jews the prepare themselves and be victorious over their enemies.<sup>16</sup>

Extending the metaphor even further one could argue that the text is suggesting that Divine decrees cannot easily be reversed. Once written and signed by God, the fate is sealed, and mankind has no power to change it. Nevertheless new decrees can be written in addition the ones already passed that might alter the outcome. Whilst they fall short of recalling the Divine decree completely they change the course of events that the decree might have otherwise lead to.

Thus far, whilst prayer and repentance have succeeded in giving mankind the power to change the outcome of the decree through new declarations, they cannot totally nullify the decree from the outset.

### *Gifts to the poor: The power to rewrite history*

Once the battles had been fought and won and the Jewish people totally saved; the celebratory customs begin.

על-כן היהודים הפרושים (הפרזים), הישבים בערי הפרוזות--עשים את יום ארבעה עשר לחדש אדר, שמחה ומשתה ויום טוב; ומשלח מנות, איש לרעהו

Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwell in the unwallled towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.<sup>17</sup>

Recognising the potential in the spontaneous adoption of these customs, Mordekhai sees an opportunity use the events to establish a new festival. He writes to the all of the provinces imploring them to maintain these practices on a fixed basis each year. However in doing so he proposes the adoption of an additional custom, that of giving gifts to the poor.

ויכתב מרדכי, את-הדברים האלה; וישלח ספרים אל- כל-היהודים, אשר בכל-מדינות המלך אחשוורוש-- הקרובים, והרחוקים. לקצתם, עליהם--להיות עשים את יום ארבעה עשר לחדש אדר, ואת יום-חמשה עשר בו: בכל-שנה, ושנה. פזמים, אשר-נחו בהם היהודים מאיביהם, והחדש אשר נהפך להם מגון לשמחה, ומאכל ליום טוב; לעשות אותם, ומי משתה ושמחה, ומשלח מנות איש לרעהו, ומתנות לאבינים.

And Mordekhai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahashverosh, both nigh and far, to enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, the days wherein the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned for them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.<sup>18</sup>

Mordekhai suggests and appeals to the people that; in addition to giving portions of food to each other and feasting, they should also make the day into one of charity so that an important aspect of the new festival should be giving to the poor.

### *Recognising the potential in the spontaneous adoption of these customs, Mordekhai sees an opportunity use the events to establish a new festival*

Immediately following this verse the book describes how the people accepted upon themselves, not just the spontaneous rejoicing that they had initiated but also additional acts of charity that Mordekhai had suggested. The text then proceeds to recap the main story for no obvious reason.

וקבל, היהודים, את אשר-החלו, לעשות; ואת אשר- כתב מרדכי, אליהם. כי המן בן-המדתא האגגי, צרר כל-היהודים--חשב על-היהודים, לאבדם; והפל פור הוא הגורל, להמם ולאבדם. ובבאה, לפני המלך, אמר עם- הספר, שוב משבתו הרעה אשר-חשב על-היהודים על-ראשו; ותלו אתו ואת-בניו, על-העץ.

And the Jews took upon them to do as they had begun, and as Mordekhai had written unto them; because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast the pur, that is, the lot, to discomfit them, and to destroy them; **but when the matter came before the king, he commanded with the book, that his evil thoughts, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon on its head;**

and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.<sup>19</sup>

This brief summary seems superfluous. The Megilla has gone into great detail in telling the story. Why is there the need for this summary at the end of the book? If we apply the idea that the word המלך “The king” can be read to mean God, then story now ends with subtly different conclusion. Rather the conclusion in chapter eight that no Divine decree can be fully overturned, here the conclusion is that God can undo His signature. Apparently the combination of charity with repentance and prayer has the power to alter the Divine plans and avert the decree altogether.

### ***Conclusion: Purim, the Day like Yom Kippur***

One important question has been thus far omitted from our analysis. Why does the Megilla give over this message in such a cryptic manner? Why did the Author not follow Tanakh’s usual pattern of explicitly linking the events in history with the spiritual level of Am Yisrael and explain their salvation in terms of repentance prayer and charity. I believe the that answer is fairly simple. When we recite the U’natana Tokef prayer in the hazan’s repetition on Mussaf Rosh Hashana we read:

You rule off the limit of each creation’s life, and write down the decree for each. On Rosh Hashana it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed; how many will pass away; and how many will be born; who will live and who will die; ... But repentance, prayer and charity avert the evil decree

---

*We are challenged to search for God’s hand and influence in everything and are empowered to influence His verdict through turning to righteous behaviour*

---

Living in a world where the Divine hand is not easily recognisable, these words are easily said but difficult to internalise and appreciate. The daily events that we witness, whether national or personal, are not often thought of as a decree from Heaven. They can always be explained as a sequence of chance occurrences. Nevertheless we are challenged to search for God’s hand and influence in everything and are empowered to influence His verdict through turning to righteous behaviour. Following the opinion of the Rabbis the

Megilla can be understood in both in a simple and a metaphorical way. By writing the story of the Megilla in this ambiguous manner, without an explicit reference to God or Divine providence, the author created a text that can be understood on many levels. In doing so it gives us a powerful example to appreciate our own power in using repentance, prayer and charity to influence Divine decisions concerning our destiny.

*Ben Freedman studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion and then read Government and Economics at LSE. He currently teaches Economics and Politics at Immanuel College.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Tikunai Zohar. 57a

<sup>2</sup> Megilla 12a

<sup>3</sup> For further information about the links between the Bet Mikdash and the Megilla see Menahem Leibtag’s article. <http://www.tanach.org/special/purim/purims1.htm> This article relies heavily on ideas found in his article on the Tenach Study Centre and on ideas that I have heard from him personally.

<sup>4</sup> Esther 6:1

<sup>5</sup> See the U’natana Tokef Prayer in the Yamim Noraim Mahzor.

<sup>6</sup> The uniqueness of Megilat Esther within Tanach is the subject of an Essay by Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun “The Upside-down World of Megillat Esther” found in “Hadasa Hi Esther” published by Herzog Teaching institute.

<sup>7</sup> Megilla 15b

<sup>8</sup> Esther 3:8

<sup>9</sup> Vayikra 26: 15-16

<sup>10</sup> Esther 4:1

<sup>11</sup> Yonah 3: 4-8

<sup>12</sup> Esther 4:8

<sup>13</sup> I am understanding the word להתחנן “to beseech” to mean praying. The verb חנן is often used in this way for example (Deuteronomy 3:23) “ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההיא לאמר” *And I besought God at that time saying...*”

<sup>14</sup> Esther 8:3

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 8:7-8

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 8:10-14

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 9:19

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 9: 20-23

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 9 24-25

Wishing all of our  
friends at Kehillat  
Aleï Tzion  
שנה טובה

שנה טובה ומתוקה

Saranne, Neil, Eliora  
and Elisha Maurice

I love this view,  
and so will  
**the new owner**  
Peace of mind  
is a  
wonderful  
thing



As your local estate agent, we're here for you and all your property needs, whatever they may be.

We are the North London experts and we'd love to give you the benefit of over 49 years of knowledge and expertise.

Hendon 020 8203 2012

[www.martyn Gerrard.co.uk](http://www.martyn Gerrard.co.uk)



The award-winning agency ...

... where integrity counts.





**Simon Gerrard MNAEA MARLA - Managing Director.**

As the largest local Jewish firm of Estate Agents in the area, we have been dealing with the sale and letting of property in North and North West London for nearly 50 years.

Following our continued success in the Finchley and Mill Hill area, it was a natural progression (and one very much driven by demand) that we opened our Hendon office at 59 Brent Street, in September 2012. Over the past year I am pleased that the hard work put in by branch Manager Paul Harwood and his team, has seen us establish our place in the Hendon property market.

Our network of 10 offices allows our experienced and knowledgeable staff to offer properties marketed through any office in the network, so we can ensure that if you are looking to sell or let your home we can help you do so **quickly and at the best price.**

At the end of 2012 I was pleased to accept the **GOLD MEDAL** at the *Times and Sunday Times Estate Agent of the Year awards*. This was for our Innovation of providing HD quality property videos of the property we are selling. These professionally produced videos give a unique view of your property and helps raise its profile on the property portals and Google.



**Paul Harwood MNAEA – Branch Manager**

Paul has been working in Hendon for 5 years and knows the area well. He joined Marty Gerrard to open the Hendon office as he wanted to work for a progressive and professional agent.

Paul is keen to explain the reasons anyone looking to sell should come to Martyn Gerrard. *“Our unique HD quality videos ensure the homes we are selling reach the widest audience of buyers as possible, and help us to achieve the best price for our vendors. We offer our videos **FREE of charge** and include them as part of our comprehensive marketing package.*

To help us to provide the best service we can to the local community, our office is open **7 days a week.**

Our unique marketing, large database of buyers and commitment to excellent customer service ensures we are succeeding where others aren't. For example:-

**A house on Audley Road** – had been on the market for months with other local agents. We took instructions and within 2 weeks we had found a buyer.

**Sunny Gardens Road** - we successfully found a buyer for a house at a price above the asking price recommended by another local agent.

We are also seeing a surge in the number of tenants looking to rent through us. Our landlord service is second to none and includes a **FREE rent guarantee** scheme. If you would like further details contact - Lettings Manager **Aaron Weintraub.**”

Call us on **020 8203 2012** or email **nw4@martyngerrard.co.uk**  
59 Brent Street, Hendon, NW4 2EA



# *Eschatology, Nationalism and Religious Zionism - Accelerating the End*

SIMON LEVY

אין ישראל נגאלין אלא בתשובה – The Jewish People will not be redeemed except through Teshuva<sup>1</sup>

## *Introduction*

**D**uring the thousands of years since the Exile following the destruction of the Second Temple, the longing to return to the Land of Israel under the guidance of the Messiah was ever-present in Jewish History. From the first generation that lived in the post-Exile times until our own generation, Jews have clung to the belief that the Messiah could come at any time. This principle was articulated by the Rambam in his Thirteen Principles of Faith.

There exists an important debate about the arrival of the Messianic period. A key argument revolves around the extent to which the actions of humanity play an active role to hasten the arrival of this age or whether the Messianic timeline has been irrevocably set in history by God.

---

## *Can humans play an active role to hasten the arrival of the Messianic period earlier than was originally planned by God?*

---

Throughout the ages, a number of important scholars have advocated an active approach, urging the Jewish People to do everything in their power to advance Messianic times. Needless to say, this has often been opposed, at times violently, by those who disagree.

In the course of this essay, we will explore the sources of the Messianic Age, showing how from the times of the Tenakh itself, a dispute existed as to how the Messiah would arrive. The Talmud introduces us to the debate introduced above, namely whether or not humankind can influence the advent of the Redemption. Following this, we will journey through Jewish History, showing how leading Rabbis promoted an active position on this matter. Finally, we will see how the early Religious Zionists reinterpreted the meaning of *Teshuva*, thus allowing a radical new philosophy to emerge that

endorsed activism within a new framework of building the Land.

## *Prophetic Visions*

Within the visions of the Prophets, there emerge disparate views as to the circumstances of the Messiah's coming. The two prophets who we shall be focussing on are Isaiah and Malakhi, although there are others such as Ezekiel whose apocalyptic approach concerns us less in the development of this thesis<sup>2</sup>.

Before we commence a discussion of what their approaches are, it is essential to investigate the historical circumstances in which these prophets found themselves. Malakhi's place at the end of the era of the Prophets is doubly significant, given that his is the last message that God wished to convey to his people before the era of prophecy drew to a close. The prophets focus on various aspects of the Messianic era. An example of this is the prophet Joel's portrayal of a war when even "the sun and moon turn black"<sup>3</sup>, connecting his prophecy with the generation of the First Exile in which he lived, giving hope to the soon to be exiled Jewish People that they would one day triumph over their conquerors. Similarly, Zekhariah paints a picture of peace and safety when he says:

So declares God: Elderly men and women will yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem, a man with his staff in his hand due to great age. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls, playing in her streets.<sup>4</sup>

This vision fits perfectly when we consider the time in which he lived. The people were attempting to re-populate Jerusalem in order to rebuild the Second Temple and were being harassed by their neighbours. This vision would alleviate their fears and strengthen their resolve to complete their task.

Malakhi, who we shall turn to first, is a short book consisting of only three chapters. Living at the time following the return to the Land of Israel after the Second Temple had been built, Malakhi was tasked with speaking

to the second generation of returnees. The Ibn Ezra states that;

He was at the end of the prophets, and so he warned, "Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant," for with his death prophecy ceased among Israel.<sup>5</sup>

We know that, in contrast to Hagai and Zekharia, he does not mention building the Temple<sup>6</sup>, but rather is concerned with messages such as respecting the Temple<sup>7</sup>.

Malakhi, in this second generation of returnees, speaks to a people for whom the allure of the return to Israel has somewhat diminished. At the end of the second chapter, Malakhi relates the question that the people had at the time.

You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say: 'How have we wearied Him?' In that you say: 'Every one that does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them; or where is the God of justice?'<sup>8</sup>

The entire final chapter shows how God will answer this question and demonstrate to the people how justice does occur in the world, and the following short extract will suffice to prove this.

Then they that feared the Lord spoke one with another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even Mine own treasure; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him. Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that does not serve Him.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, we are still left with the question as to why God ends the Written Torah with this message. In order to answer this question, we must return to the start of the Torah when God first speaks to mankind.

And God blessed them, and God said to them: Bear fruit and multiply and fill the land, and conquer it, and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the beasts which walk the earth. And God said: Behold, I have given you all grass which produces seed across the face of the earth, and every tree that bears fruit with seeds, it will be food for you. And for every beast of the land and every bird of the heavens and all that roam the land, all that contains a living spirit, I have given every herb to eat. And it was so.<sup>10</sup>

And God instructed the man, saying: From every tree of the garden you shall eat.<sup>11</sup>

---

### *Malakhi, in this second generation of returnees, speaks to a people for whom the allure of the return to Israel has somewhat diminished*

---

The Talmud uses the word *לְיָדֵי* to construct the following learning – “And God instructed (*לְיָדֵי*)” – This is to create civil law.”<sup>12</sup> As a result, the opening instructions to mankind were to create boundaries and the outlines of civil law through which the people of the world would live in harmony. Bereishit then continues to demonstrate that the people did not do so, failing most memorably during the generation of Noah. It is no coincidence that Malakhi chose to end the Written Torah with the same message with which it began.

Malakhi’s message is therefore that justice will ultimately be visible in the world, and that the Messianic Period will begin with a demonstration of this principle. Importantly, this is a natural process that involves no mention of miracles or the alteration of nature.

In contrast, Isaiah, who lived before the First Exile when the Jewish People had been beset both by internal disputes and a rapidly decreasing autonomy over their own affairs, prophesied a miraculous end to this state of affairs. The following visions will be familiar, along with many others in his writings.

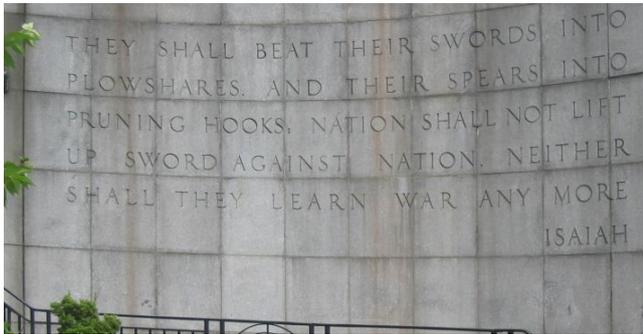
And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.<sup>13</sup>

He will destroy death forever, and God will wipe away tears from all faces.<sup>14</sup>

And He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.<sup>15</sup>

We can speculate that only such visions would bring comfort to the Jewish People. It was for that reason that

Isaiah stressed the miraculous element of the Redemption process.



The United Nations Headquarters in New York, USA

In conclusion, we have seen how various Prophets stressed different visions. Whilst Malakhi stressed the natural progression from one era to another, Isaiah's emphasis is on a miraculous process leading to a utopian world.

---

*Malakhi stressed the natural progression from one era to another. Isaiah's emphasis is on a miraculous process leading to a utopian world*

---

### *Talmudic Debates*

The differing visions detailed above are paralleled in several important passages from the Talmud. The debates that we will see will discuss two different, yet ultimately convergent ideas regarding the Messianic Period. The first is whether the Messianic Age will involve a dramatic altering of the natural world, and the second addresses our key question, namely whether human intervention can influence the date of the Messiah's arrival. The first debate stems from a mishna in tractate Shabbat that says as follows:

A man may not go out [on Shabbat] with a sword, bow, shield, club or spear. If he did, he is obligated to bring a sacrifice; R. Eliezer says, these are tachshitim (ornaments) for him.

The Sages say, they are a disgrace, as it says - "וכתו חרבותם לאתים וחניתותיהם למזמרות לא" (They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.)

It is clear from this that, whilst the Sages posit that these weapons are not classed as ornaments and are therefore burdens on Shabbat, R. Eliezer holds that they are a form

of jewellery and therefore permitted. The Talmud brings a braita that sheds further light on this dispute:

They said to R. Eliezer, 'If they are ornaments, why will they cease in the era of the Messiah?' He said to them, 'Because they will not be needed, as it says 'לא ישא גוי אל גוי חרב'. Yet let them exist merely as ornaments? Abaye said, "It may be compared to a candle at noon (and therefore totally useless)."

Now this disagrees with Shmuel. For Shmuel said, "This world differs from the Messianic era only in respect to servitude of the exiled, for it is said, 'for the poor shall never cease out of the land'. This supports R. Hiyya b. Abba who said, All the prophets prophesied only for the Messianic age, but as for the world to come, 'the eye has not seen, O Lord'."

There are some who state: They [the Sages] said to R. Eliezer, "Since they are Ornaments for him, why should they cease in the Days of the Messiah?" "In the Days of the Messiah too they shall not cease", he answered. This is Shmuel's view, and it disagrees with that of R. Hiyya b. Abba.<sup>16</sup>

This additional material is a treasure trove for discussion, but what interests us most is the latter dispute between Shmuel and R. Hiyya b. Abba. Simply put, they seem to be following the debate highlighted above between the Prophets. Shmuel, who states that there will be no difference between the two eras seems to be following the view of Malakhi, whilst R. Hiyya b. Abba follows Isaiah, predicting numerous changes to the world. We will return to this debate later when we assess how the Rambam comes to a conclusion in this matter.

The second debate occurs in Sanhedrin, and takes the form of two Sages attempting to prove their viewpoints by utilising different Torah verses.

Rav said: All the predestined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds. But Shmuel maintained: it is sufficient for a mourner to keep his [period of] mourning (Israel's sufferings in Exile in themselves sufficiently warrant their redemption, regardless of repentance). This matter is disputed by Tannaim: R. Eliezer said: if Israel repent, they will be redeemed; if not, they will not be redeemed. R. Joshua said to him, if they do not repent, will they not be redeemed!? But the Holy One, blessed be He, will set up a king over them, whose decrees shall be as cruel as those of Haman, whereby Israel shall engage in repentance, and He will thus bring them back to the right path.

The debate continues with both Tannaim bringing passukim to prove their position, but ends with the following:

R. Joshua answered, But it is elsewhere written, 'And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by Him that lives for ever that it shall be for a time, times and a half and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished.'<sup>17</sup> At this R. Eliezer remained silent.

Whether or not R. Eliezer concedes to his opponent is unclear, but nonetheless, the second debate becomes clear. R. Eliezer and Rav take the view that only when the Jewish People initiate a process of repentance will the Messiah arrive, whereas R. Joshua and Shmuel state that the process will occur naturally, either because the end of suffering has arrived naturally, or because God has forced the Jewish People to begin a process of repentance. They may well concur with their opponents in a case when the Jewish People voluntarily begin a process of repentance.

---

*R. Eliezer and Rav take the view that only when the Jewish People initiate a process of repentance will the Messiah arrive, whereas R. Joshua and Shmuel state that the process will occur naturally, either because the end of suffering has arrived naturally, or because God has forced the Jewish People to begin a process of repentance.*

---

The very next page of Talmud brings another story that would support the importance of repentance in the Messianic process:

Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi once asked the prophet Elijah: "Where shall I find the Messiah?" "At the gate of the city," Elijah replied. "How shall I recognise him?" "He sits among the lepers." "Among the lepers?" cried Rabbi Joshua. "What is he doing there?" "He changes their bandages," Elijah answered. "He changes them one by one." Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi went and sought the Messiah. He found him and said: "Peace to you, Master and teacher". "Peace to you Ben Levi", he replied. "When will you come, Master?" "Today", the Messiah replied. When Rabbi Joshua next met Elijah he reported the conversation. He added, "He spoke falsely, for

he said he would come today, and he has not". Elijah replied, "This is what he said: 'Today – if you will listen to his voice' (quoting Tehillim 95:7). That is, if Israel repented, he would have come that day.

In contrast to the individuals below whom we shall discuss in greater detail, the predominant Orthodox view was based largely on the source above. Linking internal repentance, which he views as a passive approach<sup>18</sup>, with an instantaneous salvation, Professor Aviezer Ravitzky remarks that:

Their position accords primacy to utopian messianism ...over the restorative variety... It comprehends messianism in miraculous and supernatural terms rather than in concrete, political terms... By the same token, this view makes redemption dependant on repentance, on preparation of an exclusively spiritual nature... Consequently, it favours the traditional quietism and historical passivity.<sup>19</sup>

### ***The Rambam's Contradiction***

Until now, we have seen various disputes amongst both the Prophets and the Talmudic scholars. Nonetheless, these disparate positions are acceptable, either because the Prophets only wished to give us a particular glimpse at the Messianic Age, or because there is a genuine dispute between the Prophets/Talmudic Rabbis. In the context of a halakhic book, it becomes a far greater issue when the author appears to rule in conjunction with both sides of the debate.

In Hilkhoh Teshuva, the Rambam writes as follows:

כל הנביאים כולן לא ניבאו אלא לימות המשיח אבל העולם הבא עין לא ראתה אלהים זולתך

All the Prophets only prophesied about the Days of the Messiah, but with regards to the World to Come, "No eye has seen but yours alone God".<sup>20</sup>

This would suggest that the Rambam follows R. Hiyya b. Abba, namely that the Messianic Period will contain all the miracles that the Prophets describe. However, the Rambam then writes in Hilkhoh Melakhim the following:

אמרו חכמים אין בין העולם הזה לימות המשיח אלא שיעבוד מלכיות בלבד

The Sages said: "There is no difference between this world and the Days of Messiah other than freedom from foreign subjugation."<sup>21</sup>

This clearly presents an issue for us, as the Rambam is contradicting his previously held opinion and now ruling like Shmuel as we saw above. The resolution of this issue

will allow us to gain an insight into a distinction that has played an important role to this very day.

### ***The Turei Even's Solution***

The Turei Even, written by R. Arye Leib ben Asher Gunzberg, suggests the following resolution. He writes as follows:

In my opinion it is possible to say that both this and this are the words of the living God. Shmuel follows his own opinion ... that is to say, when the time of redemption approaches, we will be redeemed even without teshuva, but when the redemption occurs in such a way, the Jewish People will not be meritorious, and as such, there will be no difference between this world and the Days of Messiah other than freedom from foreign subjugation. However, when the redemption occurs through the process of teshuva and merit, that is when there will be all the goodness and comforts.<sup>22</sup>

According to R. Gunzberg, the two arguments that we highlighted earlier in the Talmud are directly intertwined. Once teshuva takes place, so will the miracles prophesied by Isaiah. However, when the Jewish People lack merit, the redemption will occur, but only through a natural process.

---

***Once teshuva takes place, so will the miracles prophesied by Isaiah. However, when the Jewish people lack merit, the redemption will occur, but only through a natural process***

---

This is perhaps hinted to in the text of Malakhi, as he writes at the start of chapter three:

Behold, I send My messenger, and he shall clear the way before Me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple.... But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appears ... He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver ... And I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers; and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless.<sup>23</sup>

This would suggest that once the Messianic Age has occurred, a cleansing process will be required in order to

purify the Jewish People, thus implying that teshuva has not yet occurred amongst the people.

### ***The Vilna Gaon's Solution***

The Vilna Gaon also highlights the issue with the text of the Rambam. However, his resolution is rather different as he writes as follows:

Both are the word of the Living God, since there are two periods of time entitled Days of Messiah. The first is Messiah ben Yosef and this is dependent upon merit ... and there will be no difference between this world and these days other than freedom from foreign subjugation. After this... when the time arrives, Esau will come with Gog and Magog... and all will fall into the hands of Messiah ben David.<sup>24</sup>

Notwithstanding the connection noted above regarding the necessity of merit in order to start the process, the Vilna Gaon predicates his answer on the distinction between two different Messianic figures and their roles in the world. As such, it is possible for the Rambam to be hinting to this distinction in his halakhic work. The Vilna Gaon is not the first to distinguish between these two Messianic figures, and as we shall see in the next section, this distinction was to play an important role throughout Jewish History, starting hundreds of years previously.

### ***Rabbi Akiva's Active Vision***

At a time of upheaval and unrest, R. Akiva's redemptive vision was striking in its uniqueness and intensity. In the words of Rabbi Binyamin Lau, "these battle cries stirred R. Akiva to action and inspired a vision of redemption which endures to this day... The notion of two messiahs led R. Akiva to search for an earthly redemption and not just a heavenly one... The sages did not tend to agree with R. Akiva's vision, regarding it as too innovative and too daring."<sup>25</sup> Much of the following utilises R. Lau's analysis of this period, and the role that R. Akiva played in this tumultuous period of Jewish History.

An interesting example of R. Akiva's vision occurs in the last chapter of Pesachim. Discussing how to end the maggid section of the haggada on Pesah, the mishna says as follows:

R. Tarfon says, "Who has redeemed us and redeemed our ancestors from Egypt" and no concluding brakha. R. Akiva says, "So may God ... bring us to future festivals and pilgrimages which approach us in peace, rejoicing in the building of Your city and joyful in your service, and may we eat there of the offerings and Pesah sacrifices" until "Blessed are You God Who has redeemed Israel."<sup>26</sup>

In the words of R. Lau,

R. Akiva, whose aspirations are messianic, insists on praying for the future as well... He holds that it is God who pushes us to make haste, as He wants to see us actively working towards redemption.<sup>27</sup>

---

*R' Akiva holds that it is God who pushes us to make haste, as He wants to see us actively working towards redemption*

---

Of course, it would be somewhat remiss of us not to mention the famous Talmudic story that appears at the end of Tractate Makkot.

Once they (R. Akiva, Rabban Gamliel, R. Elazar b. Azarya and R. Yehoshua) were coming up to Jerusalem together, and just as they came to Mount Scopus they saw a fox emerging from the Holy of Holies. They started to weep but R. Akiva laughed. They said to him, why are you merry? He replied: Why are you weeping? They said they to him: A place of which it was once said, "And the non-Priest that draws near shall be put to death" (Bamidbar 1:51), has now become the haunt of foxes, and we should not weep? He therefore said: This is why I laugh! It is written, "And I will take to Me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zekhariah the Son of Jeberechiah" (Isaiah 8:2). Now what connection is there between Uriah the priest and Zekhariah? Uriah lived during the times of the first Temple, while Zekhariah lived during the second Temple? The Torah made the prophecy of Zekhariah dependent on that of Uriah. In the prophecy of Uriah it is written, "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field" (Mica 3:12) and in Zekhariah it is written, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts, old men and old women will again sit in the broad places of Jerusalem". As long as Uriah's prophecy had not had been fulfilled, I had misgivings regarding the accuracy of Zekhariah's prophecy. Now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, it is quite certain that Zekhariah's prophecy will also come to fruition. They said to him: Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us!<sup>28</sup>

Again in the words of R. Lau,

Wild animals skirted among the ruins of the Temple and darted forth from the Holy of Holies. This was all the other sages could see. But Rabbi Akiva cast his eyes into the distant

future... Even then, Rabbi Akiva was the visionary, able to foresee Israel's future role in the world.<sup>29</sup>

Although there are many more examples of R. Akiva's unique vision, the most famous of all is his position in relation to Bar Kokhba and his rebellion. Bar Kokba was not a sage, nor a scholar who left the Beit Midrash in order to answer the urgent call of his people. The Jerusalem Talmud relates that:

When he would go out to war he would say: Master of the Universe. Do not help and do not hinder us! "Is it not you God who has forsaken us, do not go forth God with your armies (Tehillim 60:12)"<sup>30</sup>.

Notwithstanding this somewhat irreligious position, "R. Akiva, upon seeing Bar Kokhba, would say: This is the King Messiah."<sup>31</sup> This clearly demonstrated R. Akiva's belief that there would be two Messianic figures, and his identifying Bar Kokhba as the Messiah ben Yosef<sup>32</sup>. Although the rebellion ultimately ended in failure, the uniqueness of R. Akiva's position cannot be understated.

A potential difficulty must be addressed with this position. Given that ultimately the rebellion of Bar Kokhba failed, would this not prove that R. Akiva's position is flawed? The Rambam addresses this question in Hilkhos Melakhim when he wrote as follows:

Do not imagine that the Messiah King must perform miracles and wonders, or create new things in the world, or resurrect the dead, or similar such things. This is not so, for Rabbi Akiva was the wisest of all the sages of the Mishna and he was the arms bearer of Bar Koziva the King (Bar Kokhba) and he would refer to him as the Messiah King, and he, together with all of the sages of his generation<sup>33</sup>, believed that Bar Kokhba was the Messiah King until he was killed due to his iniquities, and when he was killed they understood that he was not [the Messiah]<sup>34</sup>

The Rambam thus demonstrates that miracles were not a necessary pre-requisite for the Messiah, since there was no demand on Bar Kokhba to produce any such wonders. Rather, it was due to Bar Kokhba's sinful actions that he was unable to actualise his own tremendous potential as the Rambam writes. Perhaps the attitude of Bar Kokhba, as illustrated above when he refused to acknowledge God's power, was an example of his less than perfect nature.

To conclude this section, it is apparent that R. Akiva did not mention teshuva as a necessary precursor to redemption. Although clearly, it would have been ideal if all the Jews were keeping the Torah, his redemptive ideology took him in a more active, dynamic direction,

believing that “nationalism was an inherent component of religious identity<sup>35</sup>” Although R. Kook’s ideology<sup>36</sup> won’t be discussed in this article, he followed a similar idea, writing about “R. Akiva’s role as an eternal light of devotion to strengthen the vision of salvation and rejuvenation for Israel and its land, which has been awakened now at this time of redemption.<sup>37</sup>”

### **R. Yehuda HaLevi**

Some thousand years after the failure of the Bar Kokhba rebellion, R. Yehuda HaLevi authored one of the most important philosophical books in Judaism. The Kuzari, his account of a mythical conversation<sup>38</sup> between the King of the Khazars and a Jewish scholar, covers all areas of Jewish thought.

Split into five sections, R. Yehuda HaLevi addresses the significance of the Land of Israel in the second essay. Responding to a query regarding the special nature of the Land of Israel, he writes as follows:

You will have no difficulty in perceiving that one country may have higher qualifications than others. There are places in which particular plants, metals, or animals are found, or where the inhabitants are distinguished by their form and character, since perfection or deficiency of the soul are produced by the mingling of the elements... How about the hill on which you say that the vines thrive so well? If it had not been properly planted and cultivated, it would never produce grapes... No other place would share the distinction of the divine influence, just as no other mountain might be able to produce good wine.<sup>39</sup>

At this point, R. Yehuda HaLevi has already begun to develop his theory, namely that the Jewish People cannot thrive without a connection to the Land of Israel. Continuing to develop this theory over the course of many Talmudic proofs, R. Yehuda HaLevi is stopped in his tracks when the King rebukes him as follows:

If this be so, you have fallen short of the duty laid down in your law, by not endeavouring to reach that place, and making it your abode in life and death... Your bowing and kneeling in the direction of it is either mere appearance or thoughtless worship. Yet your first forefathers chose it as an abode in preference to their birth-places, and lived there as strangers, rather than as citizens in their own country... but the country was full of unchastity, impurity, and idolatry. Your fathers, however, had no other desire than to remain in it. Neither did they leave it in times of death and famine except by God’s permission. Finally, they directed their bones to be buried there<sup>40</sup>.

The passion of this response is startling, as is the reply that R. Yehuda HaLevi gives to the King.

---

*Were we prepared to meet the God of our forefathers ... we should find the same salvation as our fathers did in Egypt*

---

This is a severe reproach, O king of the Khazars. It is the sin which kept the divine promise with regard to the second Temple, “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion” (Zekhariah 2:10), from being fulfilled. Divine Providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first, if they had all willingly consented to return. But only a part was ready to do so, whilst the majority and the aristocracy remained in Babylon, preferring dependence and slavery, and unwilling to leave their houses and their affairs... The sentence, “My beloved stretches forth his hand through the opening” may be interpreted as the urgent call of Ezra, Nehemia, and the Prophets, until a portion of the people grudgingly responded to their invitation. In accordance with their mean mind they did not receive full measure. Divine Providence only gives man as much as he is prepared to receive; if his receptive capacity be small, he obtains little, and much if it be great. Were we prepared to meet the God of our forefathers ... we should find the same salvation as our fathers did in Egypt.<sup>41</sup>

Again, similarly to R. Akiva, there is no mention of teshuva, but rather a recognition that a failure to act, both in the times of the return from the First Exile and nowadays, has prevented the Jewish People from reaching a stage of redemption. Active return to the Land of Israel would thus ensure that redemption could begin<sup>42</sup>.

### **The Hibbat Tsion Movement**

During the nineteenth century several Orthodox thinkers began to take more of an activist view of redemption. The two who interest us most, R. Judah Alkalai and R. Tsvi Hirsch Kalischer, were notable for their unique views in this regard, often facing vehement opposition.

An example of the opposing passive approach can be seen in a sermon given by R. Yonatan Eybeschutz in 1749. He preached as follows to his congregation, at the end of his sermon. “How long will we delay when the matter depends upon repentance alone? Let us throw away the sins of hatred and haughtiness, vulgarity of language and deceit. Because of our many sins, all our endeavours (sic.) are conducted with haughtiness and the love of impiety.<sup>43</sup>” Y. Salmon notes again that,

For the Jews of that generation, there was only one means to seek the Redemption- Repentance. Repentance ensured that their prayers for Redemption would be heard- their sins resulted in their prayers not being answered. The preacher exhorted his audience to use the passive means of repentance and prayer on high, making no realistic suggestions for bringing Redemption nearer.<sup>44</sup>

As we have seen, the large majority of Orthodox scholars had subscribed to a passive approach when discussing the Messianic Age. Whilst R. Akiva had the legal position that enabled him to disagree with his opponents, R. Alkalai and R. Hirsch were less able to do so, at least without radical new interpretations, which they did indeed provide.

The role of these two individuals in Zionist history has been minimised, but as has been pointed out,

No one can deny that Herzl was indeed the prime mover of the Zionist movement but this does not render him the first to combine intellectual and physical efforts on behalf of a Zionist vision. That honor (sic.) belongs to a number of individuals, including Rabbi Zvi (sic.) Hirsch Kalischer... Between 1860 and 1870 Kalischer single-mindedly devoted his entire efforts to building a Zionist movement.<sup>45</sup>

---

*No modern people, struggling for its own fatherland, can deny the right of the Jewish people to its former land*

---

The nineteenth century was historically right for a new movement, with a refreshingly different ideology. As Moses Hess wrote,

Springtime in the life of nations began with the French Revolution... Resurrection of nations becomes a natural phenomenon at a time when Greece and Rome are being regenerated... Among the nations believed to be dead, and which, when they become conscious of their historic mission, will struggle for their national rights, is Israel. No modern people, struggling for its own fatherland, can deny the right of the Jewish people to its former land.<sup>46</sup>

In a similar vein, R. Kalischer wrote, "Pay attention to what the Italians, Poles and Hungarians have done. They placed their lives... at the disposal of their country... We should be ashamed of ourselves, for these nations acted on behalf of their own honor (sic.), while we not only

must think of our forefather's honor (sic.) but the glory of God as well."<sup>47</sup>

As such, these Rabbis were able to connect with events taking place around them, and contextualise them in a Jewish milieu. As R. Alkalai wrote, "The spirit of the times has freed all the inhabitants of the earth to live where they wish ... it calls upon us to say... "Go free"! It demand[s] of us that we re-establish Zion, the centre of our life"<sup>48</sup>. At the same time, these Rabbis were denying the traditionally held passive approach to the Messianic Age, with R. Kalischer writing that, "If a man should come before you and declare... that the Messiah will be sent from heaven at one stroke, you should pour coals upon his head."<sup>49</sup>

Given that these Rabbis were composing a new active eschatological philosophy they would be forced to reinterpret sources. As Ravitzky puts it, "They hereby contribute greatly to the creation of a new, Zionist homiletic reworking of the classical messianic texts"<sup>50</sup>. Lehman-Wilzig similarly notes that,

Objectively, they were theologically valid, but the mere fact that he brought so many [sources] shows that he was aware of his divergence from a widely accepted Jewish theological principle with eighteen hundred years weight behind it.<sup>51</sup>

The most important source for these Rabbis was from the midrash which stated that, "Thus will be the redemption of Israel... first it will glimmer, then sparkle, then shine forth more and more brightly"<sup>52</sup>. As a result, the mindset that had taken hold of the Jewish people, namely that the redemption would occur miraculously and instantaneously could now be confronted directly.

Interestingly, at a similar time, R. Alkalai was covering another potential theological weakness by following in the footsteps of R. Akiva hundreds of years earlier. He wrote that there was a distinction between the Messiah ben Yosef and Messiah ben David, the former being handpicked to lead the migration to Israel, and the latter arriving to build the Temple<sup>53</sup>. This allowed Jews to still believe that the Messianic Age could not be hurried, and yet understand that this only applied to the final redemptive stage.

R. Hayyim David Hazzan, the Sephardi rabbi wrote as follows,

We shall succeed in bringing redemption to the Holy Land by ploughing and reaping, and by performing the commandments related to the land. The salvation of the Lord thus shall spring forth from the land.<sup>54</sup> Along similar lines, R. Kalischer noted that, "When He will give redemption to the Land in its earthiness, then

will the horn of salvation sprout from the heavens above.

One may note that there is still one issue yet to be resolved. According to those who followed the dictum of the Talmud quoted at the beginning of this article, how could these Rabbis connect their theology with one that advocated teshuva as the resolution to Exile?

---

*The essence of teshuva is, as explained in the Zohar, the wholehearted resolve to return to Erets Israel.*

---

These two Rabbis were not unfamiliar with this potential difficulty, and once again, their creative response is a testament to both their knowledge of Jewish sources and their desire to create an all-encompassing theological defence of their position<sup>55</sup>. R. Kalischer wrote, in response to his opponent R. Meier Auerbach that,

Respecting your argument that all is dependent on teshuva - do we not see that things are getting worse. But the essence of teshuva is, as explained in the Zohar, the wholehearted resolve to return to Erets Israel and, when a sufficiently large number have gathered there, they will repent fully.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, R. Alkalai wrote that, "Teshuva means that they should return (yashuvu) to the land... for the Jew who dwells elsewhere is like one who has no God; hence there is no repentance greater than this."<sup>57</sup>

### Conclusion

We have seen how despite the prevalent belief that redemption would occur through a passive process of personal redemption, there were individuals throughout history who advocated an active theology.

In the case of R. Akiva, his messianic ideology led to support for the Bar Kokhba rebellion, as he firmly believed that the uprising would bring the Days of Messiah, led from the front by the physical Messiah ben Yosef who would be followed by the spiritual leadership of Messiah ben David.

R. Yehuda HaLevi was perhaps the first to combine an active messianic outlook with a return to the Land of Israel. Believing that Jews today could bring the Days of the Messiah if they were only prepared to do their part, he refers to the failure to return to Israel as a sin, seeing no difference between those who failed to return from Babylon when the Second Temple was built and the Jews in his day who lived outside the Land of Israel.

Finally, we saw how the leaders of Hibbat Tzion reinterpreted traditional sources in order to establish their own theology. The most striking element of their philosophy was the emphasis on teshuva as a physical return, rather than an individual's introspection.

It is appropriate to end this essay with the following midrash which emphasises the importance of taking action in the world.

כי ה' אלהיך ברכך בכל מעשה ידך (דברים ב ז), ר' יעקב אומר יכול אפילו יושב ובטל, תלמוד לומר בכל מעשה ידך, אם עשה אדם הרי הוא מתברך, ואם לא אינו מתברך

For Hashem Your God blesses you in all the work of your hand. R' Ya'akov says, "You may think that this applies even when you sit idly, therefore the Torah says 'In all the work of your hand'. If a man acts, he will be blessed, but if not, he will not be blessed"<sup>58</sup>.

*Simon Levy was educated at Manchester Grammar School and spent two years in Jerusalem learning at Yeshivat Torat Shraga. He returned to Manchester to take a degree in Liberal Arts. Simon has worked in many roles within Jewish Education, including as the Mazkir (National Director) of Bnei Akiva, at UJIA in charge of youth movement summer tours to Israel, teaching kodesh at Immanuel College and heading Mizrahi UK. He recently completed a Masters in Jewish Education at Birkbeck, University of London and has just made aliya with his wife and daughter.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 97b

<sup>2</sup> See Ezekiel 38:18-23 for an example of such a vision

<sup>3</sup> Joel 4: 9-17

<sup>4</sup> Zekharia 8:4-5

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Ezra to Malakhi 1:1

<sup>6</sup> See Zekharia 6:12-15

<sup>7</sup> Malakhi

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 2:17

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 3:16-18

<sup>10</sup> Bereishit 1:28-30

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 2:16

<sup>12</sup> T.B. Sanhedrin 56b

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 11:6-9

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 25:8

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 2:4

<sup>16</sup> T.B. Shabbat 63a

<sup>17</sup> Daniel 12:7 – thus proving that there is a fixed time for the Redemption

<sup>18</sup> Although it will not be discussed here, the ideology of Habad does seek to take the traditional view of teshuva and instil an activist approach to the process of repentance. As Ravitzky writes, "The basic religious... mission of Habad is... to elevate the conscious choice of the individual ... that is, to actualize (sic) his inner given holiness (Ravitzky, p.191)."

<sup>19</sup> Aviezer Ravitzky, "Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism", Trans. M. Swirsky and J. Chipman, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.21

<sup>20</sup> Rambam Hilkhot Teshuva 8:7

<sup>21</sup> Rambam Hilkhot Melakhim 12:2

<sup>22</sup> Turei Even, Comm. to Rambam's Hilkhot Teshuva 7

<sup>23</sup> Malakhi, 3:1-5

<sup>24</sup> Vilna Gaon; Commentary to T.B. Brakhot, 31a

<sup>25</sup> Binyamin Lau, "The Sages: Volume II", Maggid Press, p.279

<sup>26</sup> Mishna Pesahim 10:6

<sup>27</sup> Lau, p.289-290

<sup>28</sup> T.B. Makkot 24b

<sup>29</sup> Lau, p.308

<sup>30</sup> Talmud Yerushalmi Ta'anit 4:5

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> R. Kook writes at length about this principle in his article entitled "The Mourning in Jerusalem", The Articles of Rav Kook (Jerusalem 5774). As we have already seen, the Vilna Gaon also makes this important distinction.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, the Ra'avad takes issue with this Rambam and states that, "Did not Ben Koziba (Bar Kokhba) say 'I am King Messiah' and the Rabbis sent people to check if he "could judge by his smell" or not. Since he could not, they killed him".

Thus the Ra'avad (following the view of the Gemara in Sanhedrin (93b)) holds that Messiah does have to be able to work miracles. The absence of the ability to "judge by his sense of smell" proved that he was not Messiah.

<sup>34</sup> Rambam, Hilkhot Melakhim 11:3

<sup>35</sup> Lau, p.375

<sup>36</sup> There is another striking example of the similarity between R. Akiva and R. Kook. As I wrote in a previous edition of Degel (Nissan 5769), "Just after R. Kook made Aliya in 1904... Herzl passed away and R. Kook delivered a hesped for him. R. Kook wrote, 'in our time, like the footsteps of Mashiah ben Yosef, comes the Zionist vision. We may consider this man to have been the harbinger of Mashiah ben Yosef, in terms of his role in achieving the great aim of national rebirth in the material sense. This emphasis on the material dimension...prevents spiritual elevation. Yet the various forces will all end up submitting to the light of the Torah and the knowledge of God.' (AY Kook, Eulogy in Jerusalem, *Ma'amrei ha-Reiyah* (Jerusalem, 1984), 96-9)"

<sup>37</sup> The Articles of Rav Kook, p.202-203

<sup>38</sup> The letter of Hasdai Ibn Shaprut to the King would perhaps suggest that there was such a country who had decided to convert to Judaism. In addition, scholars such as D.M. Dunlop have postulated that Yehuda had access to Khazar documents upon which he loosely based his work.

<sup>39</sup> Kuzari, Second Essay Points 10 and 12

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Point 23

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Point 24

<sup>42</sup> Although this is not referenced, this thought is perhaps predicated on the following Talmudic teaching. "Had

Israel ascended like a wall from Babylonia, the Temple would not have been destroyed a second time. (Talmud Bavli Yoma 9b)". This is of course connected to the "Three Oaths" – see note 50 below for more details.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Eybeschütz, Yearot Devash, VoL. II, Sulzbach, 1799 (second edition), p. 62.

<sup>44</sup> Yosef Salmon, "Tradition and Modernity in Early Religious-Zionist Thought", Summer 1979, p.83

<sup>45</sup> Sam N. Lehman-Wilzig, "Proto-Zionism and its Proto-Herzl: The Philosophy and Efforts of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought, Summer 1976, p. 56

<sup>46</sup> Moses Hess, "The Revival of Israel: Rome and Jerusalem, The last nationalist Question", 1862 (Bison Book Edition), University of Nebraska Press, p.86

<sup>47</sup> Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, Drishat

Zion, ed. Israel Klausner (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1964, p.179

<sup>48</sup> Judah Alkalai, Kitvei ha-Rav Yehuda Alkalai, ed. Yitshak Werfel (Jerusalem, 1944), p.529 (known henceforth as Alkalai)

<sup>49</sup> Zevi Hirsch Kalischer, Ha-ketavim ha-Tsioni'im shel ha-Rav Tsvi Kalischer, ed. Y. Klausner, Jerusalem, 1947, p.258

<sup>50</sup> Ravitzky, p.28

<sup>51</sup> Lehman-Wilzig, p.58

<sup>52</sup> Cant. R. 6:16

<sup>53</sup> Isaac Wedel, The Works of Rabbi Judah Alkalai (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1944), p. 221.

<sup>54</sup> A J Slutzki, ed. Shivat Tsion, pt. 2 (Warsaw, 1900), p.54

<sup>55</sup> Astute readers may still be troubled by the Three Oaths that appear in Tractate Ketubot (111a) and how the Hibbat Tsion dealt with them. Ravitzky deals with this in detail on pages 31-2 but in short notes how both R. Alkalai and R. Kalischer reinterpreted the traditional understanding of the Three Oaths to support their own philosophy.

<sup>56</sup> The correspondence appeared in Ha-Levanon, in 1863

<sup>57</sup> Alkalai, p.244

<sup>58</sup> Midrash Tehillim; 23

# *'A child born in Paris in 1933...'*

## *Rav Aharon Lichtenstein at 80*

### *- A Tribute*

RABBI JOE WOLFSON

**O**n Friday 10th May 2013, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein addressed several thousand of his students who had gathered together from across Israel and overseas to celebrate his 80th birthday at Yeshivat Har Etzion (Gush), the institute where he has been rosh yeshiva since 1971.

'When I think that a child born in Paris in 1933, who had to flee Europe for America, should be standing here today...' began Rav Lichtenstein before his voice cracked with emotion.

For the last fifty years, Rav Lichtenstein has been, and continues to be, one of the foremost leaders of modern orthodoxy and religious Zionism. He is one of the towering figures of our community whose gadlut b'Torah compares with any one of this generation's gedolim, and whose character traits of humility, kindness and sincere and deep religiosity are attested to by all who have come into contact with him<sup>1</sup>.

---

*Rav Lichtenstein has been, and continues to be, one of the foremost leaders of modern orthodoxy and religious Zionism*

---

#### ***Background***

Rav Lichtenstein was born in France in 1933 and, with the rise of Nazism, left with his family for America as a young child. Settling originally in Chicago, where his father, Rabbi Dr Yechiel Lichtenstein, was a noted Jewish educator and school principal, the family relocated to New York in order to allow their son to develop his precocious Talmudic skills. Through his mother's connections with the Torah elite of New York, tutoring was arranged with such luminaries as Rav Yitshak Hutner at Yeshivat Haim Berlin. From there he moved to Yeshiva University (YU), where he counted Rav Aron Soloveitchik, and above all his future father-in-law Rav

Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, as his greatest mentors. In the 1960s he pursued a doctorate at Harvard in Renaissance English Literature – a time which left a lasting impact on his overall thought and vision – before returning to YU as a rosh yeshiva where he helped regenerate the Kollel and taught both gemara and English literature. In 1971 he made aliya with his family and accepted an invitation from Rav Yehuda Amital to serve as joint rosh yeshiva of the recently founded Yeshivat Har Etzion in Gush Etzion, a position he has occupied ever since. Over the last 40 years, a number of books of collected essays have appeared, *Leaves of Faith I and II*, and *Varieties of Jewish Religious Experience*, a collection of adapted lectures, *By His Light*<sup>2</sup>, and eight volumes of Talmudic works, *Shiurei HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein*, on rarely studied areas such as *Taharot*, *Dina D'Garme*, and *Horayot* as well as more well trodden masekhtot such as *Bava Batra*, *Bava Metzia* and *Gittin*.



Rav Aharon Lichtenstein

The interested reader will be able to get the fullest and best picture of his thought from these works, as well as quite a number of essays written about Rav Lichtenstein by others<sup>3</sup>. This piece is not intended to be a critical overview or an in-depth analysis of Rav Lichtenstein's life and work. Nor does it address what is arguably Rav Lichtenstein's most significant achievement: the continued development and further refinement of the conceptual-analytic method of Talmud study (the Brisker method) that originated with Rav Haim Soloveitchik, and

that was carried on by his children and grandson Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Rav Lichtenstein's father in law<sup>4</sup>.

Rather this essay is intended as a student's appreciation of his teacher, by way of a collection of thoughts and anecdotes. Hopefully they will communicate something of the experience of studying in close proximity to Rav Lichtenstein for a number of years, and capture some aspects of his teaching and personality that make him modern orthodoxy's pre-eminent rosh yeshiva.

### ***Complexity and Passion***

A number of years ago I sat in on a question and answer with Rav Lichtenstein with some visiting high school students from Manchester. One asked the obvious question for an eighteen year old formulating his gap-year plans, 'what is it that makes your yeshiva unique?' After a few moments of insisting that there were many wonderful yeshivot to choose from, Rav Lichtenstein came up with the following formulation about what he hoped characterised Yeshivat Har Etzion. There is a tension, Rav Lichtenstein explained, between two values: complexity and passion. Complexity entails being able to see multiple sides to an issue – the understanding that no single perspective captures the whole truth, that our own deeply held convictions will not necessarily be shared by others, for perfectly valid reasons. Passion entails a sense of absolute commitment to a cause, a love and determination to see a task through, to be bound up totally in one's belief.

Passion does not naturally lead to complexity for passion is far easier to engender when one views the critical issues as black and white – when you are right, and the other is wrong. Complexity does not naturally lead to passion, for an appreciation of multiple angles and perspectives can leave one disinclined to commit to any single perspective. Said Rav Lichtenstein, his hope for the unique character of the yeshiva is that a synthesis is attained between passion and complexity – not a lukewarm halfway house, which pays lip-service to one without truly fulfilling the other, but a true and deep combination; to be as passionate as possible on the one hand, and as sensitive to nuance and complexity as possible on the other.

---

***Said Rav Lichtenstein, his hope for the unique character of the yeshiva is that a synthesis is attained between passion and complexity – not a lukewarm halfway house... but a true and deep combination.***

---

On hearing or reading these words an understandable response is that such a fusion is admirably idealistic, yet

in practice unattainable. We all know in ourselves that we often achieve one of these values at the cost of the other. Yet all who have come into contact with Rav Lichtenstein recognise in him an exquisite balance of the two. I have never met someone as passionate as Rav Lichtenstein, nor anyone as complex as him, with such an ability to appreciate multiple sides of an issue, not only in the study of a *sugya*, but when engaged in public debate or helping a student address a delicate and personal issue. In my mind, this should be a central aspiration not only of Yeshivat Har Etzion, but of modern orthodoxy as a whole, and Rav Lichtenstein's example provides a model for us all.

### ***When to judge and when to withhold judgement***

A corollary of Rav Lichtenstein's constant tendency to see the many sides of any given issue is that he is frequently unwilling to pass judgement where many would expect a firm condemnation. This struck me most forcibly as a *shana aleph* student in a discussion with Rav Lichtenstein upon returning from a trip to Poland. We related how we had been shocked to see at the Majdanek death camp, residents of the adjacent town of Lublin treating this place of cruelty and immeasurable suffering in an utterly nonchalant way: a mother had pushed her child's buggy through the camp as a shortcut and we had seen young adults taking driving lessons past the gas chambers. We expected Rav Lichtenstein to articulate our disgust but instead he responded that we should not judge them so harshly; we cannot imagine what it is like to grow up and live beside such a place, with a complicated mix of feelings of guilt, denial and incomprehension. I learnt on that day that judging others, even when they appear to be clearly in the wrong, must wait until the perspective of the person being judged has also been considered.

But if Rav Lichtenstein avoids for the most part condemning others, it is all the more powerful when he does express a firm judgement. Once he had received a letter from a heavily pregnant woman reporting that, on a bus from Jerusalem to Gush Etzion, none of the many yeshiva students had given her a place, leaving her to stand for the whole journey - 'is this what you teach your students?' she had asked. Visibly shocked, Rav Lichtenstein stopped the yeshiva's morning seder (the only time in over forty years) and made furiously clear that if he knew the identity of any of those who had remained seated he would have no hesitation in expelling them immediately from the yeshiva. As in Rav Amital's famous story of the crying baby<sup>5</sup>, Rav Lichtenstein views *limud Torah* as pointless, if not an outright desecration, if it is not combined with awareness, sensitivity and concern for those beyond the walls of the *beit midrash*.

## Secular Education

It is rare to have a conversation with Rav Lichtenstein without a reference being made to one of the pantheon of great authors, poets, or philosophers. One legendary story of the 1970s has Rav Ovadiah Yosef approaching Rav Lichtenstein after a shiur saying that he was familiar with all the sources quoted bar one; 'who was this Rav Dostoyevsky?'

With time spent with Rav Lichtenstein, one appreciates that his broad erudition is not simply a serious side hobby that he believes to be worthwhile but at the very heart of his personality as an *eved Hashem* and *rosh yeshiva*, and serves as the frame of reference that he feels most comfortable in which to express himself. As an example, his most recent sefer to be published is on *Horayot*, a little-studied tractate dealing with the nature and authority of the Sanhedrin and its rulings. The shiurim contained in it are of a standard with the very best of the Brisker method, first pioneered by Rav Haim Soloveitchik a hundred years ago which have since taken over the yeshiva world. Yet in the introduction to the work, it is the political philosophy of Edmund Burke that is cited to explain the revolutionary nature of the mishna's line that a 'mamzer talmid hakham takes precedence over an ignorant Kohen Gadol'<sup>6</sup> – a statement which pre-empts by a millenium the conviction that now lies at the heart of the Western political tradition, that a people have the right and responsibility to overthrow a corrupt and illegitimate regime.

Burke features in the introduction to a work of serious Talmudic scholarship, not as superficial window-dressing, but because of the conviction that *Masekhet Horayot*, is both eternal *dvar Hashem* and at the same time of relevance to the most important political questions of authority and legitimacy that have occupied mankind for thousands of years.

But Rav Lichtenstein's *Torah uMadda* is not quite the same as that of his father-in-law's. Where Rav Soloveitchik utilised Kant, Kierkegaard and others to provide him with concepts and categories to probe religious experience, Rav Lichtenstein turns to literature rather than philosophy to express the richness and drama of religious life and history. This particular take on *Torah uMadda* is best expressed by an analogy that Rav Lichtenstein occasionally uses. Any given object – a table or a vase for instance – reflects upon the one who produced it. The more sophisticated and complex the object, the more impressive is the mind, skill, and labour of the artisan. There is no more complex and sophisticated 'invention', claims Rav Lichtenstein, than that of the human mind and personality, and there is no discipline that better captures its nature than literature. If so, the argument goes, through the study of literature – in combination with *limmud Torah* – do we come to a

deeper and more powerful appreciation of the Creator of mankind, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

---

## *His is the Torah uMadda of the poet rather than the philosopher*

---

This then is the *Torah uMadda* of the poet rather than the philosopher, which states that a familiarity with the best of general culture vastly enriches one's appreciation of the nuances, depths and beauty of life, history, and personal relationships. For the hundreds of students who have studied at HarEtzion before going onto pursue secular degrees, the impact of a *rosh yeshiva* who gives such value and legitimacy to secular studies is integral to an overall ideology that sees the religious Jew as both contributing to, and benefitting from, involvement in the wider society.

## Family

It is a sad but clearly observable phenomenon that many great thinkers and leaders, in the Jewish world and beyond, although having many close students have strained and difficult relationships with their immediate family members. And this is not surprising, for the responsibilities and stresses of those in positions of leadership mean that those ostensibly closest to them can struggle to forge the necessary emotional relationship with the individual behind the public persona<sup>7</sup>.

Given this, it is one of Rav Lichtenstein's proudest accomplishments, that this could never be said of him. Together with his wife Dr Tovah Lichtenstein, the couple have lectured and spoken publicly for many years on the strategies and values they view as necessary for building strong and loving Jewish families in the modern world. Indeed, as they have grown older, it is this aspect of their many achievements that has become increasingly obvious. A friend related to me that he had recently asked Rav Lichtenstein how he coped with the vacuum created now that he has stepped down from giving *shiur yomi*, his regular *gemara* class, that he has given for the last fifty years. The answer was simple: he takes pride in having his family around him.

Fittingly, the day of the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations began with all six of his children giving simultaneous short *shiurim* on an aspect of *limmud Torah* that they connected with their father. His daughter, Mrs Esti Rosenberg, who is the head of the Migdal Oz seminary, spoke about her father's identification with the Ramban, and focused on a specific piece of his commentary to Devarim ch.4. The Ramban draws our attention to the juxtaposition of the end of verse 9:

והודעתם לבניך, ולבני בניך

And you shall teach your children and your children's children

with the beginning of verse 10:

יום אשר עמדת-- לפני ה' אלוך בחרב

The day you stood in front of Hashem your God at Horeb

Although ostensibly the verses form part of separate clauses to one another, the Ramban, building on *Hazal*, interprets their proximity as indicating a fundamental component of *Talmud Torah* – that of העברת המסורה, or the transmission of the tradition. In the Ramban's reading, this obligation to pass on the Torah to coming generations, both its content and the means by which to approach it, is not an external or technical addition to the mitzva of *Talmud Torah*, but essential to its very definition. Such an understanding, explained his daughter, was central to Rav Lichtenstein's approach to his life's work as a father and educator and explained his determination to learn with every one of his children individually for an hour every Shabbat as they were growing up. His other daughter Mrs Tonya Mittleman, expressed a similar sentiment when she said on the film accompanying the occasion, that as children growing up they had never felt any gap or disconnect between their home and their father's role – the yeshiva was their family and their family was the yeshiva in a natural and unquestioned way.

In many places *Hazal* give expression to the tension inherent in being devoted to two absolute values: that of family and the study of Torah<sup>8</sup>. Part of Rav Lichtenstein's legacy to his students is in providing a model that is able to cope with this tension, to demonstrate absolute commitment to each of the values without compromising one's responsibilities to the other.

As I conclude this essay I think back to one of the first times I appreciated the *zechut* of being a student of Rav Lichtenstein. The summer of 2005, the yeshiva was studying Bava Kamma and the country was torn over the policy of disengagement from Gaza that Ariel Sharon's government was intent on pursuing. On the Tuesday of that week Rav Lichtenstein delivered a masterful introductory *shiur klalli* to the yeshiva on the topic of *Dina D'Garme* (indirect causation of damages) deploying his knowledge and conceptual-analytic methodology to excellent effect. The following day from precisely the same position at the front of the Bet Midrash, Rav Lichtenstein delivered another speech to the whole yeshiva. This time however, the topic was not a Talmudic *sugya*, but his vehement rejection as wrong and dangerous of the call, by other leading figures in the religious-Zionist camp, for soldiers to disobey orders if instructed to evacuate settlements in Gush Katif. The

decision to serve in the Israeli army, argued Rav Lichtenstein, must mean putting national unity and cohesion above even our most cherished personal values. Standing in such stark contrast to the opinions of so many other Zionist Rabbis, Rav Lichtenstein's statement was reported widely in the Israeli media the following day, and was a rare example that summer of a major public figure attempting to reduce polarisation rather than exacerbate it.

---

*The synthesis of erudition, nuance and moderation that characterises the best of Modern Orthodoxy, with a sense of historical moment and concern for the Jewish people as a whole*

---

Looking back on the juxtaposition of those two speeches with the hindsight of eight years, they capture something of the uniqueness of Rav Lichtenstein.

The synthesis of the erudition, nuance and moderation that characterises the best of Modern Orthodoxy, with a sense of historical moment and concern for the Jewish people as a whole, which Religious Zionism aspires to – and underpinning that combination, a love and knowledge of Torah with the ability of a world class *rosh yeshiva* and *Talmid Hakham* to impart it.

*Ben shemonim l'gevura*<sup>9</sup> – May we continue to be blessed with Rav Lichtenstein's leadership and teachings for many years to come.

*Joe Wolfson is a rabbi and educator living in Israel where he is a member of the Kollel Halakha of Yeshivat Har Etzion. He has degrees from Cambridge and UCL and has taught in London, New York and Sydney.*

---

<sup>1</sup> In a wide-ranging and at points not uncritical review of Rav Lichtenstein's published work, Alan Brill writes: "Orthodox Jews of all leanings, myself included, have the deepest respect for, even awe of, R. Lichtenstein's piety, learning, and humanity. He is the ideal rosh yeshiva—erudite, humble, and moral." "An Ideal Rosh Yeshiva". *Edah Journal* 5:1 (Tammuz, 2005)] (PDF), available at [www.edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/5\\_1\\_Brill.pdf](http://www.edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/5_1_Brill.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The lectures that comprise *By His Light* can be viewed at <http://www.vbm-torah.org/develop.html>

<sup>3</sup> An enormous bibliography of towards a thousand pieces of Rav Lichtenstein's published and unpublished work has been compiled by his students over the years and has been most recently updated by Rabbi Dov Karol. It can be found at <http://etzion.org.il/vbm/archive/Bibliography-web.htm> In addition a recent blog - [pagesoffaith.wordpress.com](http://pagesoffaith.wordpress.com) - has been launched that

transcribes Rav Lichtenstein's thoughts on contemporary issues.

See also the article by Brill in footnote 1 above. The most in-depth analysis of Rav Lichtenstein Talmudic work has been written by his student Rav Elyakim Krumbein, "From Reb Haim and the Rav to Shi'urei ha-Rav Aharon Lichtenstein – The Evolution of a Tradition of Learning" in The Orthodox Forum work, Lomdus: *The Conceptual Approach to Jewish Learning*, ed. Yosef Blau available at [www.yutorah.org](http://www.yutorah.org) See also the response in the same volume by Dr Avraham Walfish.

<sup>4</sup> The published Talmudic works mentioned above received the Rav Kook Prize this year, with the committee concluding that 'in these books Rav Lichtenstein puts the Brisker learning methodology to deep and impressive use, and opens up traditional Talmudic lamdanut for the current generation'. In the essay cited in footnote 3, Rav Elyakim Krumbein argues convincingly that Rav Lichtenstein's Talmudic work represents not only outstanding articulations of the Brisker methodology, but the actual forward development of the method, contrasting it with both Reb Haim himself and Rav Soloveitchik.

<sup>5</sup> Rav Amital's most oft-cited story, and the one which he frequently said he had in mind when founding the yeshiva, concerned Rav Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Once Rav Schneur Zalman was studying Torah when he heard the crying of his infant grandson. He rose from his studies and soothed the baby to sleep. Meanwhile, his son, the boy's father, was too involved in his study to hear the baby cry. When R. Zalman noticed his son's lack of involvement, he proclaimed, "If someone is studying Torah and fails to hear the cry of a baby's cry, there is something very wrong with his learning."

<sup>6</sup> Mishna Horayot 3:8

<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, and perhaps simultaneously, a tension exists between the intellectual or spiritual idea that absorbs the individual, and the seemingly mundane responsibilities of family. 'There is something vulgar and absurd... in the notion of a Mrs. Plato, a Madame Descartes. You cannot commit to taking out the garbage while also solving the problem of the cogito... Can a man or woman fulfill a sacred devotion to thought, or music, or art, or literature, while fulfilling a proper devotion to spouse or children?', James Wood, 'Sins of the Father - Do Great Novelists Make Bad Parents', *The New Yorker*, July 22, 2013

<sup>8</sup> See for example Ben Azai in Yevamot 63b

<sup>9</sup> Pirkei Avot, Ch. 5

## *Im ninalu*

Yael Unterman

Do the gates of prayer close and open at particular hours or moments?  
Do the gates of prayer creak and bend in the torrid wind?  
Do the gates of prayer have metal bars with tiny ruby studs?  
Do the gates of prayer swing wide at the push of a toddler's plump hand?

Shall a still small voice open them or torrents of weeping only?  
Is there a sign on the gates saying "Trespassers keep out?"  
Are some prayers of inferior pedigree, frayed at the edges, feeble?  
Is there a gatekeeper who may be bribed by a tzaddik or by Kafka?

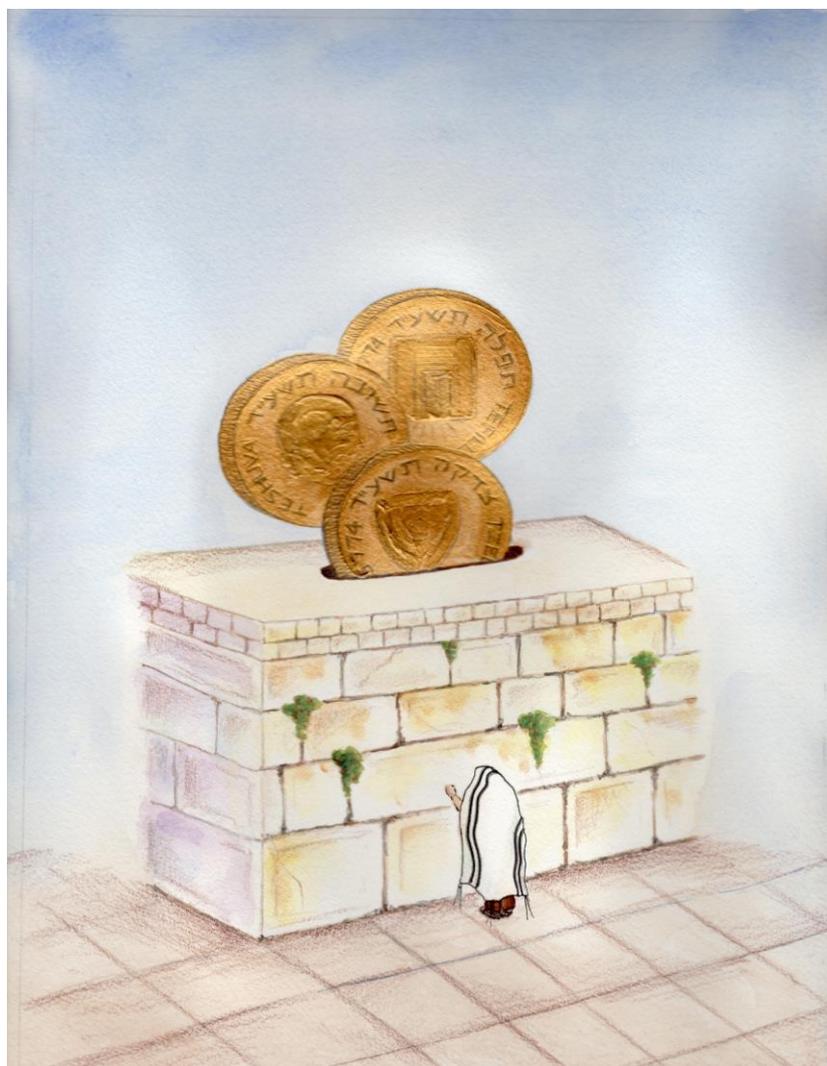
Who can tell me about the gates of prayer?  
My knock echoes hollow; my ears ring empty.

*Yael Unterman grew up in Manchester and now lives in Jerusalem. She is the author of many articles, poems and reviews, and two books: Nehama Leibowitz: Teacher and Bible Scholar (2009 National Jewish Book Awards finalist) and The Hidden of Things: Twelve Stories of Love and Longing (forthcoming, late 2013). To read more of her writings, see [www.yaelunterman.com](http://www.yaelunterman.com)*

Greetings  
from Moshe  
& Sarah  
Shatzkes &  
Family

If you are interested in writing in a future edition of Degel, please be in touch with the editors to share your idea.

The editors can be reached at  
[Degel@aleitzion.co.uk](mailto:Degel@aleitzion.co.uk)



Degel is a publication of Alei Tzion Community and is available to download at  
<http://www.aleitzion.co.uk/degel>

Please dispose of this journal in a manner suited to its content