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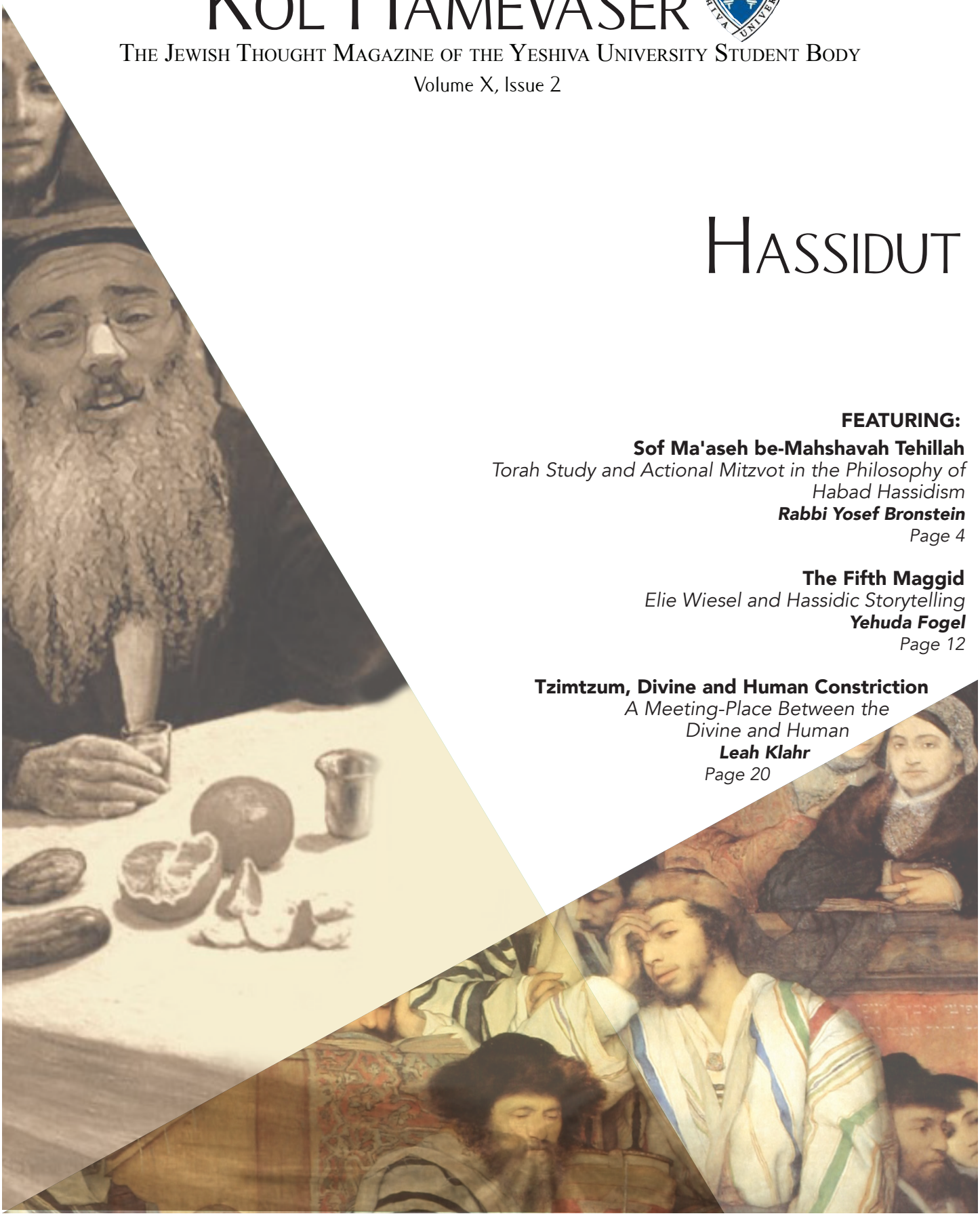

Hassidut

FEATURING:

Hassidut

Letter from the Editor

By Yaakov Schiff

Hassidism was founded in the eighteenth century by Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer of Medzhibozh - better known as the Ba'al Shem Tov, or "Besht" - in the wake of the Khmelnitsky Massacres and Sabbateanism. Preaching the fundamental value of emotional religious fervor, appreciation of Godliness in the mundane, and the profundity of simple piety, Hassidism quickly took European Jewry by storm, attracting thousands of followers even as it became the subject of significant controversy. As Hassidic philosophy and its modes of practice came under fire from many great eighteenth-century rabbinic figures, the division between Hassidim and *Mitnagdim* (anti-Hassidic Jews) shook the European Jewish community to its core.

In the modern day and age, Hassidism thrives as one of the most vibrant strands of Orthodox Jewry. The teachings, values, and holistic spirituality of Hassidic doctrine have had far-reaching influence in the Orthodox Jewish community and beyond. Hassidim make up a significant component of the Jewish population throughout the world, and an increasing number of students on Yeshiva University campuses identify as either Hassidic or neo-Hassidic.

It is the belief of the editors of *Kol Hamevaser* that the tools and resources of the academy can serve as both an enriching complement to traditional Torah learning and a gateway to enhanced depth of *avodat Hashem* (service of God). The goal of this issue of *Kol Hamevaser* is to explore the history and philosophy of Hassidism from a perspective that is at once academic and anchored in an underlying adherence to Halakhic Judaism. In this volume, the reader will find articles exploring the approaches of Hassidic masters to topics of *parshanut* (Torah commentary), *aggada* (homiletics), and *mahshavah* (Jewish philosophy): Leah Klahr discusses the esoteric notion of *tzimtzum* (Divine contraction); Yisrael Ben-Porat presents a Hassidic perspective on *Hazal*'s conception of *Keri'at Yam Suf* (the Splitting of the Reed Sea); Tzvi Benoff contemplates Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson's approach to Rashi's use of Targum Onqelos in light of expanded historical evidence; and Judy Leserman probes the spiritual value of music from the standpoint of Habad Hassidut. Additionally, the reader will also find articles touching on the influence of Hassidic themes and teachings upon the contemporary broader Jewish milieu, as in Yehuda Fogel's study of the late Elie Wiesel as a storyteller and Netanel Paley's reflection on the current state of spirituality at Yeshiva University.

It is the sincere hope of our writers and editors that this issue of *Kol Hamevaser* will enhance the reader's general knowledge and appreciation of this important topic in Jewish thought, and will serve as both a catalyst

Sof Ma'aseh be-Mahshavah Tehillah

Torah Study and Actional Mitzvot in the Philosophy of Habad Hassidism

By Rabbi Yosef Bronstein

Human beings are blessed with many remarkable faculties. We experience and interact with the world through our five senses and develop an internal intellectual and emotional structure through our minds and hearts. We often intuitively know which faculty to use for particular purposes. We relate to food mainly through our sense of taste and solve math problems with our intellectual capabilities.

What about our relationship with God? Is there a particular human faculty that should be emphasized in our quest to connect with the Absolute? While the Torah certainly mandates the submersion of the entire self into the service of God, is there still room to create a hierarchy of efficacy between our array of faculties? In this essay, I will briefly outline the approach of Habad Hassidism to this question, using the philosophies of Rambam and R. Hayim of Volozhin as foils.

Rambam

Throughout his works, Rambam refers to the intellectual worship of God as the pinnacle of a religious life. In the last chapter of *The Guide to the Perplexed,* Rambam lists the various levels of attainable human perfection. The fourth and ultimate level, the "true perfection of man" is: "The acquisition of the rational virtues - I refer to the conception of intelligibles, which teach true opinions concerning the divine things. This is in true reality the ultimate end; this is what gives the individual true perfection, a perfection belonging to him alone; and it gives him permanent perdurance; through it man is man.[1]" Despite Judaism's immense system of positive and negative commands, Rambam sets the sights of the religious questor on intellectual perfection. In fact, the entire system of actional mitzvot with all of its breadth and depth is contextualized as a divine lesson plan to enable and engender greater intellectual meditation of God.[2]

Moreover, Rambam identifies the "soul" of a person as one's cognitive capacity: it is the ability to think that is the "image of God" which elevates humans above animals.[3] This is to be contrasted with the body, which, while necessary to house the soul, is described as the source of "all [of] man's acts of disobedience and sins."[4] It is for this reason that at opposite side of the spectrum from the intellect stands the sense of touch, the most physical and bodily of the senses. Rambam approvingly cites Aristotle that "that this sense is a disgrace to us."[5]

Nefesh ha-Hayim

R. Hayim of Volozhin fundamentally retains the Rambam's favoritism for the cognitive faculty as the ideal method of connecting with God. However, instead of using one's intellect to philosophically contemplate God, R. Hayim of Volozhin advocates filling one's mind with Torah. It is the study of Torah per se that creates the greatest of all possible bonds with God, as "He and His Torah are one." While God certainly demands the fulfillment of actional mitzvot, their performance cannot compare with the level of connection to God that is engendered by the study of Torah. This is the meaning of the famous Mishnaic dictum "The study of Torah is the equivalent of all of them."[6]

The Alter Rebbe

R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe of Habad, developed a complex relationship between the study of Torah and the fulfillment of actional mitzvot. A cursory read of certain passages would indicate he is in full consent with R. Hayim of Volozhin that the intellectual study of Torah creates more of a union with God than the performance of mitzvot. In an early chapter of Tanya, the Alter Rebbe posits a unity between God and His wisdom (the Torah) and a unity between the knower of knowledge and the knowledge itself. Employing a form of the transitive property, the Alter Rebbe asserts that if a person understands the Torah he becomes unified with God's wisdom which, in essence, translates into a unity with God himself. This result is "a wonderful union, like which there is none other, and which has no parallel anywhere in the material world."[7]

However, three interrelated points mitigate this superiority of intellectual Torah study over action.[8] First, elsewhere in Tanya the Alter Rebbe describes an advantage of actional mitzvot over the study of Torah. While Torah study draws divinity into one's cognitive and verbal faculties, the ultimate mission is to have one's entire being enveloped in the divine light. It is only the actional mitzvot that are performed by the bodily limbs that allow for divinity to extend even to the body, which is generally associated with man's baser desires and animalistic soul.[9] In the words of the Alter Rebbe:

> Therefore, when a person occupies himself in the Torah, his *neshamah,* which is his divine soul, with her two innermost garments only, namely the power of speech and thought, are absorbed in the Divine light of the blessed *En Sof,* and are united with it in a perfect union… *However, in order to draw the light and effulgence of the* Shechinah *also over his body and animal soul, i.e. on the vital spirit clothed in the physical body, he needs to fulfill the practical commandments which are performed by the body itself*…the energy of the vital spirit in the physical body, originating in the *kelipat nogah,* is transformed from evil to good, and is actually absorbed into holiness like the divine soul itself.[10]

It is the physical action of a mitzvah that transforms the evil of the body and animal soul into a sanctified entity.[11]

A second element of the Alter Rebbe's approach to the relationship between Torah study and actional mitzvot is that it shifts along the axis of time. He teaches of a unique divine revelation in each generation, causing the people in different eras to primarily focus on a certain aspect of the divine service. While in the times of the Tannaim and Amoraim the primary divine service was through Torah study, this shifted to prayer in the post-Hazal epoch. As history marched forward and the 19th century arrived, the Alter Rebbe perceived another major alteration: "in these generations, the main revelation of God is in the performance of acts of lovingkindness."[12]

This sentiment is further elucidated in a fundraising letter that the Alter Rebbe wrote to his Hassidim on behalf of their brethren in Israel:

> Therefore, my beloved, my brethren: set your hearts to these words expressed in great brevity…how in these times, with the advent of the Messiah, the principal service of Gd is the service of charity, as our sages, of blessed memory, said: "Israel will be redeemed only through charity." *Our sages, of blessed memory, did not say that the study of Torah is equivalent to the performance of loving-kindness except in their own days*. For with them the principal service was the study of Torah and, therefore, there were great scholars: Tannaim and Amoraim. *However, with the advent of the Messiah…there is no way of truly cleaving unto it and to convert the darkness into its light, except through a corresponding category of action, namely the act of charity*.[13]

According to the Alter Rebbe, the Rabbinic statements regarding the primacy of Torah study over actional mitzvot were primarily directed towards earlier generations.[14] As we approach the messianic era, he writes, the focus of our service needs to shift towards sanctifying the lower elements of the world and "converting darkness to light" which requires a shift towards bodily involvement in mitzvot.[15]

It is not random that actional mitzvot intended to purify the lower elements of the world should become the primary form of service in the pre-messianic era. In several passages, the Alter Rebbe develops a paradoxical and inverted hierarchy of spirituality. Whatever is revealed to us as "lower," i.e. more physical and less spiritual, is, in fact, rooted in a higher aspect of divinity. This radical idea is often expressed with the phrase "*sof ma'aseh be-mah'shavah tehilah*" and fittingly impacts the Alter Rebbe's conceptualization of physical actions' significance.[16]

While it is natural to assume that Torah study, which absorbs the studier's "higher" cognitive faculties, is the ideal path of connecting with God, in truth it is bodily involvement with actional mitzvot that bind a person with an even higher and more essential aspect of divinity. Using kabbalistic terminology, the Alter Rebbe argues that understanding the Torah connects one with the *Hokhmah* of God, while physical, actional mitzvot involving material items are rooted in the higher element of God's *Razon* (will).[17] While both of these endeavors are crucial services for their corresponding human faculties, and levels of reality and action can never replace Torah study, it is ultimately the physical performance of mitzvot that connect us to this more "elemental" element of God.

In summary, while Rambam and R. Hayim of Volozhin assumed a constant hierarchy between intellectual and actional service that is weighted towards the former, the Alter Rebbe developed a multi-tiered approach. The intuitive and revealed perspective grants Torah study primacy over the fulfillment of actional mitzvot. However, the concealed truth is that actional mitzvot are rooted in a "higher" aspect of divinity and consequently are able purify even the lower aspects of the world in anticipation for the coming of *Mashiach* (the messiah).[18]

Lubavitcher Rebbe

R. Menahem Mendel Schneerson, (henceforth, the Lubavitcher Rebbe) took his predecessor's idea, expanded it and applied it. His frequent mantra *"ha-Ma'aseh Hu ha-Ikar"*[19] was not just a rallying cry to galvanize his followers but reflected an acute implementation of the Alter Rebbe's shift towards action as the world readied for redemption.[20]

While for the Alter Rebbe, the primary meaning of "action" was the simple performance of mitzvot, especially the giving of charity, the seventh Rebbe emphasized the need for these actions to take place in the "lowest" realms, far from the hallowed halls of the *beit midrash* (study hall) and synagogue. Such a service requires self-sacrifice on the part of the practitioner naturally more inclined to remain safely within the spiritual oasis of his devout fraternity. Paradoxically, however, it is only through overcoming the revealed and natural desire for perceived spiritualty to instead engage in "lowly" physical mitzvot in the "lowest" realms, that one can draw the highest levels of divinity into the world.[21]

The following *siha,* or talk, of the Lubavitcher Rebbe is paradigmatic of his unique approach to this topic. On the Shabbat of *Parashat Vayeitzei*, 5740 (1979),[22] the Lubavitcher Rebbe dedicated his address to Yaakov's life trajectory. We are taught that Yaakov spent his early years in the tent of Torah, but as a mature adult he is forced to flee to the house of Lavan where his life becomes pervaded with sheep. He shepherds Lavan's sheep for twenty years, becomes wealthy through the sheep business, experiments in sheep-breeding procedures and even dreams about sheep. What is the deeper significance in this transition from Torah study to sheep?

The Rebbe began his explanation by citing a midrash that has a dual description of our relationship with God: "He will be a Father to me and I will be a son to Him.... He will be a Shepherd to me... and I will be sheep to Him."[23]

This midrash is initially perplexing. After underscoring the unique love between Hashem and the Jewish people through analogizing the Jewish people as Hashem's child, what is to be gained by referring to us as Hashem's sheep? Surely a father loves his child more than the shepherd loves his sheep?

The Rebbe explained that children and sheep represent two layers in our connection and service to Hashem. The parent-child relationship is the deepest bond that can exist between two entities, but it remains as just that – a bond between two separate entities. For all the natural love and closeness that they feel for each other, the child is an autonomous human being with his own mind. On this level, a Jew as an independent person is privileged to have an incredible, loving, bidirectional relationship with God. Our service stems from a desire to please the Ultimate Being that we love.

Although in one respect a sheep is certainly less cherished than a child, in a different respect the sheep-shepherd relationship can be considered to run even deeper than the relationship of a child and parent. Sheep, more so than all other animals, tend to be characterized by their obedience and submission. A sheep does not heed the shepherd's call from a desire to please the shepherd, but rather due to its obedient nature. For a Jew, this level of self-negation (*bittul*) stems from the realization of *ain od milvado*, that nothing, especially one's soul, exists outside of God. Therefore, we are truly not independent entities and have no will outside of God.

These two models of relationship are associated with two levels of connection to God, and consequently with two different forms of service of God. Torah study corresponds to the level of the child-parent connection. The strong intellectual effort that is expended on Torah study highlights the reality of the studier as an independent person with an autonomous and creative mind. It is through Torah study that we recognize God's grandeur, which generates our love for Him and desire to please Him. In this sense, we are similar to the child seeking

to please his "great" parent whom he loves.

The self-negation of a sheep rises to the fore when we are involved in actional mitzvot intended to purify the world. The Hebrew word for sheep, *tzon*, is etymologically connected with the word Hebrew word *yezi'ah* or "going out." The mission of purifying the world requires one to leave the spiritual sweetness of the study hall and "go out" to be physically involved with the less "spiritual" broader world. This transition entails a double descent: from the study hall to the outside world and from a focus on one's more "spiritual" intellectual faculties to an involvement in the world of action. For the average person interested in developing a bidirectional relationship with God, such a shift would be assessed as a spiritual regression. Only a person who is completely subservient to God will be willing to sacrifice his own feelings of spirituality for the sake of God's mission.[24] It is this kind of selfless service that most fully creates the *dirah be-tahh'tonim* (dwelling place in the lowest realms) for God.[25]

This, then, explains the course of Yaakov's life. He begins as a *son* of God who studies Torah in the tents of Shem and Ever, far from the troubles and travails of the world. But it is only after "*va-yeizei Ya'akov*," when Yaakov leaves his familiar spiritual surroundings and goes to Haran, that he develops the deeper connection with Hashem through *bittul*. It is paradoxically not the study of Torah, per-se, but rather his honesty and integrity in business and actual performance of the six hundred and thirteen commandments in Lavan's house that allows Yaakov – and, ultimately, the whole world – to achieve the ultimate connection with Hashem. It is for this reason that sheep, symbolic of the service through self-nullification, become the leitmotif in Yaakov's life after leaving his father's home.

The Rebbe concludes that this lesson is particularly pertinent in this generation:

> The obvious directive that results from the above (in our generation) is: We must carry out the order of Divine service [related to *Parshas*] *Vayeitzei*[that focuses on] going out to the world and illuminating it. Before this, one must prepare by studying Torah in the tents of Shem and Ever. But to attain [the peak of] "And the man became exceedingly prosperous," i.e., "fill[ing] up the land and conquer[ing] it," one must go out to the world and occupy himself with illuminating it.[26]
>
> On the contrary, in this era of *ikvesa diMeshicha,* when *Mashiach's* approaching footsteps can be heard, the primary dimension of our Divine service is deed. This differs from the era of the *Talmud,* when Torah study was the fundamental element of Divine service. This is reflected in the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch,* that there is no one in the present age of whom it can be said: "his Torah is his occupation" (as was the level of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his colleagues). Not even a small percentage of the Jewish people are on that level, because the fundamental Divine service of the present era is deed, actual *tzedakah.*

The Lubavitcher Rebbe further emphasizes that this newfound focus on action for the sake of illuminating the lowest aspects of the world needs to be characterized by the utmost sense of self-negation:

> To add another point: In order that one's efforts will find great success, they must be carried out in a manner of *bittul.* They must be carried out for the sake of fulfilling Gd's mission of illuminating the exile. When one carries out his mission with *bittul,* his efforts are not correspondent to the limits of his nature and satisfaction. It does not make that much difference to him where Gd sends him.

For the Lubavitcher Rebbe, this shift on emphasis from Torah study to action[27] is part of a more general recalibration in emphasis of our *avodat Hashem,* our service of God, as we approach the messianic era. Many of the ideas that were previously esoterically expressed in Habad's voluminous literature were not only expansively and innovatively developed by the Rebbe during his forty-year tenure as Habad's leader, but also took on greater physical and practical form.

May we merit to properly serve God with our minds, hearts and actions.

1 Guide to the Perlplexed, 3:54. Translation from Shlomo Pines, Guide to the Perplexed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 635.

2 Marvin Fox, Interpreting Maimonides (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 316-317; Norman Lamm, Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House; New York, Yeshivah University Press, 1989), 143; Menahem Kellner, Science in the Bet Midrash: Studies in Maimonides (Brighton MA: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 63-80. See Guide to the Perplexed, 3:27 where this point is made most explicitly. Lamm, Torah Lishmah, 174 notes that his assertion that Rambam unequivocally favors intellectual enlightenment to observance of the halakhic system is challenged by Dr. Isadore Twersky in his Introduction to the Code of Maimonides.

3 Yesodei HaTorah 4:8

4 Guide to the Perplexed 3:8 (Pines, 431).

5 Guide to the Perplexed 2:56 (Pines, 371) and 3:8.

6 All of Section 4 of Nefesh ha-Hayim is dedicated to the nature and significance of Torah study. For R. Hayim's understanding of the relationship between Torah study and the fulfillment of actional mitzvot, see 4:29-30. For analysis and contextualization see Lamm, Torah Lishmah, 153-154.

7 Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 5. Translation from http://www.chabad.org/library/tanya/tanya_cdo/aid/1028886/jewish/Chapter-5.htm.

8 See Moshe Halamish, Mishnato ha-Iyunit shel R. Shneur Zalman mi-Liadi, Dissertation (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1976), 244-272 for an elaboration on many of these themes.

9 Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 1.

10 Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 35. Translation from http://www.chabad.org/library/tanya/tanya_cdo/aid/1029034/jewish/Chapter-35.htm. Emphasis added.

11 See, also, Tanya, Iggeret ha-Kodesh, epistle 5.

12 Torah Ohr, Ester, 120b.

13 Tanya, Iggeret ha-Kodesh, Epistle 9. Translation from http://www.chabad.org/library/tanya/tanya_cdo/aid/1029292/jewish/Epistle-9.htm. Emphasis added. See, ibid, Epistle 5 for the explanation of why charity in particular is the paradigmatic actional mitzvah.

14 It is interesting that a parallel to this historical shift can be found in the individual person. There is a tannaitic debate (Kiddushin 40b) regarding which of Talmud or ma'aseh is "greater." Shitah Mekubezet, Bava Kamma 17a cites the opinion of R. Yeshaya that during one's youth, Talmud is greater, but "in the end of a person's life" we assume that ma'aseh is greater.

15 It is passages such as these that presumably served as sources for Rav Kook's perspective that certain emphases in the service of God need to be recalibrated as the messianic process accelerates. See my recent article "'She Should Carry Out All Her Deeds According To His Directives:' A Halakha in a Changes Social Reality" at Lehrhaus for a case study and brief elaboration on this theme in the thought of Rav Kook.

16 See Jerome Gellman, "Zion and Jerusalem" in Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality ed. Lawrence Kaplan and David Shatz (New York: New York University Press), 288 who lists fourteen distinct places where this idea appears in the thought of the Alter Rebbe.

17 Torah Ohr, Parshat Noah, 8c. For an explanation of the terms Hokhmah and Razon see Nissan Dubov, "The Sefirot," available at http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/361885/jewish/The-Sefirot.htm. Another very relevant primary source appears in his Seder Tefilot mi-Kol ha-Shanah Volume 1, 23a where the Alter Rebbe connects the unique relevance of action for the later generations with the fact that action is rooted in the highest level of divinity. It is also important to note that the performance of mitzvot in this system is an end unto itself and not a means towards a higher goal as there can be no further regression beyond God's Will. In this regard, see, Likkutei Sihot Volume 6, pg. 21-22 and notes 69-70 there.

18 It is important to note that the relationship between Torah study and action in the thought of the Alter Rebbe may not be as simple as portrayed above. I am following the opinion of Norman Lamm, Torah Lishma, 147-151 and Rivkah Schatz Uffenheimer, "Anti Spiritualizm she-be-Hassidut: Iyunim be-Torat Shen'ur Zalman mi-Liadi" ha-Molad 171-172 (1953): 513-528 that ultimately the Alter Rebbe gave action a higher place in the spiritual hierarchy than Torah study. See, however, Halamish, "Mishnato ha-Iyunit shel R. Shneur Zalman mi-Liadi" 269-271 who argues that the conflicting statements imply that in the Alter Rebbe's final estimation one cannot speak of a true hierarchy. In this regard it is enlightening to read the siha of the 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe (Likkutei Sihot, Volume 8, 186-191) who proposes that while only actions can draw down from the "essence" of God, Torah study is necessary in order to reveal the "Divine essence" in this world.

19 See Avot, 1:17. Also, regarding the tannaitic debate (Kiddushin 40b) if Talmud or ma'aseh is "greater," see Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5747, pg. 58 where the Rebbe posits that throughout most of history the ruling has been on the side of Talmud (though, see Rashi, Bava Kama 17a s.v. meivi lidei), in the times of Mashiach the Sanhedrin will reverse the ruling and decide that ma'aseh is "greater." See there for a longer analysis.

20 It is interesting that the Vilna Gaon also spoke of the increased significance of action as part of the messianic process, as least in regard to the "ma'aseh" of settling the Land of Israel. See, Kol ha-Tor chapter 1 and Refael Shohat, Olam Nistar be-Mamadei ha-Zeman: Torat ha-Geulah shel ha-Gra mi-Vilna, Mekoroteha, ve-Hashpa'atah le-Dorot (Ramat Gan: University of Bar Ilan Press, 2008), 239-242. Rav Kook (Shemonah Kevazim 3:92), as well, discusses the newfound crucial nature of "ma'aseh," in the form of engaging worldly affairs, during the era preceding the coming of Mashiach.

21 For a longer discussion of this topic see R. Feital Levin, Heaven on Earth: Reflections on the Theology of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem M. Schneerson (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publishing Society, 2002), 114-122; Yizhak Krauss, ha-Shevi'i – Meshi'hiyut be-Dor ha-Shevi'i shel Habad (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot Ahronot Books, 2007), 137-143.

22 Likkutei Sihot Volume 15, 252-258.

23 Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 2:16.

24 For a detailed elaboration of the various levels of mitzvot in the thought of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, see Gidran shel Mizvot, Hukim u-Mishpatim be-Mishnato shel ha-Rebbe, compiled by R. Yoel Kahn (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 1994). The highest level of the performance of mitzvot in the state of complete bittul is discussed there, pp. 38-43.

25 The Lubavitcher Rebbe's association of actional mitzvot with complete bittul to God and the study of Torah with a human being's independent and autonomous nature is a study in contrasts with the approach of Rav Soloveitchik. See, Maimonides: Between Philosophy and Halakha: Rabbi Joseph b. Soloveitchik's Lectures on the Guide to the Perplexed at the Bernard Revel Graduate School (1950-1951) edited, annotated and with an introduction by Lawrence J. Kaplan (Brooklyn, NY: Ktav Publishing; Jerusalem, Urim Publications, 2016), 234-235 where Rav Soloveitchik associates the study of Torah with "ontic identification with God," and the fulfillment of actional mitzvot with "the expression of my consciousness of ontic separation [from God]."

26 Translation is adapted from http://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2295019/jewish/A-Knowing-Heart-Parshas-Vayeitzei.htm.

27 It is obvious that this shift towards action does not entail a de-emphasis on the significance of Torah study. Both the Alter Rebbe and the Lubavitcher Rebbe were known for their vast and deep knowledge of Gemara and halakaha and enjoined their students to aspire for greatness in "nigleh." Also, the Lubavitcher Rebbe also spoke of a form of Torah study involving bittul that as well serves as a means for drawing down the Divine Essence, see Torat Menahem, 5719 (volume 25), 275-279; 283-285.

The Leipzig Manuscript (MS Leipzig 1) & Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson's Rules of Rashi's Usage of Targum

By Tzvi Aryeh Benoff

I. Introduction

The Leipzig Manuscript, or MS Leipzig 1, is a manuscript of the commentary of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzḥaki (known as *Rashi*) to the Pentateuch and five *Megillot*, stored in the Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig (Leipzig University Library), which is currently in the process of being transcribed.[1] Aside from the obvious cultural and religious value of any additional manuscript of a Torah commentary, MS Leipzig 1's importance is underscored by the fact that its author, identified as the thirteenth-century Rabbi Makhir ben Karshavyah, writes that he produced the manuscript from a copy of the commentary transcribed and annotated by Rashi's personal scribe, Rabbi Shemayah.[2] Thus, scholars have noted its importance in determining the exact comments of Rashi, as well as his subsequent thought process and editing.[3]

One of the less studied applications of this manuscript is the usage of Targum Onqelos in Rashi's commentary, and, more specifically, the conventions and styles employed by Rashi when using the Targum Onqelos. Although the transcription of MS Leipzig 1 has not yet been completed and a more rigorous analysis is required,[4] there are several instances in which this manuscript will abet or challenge certain guidelines of Rashi's usage of Targum as formulated by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.[5] Moreover, as this investigation will show, these scenarios may facilitate the modification of these criteria, or formulation of additional guidelines underlying Rashi's usage of Targum.

II. Rabbi Schneerson's 'Rules' of Rashi

In addition to leading the Lubavitch Hassidic movement, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson became well known for the lengthy scholarly discourses (*sihot*) he delivered during Hassidic gatherings (*farbrengins)*. After the passing of his mother in 1954,[6] Rabbi Schneerson began to present a new genre of lectures known as the "Rashi *Siḥot."* These lectures would typically analyze a particular passage of Rashi's commentary upon the weekly Torah portion, using various textual nuances to explain Rashi's question, choice of words, and thought process. This 'hyperliteral' reading, as Rabbi Chaim Miller calls it,[7] was built on the philosophy that Rashi wrote a systematic commentary to the Torah following a set of rigid, self-imposed guidelines. Rabbi Schneerson's system of rules were subsequently compiled and redacted in the work *Kelallei Rashi Be-Pirusho al Ha-Torah* ("The Rules of Rashi in His Commentary on the Torah"; henceforth, *Kelallei Rashi*) written by Rabbi Tuvia Blau, a project that Rabbi Schneerson personally endorsed.[8]

Chapter 11 of *Kelallei Rashi* is devoted to Rashi's usage of Targum. Therein, Rabbi Schneerson posits that Rashi rarely, if ever, uses Onqelos as an independent source; instead, he contends, Rashi generally quotes Onqelos only to support his own opinion or to highlight a dissenting opinion.[9][10] Rabbi Schneerson also offered an explanation as to the various ways in which Rashi cites the Targum. Rashi's standard practice of using the Targum, he notes, is merely to use the phrase "*ke-targumo*," 'according to the manner of its Targum', with the understanding that the reader will study the text of Targum independently.[11] The only time Rashi cites the Targum's text is when he believes doing so adds something substantive to his explanation.[12] Similarly, Rashi only adds a Hebrew translation to the phrase "*ke-targumo*" when the translation will help focus on a particular nuance, interpretation, or edition of Targum.[13] [14]

What emerges from these guidelines is that Rashi would certainly not use Targum as a source for his own explanation without quoting it explicitly or at least going out of his way to attributing credit to it. In addition to various disputes

regarding the particularities of Rabbi Schneerson's rules, this latter point has been somewhat contested, as some believe that Rashi actually does base many of his comments on Targum Onqelos without quoting or attributing credit to it.[15] This assertion can be examined with greater depth and precision using the Leipzig Manuscript.

III. Scenario 1: Support for Rabbi Schneerson's Rules & the Targum as a Template

In Genesis 13:16, upon describing the Jacob's journey to his uncle Laban in Aram, the Torah recounts God's blessing to Jacob after spending the night at Mount Moriah: And I shall make your descendants like the dust of the land, inasmuch as if a person can possibly number the dust of the earth, so too shall your descendants be numbered. In his commentary, Rashi elaborates upon the formulation of this Biblical verse, clarifying its intended meaning for the reader: "Inasmuch as if a person can possibly etc." – Just as it is impossible that the dust be counted, so too shall your children be uncountable.[16] Rashi's elaboration seems clearly to be the Hebrew translation of Onqelos's text ("*Kama de-leit efshar le-gevar le-mimnei yat afra de-ar'a, af banekha lo yitmanun*"). According to Rabbi Schneerson's rules, one would expect Rashi to write that he is quoting Onqelos in offering this explanation – and yet, in fact, he does not. How, then, might one understand this particular comment of Rashi in light of Rabbi Schneerson's rules?

Several super-commentaries on Rashi's commentary explain that Rashi employs only his own logic in formulating this comment, as indeed the standard translation would not make any sense in this context.[17] Why then would Rashi appear to quote Onqelos? One can feasibly posit that Rashi sometimes uses the Targum's text as a template for his own explanation: Rashi may borrow the Targum's language for his independent explanation, even though he believes his explanation does not require additional support, merely because the two are similar.[18.]

This stylistic preference may also explain a similar scenario regarding Rashi's explanation of the name "*Tzafnat Pane'aḥ*" given to Joseph by Pharaoh in Genesis 41:45. Several Biblical commentators struggle to explain this ambiguous phrase, positing that the words must be Egyptian in origin.[19] Rashi, however, has no trouble explaining this phrase, despite the fact that this is the only time it appears in the Scriptures and has no source in rabbinic literature: "*Tzafnat Pane'aḥ*" – meaning, 'interpreter of hidden matters (*tzefunot*)'; and there is no parallel to the word '*pane'ah*' in all of Scripture.[20]

Rashbam[21] expresses a similar opinion and adds the word "*ke-targumo*," indicating that this manner of explanation follows that given by the Targum. Upon comparison, it becomes clear that Onqelos does in fact anticipate both Rashi and Rashbam in explaining this verse: *"U-kera Far'oh shum Yosef gavra di-temiran galyon lei*" – And Pharaoh called Joseph by the name, 'man to whom the hidden things are revealed'. [22] That Rashi himself does not choose to invoke the word "*ke-targumo*" in his own comments here is puzzling. Unless Rashi changed his mind to conform to his grandson's position, Rabbi Schneerson must claim as per his rules that Rashi felt that such a position did not require any additional support.[23] At the same time, one seemingly cannot deny that Rashi is 'borrowing' from Onqelos's text. As before, the most logical explanation is that Rashi arrived at the idea on his own, felt that it did not need any additional support, and merely 'borrowed' Onqelos's language.

The Leipzig Manuscript can partly mitigate the aforementioned sort of problem. In the MS Leipzig 1 version of Rashi's commentary to Genesis 13:16, one finds that the word "*ke-targumo*" is in fact appended to the end of Rashi's comment. Thus, as per Rabbi Schneerson, Rashi must have used Onqelos as a support for his translation in this case because he felt that his own explanation was not evident enough and required additional support. However, Rashi's commentary to Genesis 41:46 on the phrase "*Tzafnat Pane'aḥ*" remains unchanged, and thus still potentially problematic for Rabbi Schneerson. As such, one should still conclude that, according to Rabbi Schneerson, Rashi will, at times, use Onqelos's text as a template for his writing.

IV. Scenario 2: Challenges for Rabbi Schneerson's Rules & the Targum as a Source (or Indicator) of Hermeneutic Tradition

At the beginning of Genesis 1, in describing what happened on the second day of Creation, the Torah writes: And the Lord said, Let there be a firmament within the waters (*be-tokh ha-mayim*), and it shall be a division between water and water. [24] Rashi elaborates upon the verse's formulation: "Within the waters" – i.e. in the middle of the waters, that there be a distinction between the upper waters and the firmament as there is between the firmament and the waters upon the earth; thus, we learn that they all are dependent upon the word of the Sovereign.[25]

It appears that Rashi is deliberately interpreting the word "*be-tokh*" in this context to mean 'in the middle' rather than 'in the midst'.[26] If so, one might believe Rashi to be merely echoing Onqelos's interpretation, "*be-metzi'ut maya*" – 'in the middle of the waters'. However, upon further consideration, such an explanation is insufficient, seeing as it fails justify the remainder of Rashi's commentary. Rather, it seems more plausible to conclude that Rashi here utilizes the Midrash Rabbah's interpretation of the verse:

> "Let there be a firmament within the waters" – [that is,] in between them and in the middle. Said Rabbi Tanḥuma, I propose the following interpretation: if it had said merely 'And the Lord made the firmament, and He distinguished between the waters on (*al*) the firmament', I would have said this means that the waters were placed upon the actual firmament; now that it says 'and between the waters which are above (*mei-al*) the firmament', thus the upper waters are referred to in this passage. Said Rabbi Aḥa, Like the manner of a lamp, and its fruits are the rain waters. [27]

From the above analysis, as well as the classical commentaries on Rashi[28], it would appear that Rashi believed that "*be-tokh*" had two possible translations depending on the context, and thus did not require Onqelos's support for his opinion. Accordingly, as per Rabbi Schneerson's rules, Rashi must not have seen fit to quote or base himself upon the Targum in this instance.[29]

Indeed, this position is buttressed by a complementary Rashi in Genesis 2:9. In describing the primeval Garden of Eden, the verse states: And the Lord, God, caused to sprout from the ground every manner of tree, pleasing of appearance and good to eat; and the tree of life inside the garden, along with the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Elaborating upon this verse, Rashi comments: "Inside (*be-tokh*) the garden" – i.e. in the middle.[30] In this instance, Rashi does not appear to base his interpretation on any midrash,[31] but rather elaborates purely on the grounds of his own understanding. As before, Rashi does not quote Onqelos, who also translates the word "*be-tokh*" here as he did in the previous verse. Rabbi Schneerson would presumably argue that Rashi simply felt that in this context, the translation 'in the middle' was more appropriate than 'in the midst'. Indeed, other commentators reason that "*be-tokh*" really must mean 'in the middle' in this case: seeing as the previous verse already stated that God planted trees in the garden, the word "*be-tokh*" would be redundant if it merely conveyed that these trees were also amid the garden.[32]

The Leipzig Manuscript, however, tells a different story. In the Rome and *Defus Rishon* editions of Rashi's commentary, the extra word "*ha-gan*" – 'the garden' – appears appended to Rashi's comment: "Inside (*be-tokh*) the garden" – i.e. in the middle *of the garden*.[33] Aside from merely complementing Rashi's explanation, this minor addition holds ostensibly little significance.[34] The Leipzig Manuscript, however, has a subsequent addition: "Inside (*be-tokh*) the garden" – i.e. in the middle of the garden; according to the manner of its Targum: 'in the middle' (*ke-targumo be-metzi'ut*).[35] Interpreting along the lines of Rabbi Schneerson's rules, it emerges according to the Leipzig Manuscript version that Rashi did not feel comfortable simply relying on his own logic in this context, and instead sought to draw proof from the Targum. Moreover, Rashi must also have felt that the Aramaic word "*be-metzi'ut,*" 'in the middle', provided an added layer of meaning useful in supporting his own choice of explanation.

Unfortunately, with the exception of a few fragments, the Leipzig Manuscript does not include Rashi's commentary to the first chapter of Genesis. Thus, it is not known whether Rashi might have used the phrase "*ke-targumo be-metzi'ut*" in the first instance as well, in his comment to Genesis 1:6. On the basis of what appears to be Rashi's extensive citation of midrash in that circumstance, however, it may be surmised as per Rabbi Schneerson's rules that Rashi would likely not have employed this phrase in that context.

Upon reflection, a serious problem emerges from the texts surveyed thus far. If we are to accept the MS Leipzig 1 text as correct, Rabbi Schneerson's rules appear to box Rashi into a corner, as it were: in the first instance, commenting upon Genesis 1:6, Rashi was apparently uncomfortable with translating "*be-tokh*" as "in the middle" without providing some manner of textual or rabbinic support. In the second instance, in Rashi's comments on Genesis 2:9, a quote from Targum Onqelos appears to take the place of rabbinic support. However, by quoting the Targum's formulation in that latter instance, Rashi also indicates that the support upon which he draws is somewhat less intuitive. If Onqelos's position as to the definition of "*be-tokh*" is indeed unfounded in *aggadic* (rabbinic homiletic) literature,[36] and in translating as he does, Onqelos is merely rendering an otherwise literal translation, then what unspoken support does Rashi seek to garner in quoting him here?

This question is further strengthened by a similar dynamic with respect to a later comment of Rashi. The verse in Numbers 17:21 states: And Moses spoke unto the Children of Israel, and all their princes gave to him a staff for each prince, a staff for each prince, according to the house of their fathers, twelve staffs in all; and the staff of Aaron was among (*be-tokh*) their staffs. In commenting upon this verse, Rashi translates the word "*be-tokh*" as 'in the middle', while Onqelos renders "*be-go"* – 'in the midst of'.[37] Although several commentators point to textual nuances which may support Rashi's understanding of the word in this context, all posit that Rashi must have relied upon some *midrashic* source in order to justify an explanation that entails rewriting the details of a Biblical event without the aid of some explicit rabbinic source.[38] Indeed, upon further investigation, one finds that this very understanding of the incident described in Numbers 17 is recounted in the *Tanḥuma Yashan*, a source with which Rashi is known to have been familiar and upon which he relies elsewhere in his commentary.[39] On the basis of this example and others like it, it seems relatively clear that Rashi generally relies upon not only textual support but also *aggadic* grounding to justify translating the word "*be-tokh*" to mean 'in the middle'. It is also clear from this example that Onqelos and Rashi had differing conceptions of how to translate the word "*be-tokh*" based on context, sometimes resulting in differences of interpretation. In virtue of what *aggadic* basis, then, can Rashi's comment to Genesis 3:9 be understood?

Although it seems to this writer that there is no straightforward way to answer this question on Rabbi Schneerson's rules, two plausible answers may be suggested. One possibility is that, by adding the word '*be-metzi'ut*' in his comment to Genesis 3:9, Rashi acknowledges that he and Onqelos do not agree upon the same general parameters as to when the word '*be-tokh*' ought to be translated as 'in the middle'. Indeed, inquiry shows that Onqelos appears to have more stringent parameters than Rashi as to when the word '*be-tokh*' ought to be translated as 'in the middle' rather than 'in the midst'. By pointing to the fact that Onqelos finds it appropriate to translate '*be-tokh*' as 'in the middle' in this context despite his more stringent parameters for doing so in general, Rashi thus draws an indirect support for his own choice of translation in this instance. Clever though it may be, this answer is fundamentally lacking in that it leaves the question of Rashi's unspoken *aggadic* source unanswered.

A second, more plausible explanation for Rashi's mysterious inclusion of the word '*be-metzi'ut*' in his comment to Genesis 2:9 emerges from a better understanding of why Rashi believes the word '*be-tokh*' can mean 'middle' in the first place. In his commentary to *Midrash Rabbah*, Pseudo-Rashi explains[40] that the word '*be-tokh*' can be interpreted exegetically based on Jewish tradition's concept of "*yesh im le-mikra, yesh im le-mesoret"* – that is, the notion that in certain circumstances, Scripture may be interpreted on the basis of understanding the text, not only according to the tradition of the way its words are punctuated and read aloud, but also according to the tradition of the way its words are spelled, independent of traditional punctuation. In light of this additional information, one can posit that Rashi does not always require an *aggadic* tradition per say to justify his choice of Scriptural translation; rather, a tradition that the methodology of "*yesh im le-mikra, yesh im le-mesoret"* is applied to the verse in question can also suffice as a justification, where appropriate. Although Onqelos may have had a different tradition or understanding of the precise meaning and application of the word '*be-tokh*' in general, his understanding of this word in the specific instance of Genesis 3:9 may still constitute a valid utilization of this type of textual exegesis in Rashi's eyes. Along these lines, one may posit that perhaps Rashi sought to use neither Onqelos's logic

nor Onqelos's reasoning by quoting Onqelos's formulation in commenting on Genesis 2:9; rather, perhaps Rashi sought only to invoke Onqelos's tradition and precedent as basis for his own choice of translation. As such, Rashi adds the word '*be-metzi'ut*' to highlight this very difference between precedence of tradition and accuracy of translation.[41]

V. Conclusion

As has been demonstrated over the course of this analysis, the Leipzig Manuscript presents opportunities for new understandings of Rashi that can serve as test cases for Rabbi Schneerson's rules. In some of these cases, the results of comparison provide new support Rabbi Schneerson's thesis, while at other times they pose new challenges to it. In both sorts of scenarios, this valuable manuscript fuels the student's drive to investigate ever further, modifying and formulating newer and more precise criteria for understanding, characterizing and categorizing Rashi's usage of Targum Onqelos.

1 See http://alhatorah.org/Commentators:Rashi_Leipzig_1

2 Id.

3 Id. See note 2 ad loc.

4 This author has only subjected Rashi's comments to Genesis to in-depth examination in this respect.

5 While there are many applications to more traditional studies of Rashi's methods, this paper will focus on Rabbi Schneerson's rules for two reasons. One is that his rules are the most comprehensive and formulaic. Secondly, he is the only one to have made a comprehensive set of rules for Rashi's usage of Targum. (Others have posited some as well, but mostly just provide examples spanning tens of pages. See Ezra Melamed's Mefarshei Ha-Mikra: Derakheihem Ve-Shitoteihem vol. 1)

6 Although no official explanation was given, it is the author's opinion that this was a way to spread Torah on a communal level in memory of his mother. Following the death of Rabbi Schneerson's wife, a new girl's school was established in her memory. Rabbi Schneerson may have felt that his mother's death was a personal loss and not a communal one (as opposed to the death of his wife). Regardless, these sihot were a way in which he was able to personally honor her memory by teaching a topic commonly studied by both men and women. Moreover, both men and women attended these lectures, as had his mother. Indeed, his mother would comment that his discourses were especially meaningful to her (see Chaim Miller's Turning Judaism Outwards: A Biography of the Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, page 384).

7 Turning Judaism Outwards. 389.

8 See Tuvia Blau's Kellalei Rashi Be-Pirusho al Ha-Torah, Introduction. It should be noted that, as the work was not written by Rabbi Schneerson himself, the exact nuances analyzed in this paper may not fully reflect his opinion (see note 13 below).

9 Kellalei Rashi Be-Pirusho al Ha-Torah, Chapter 11 Sections 1-3, 10-12. See note 19 and Likutei Sihot and footnote 17 ad loc. This statement is somewhat vague as that particular phraseology is only used once in Rashi's entire commentary. See Melamed's work for similar phrases. Whether this was the intent of Rabbi Schneerson, or he was referring to a more substantial portion of Rashi's comments remains unknown.

10 See Eran Viesel's Iyun be-Hegedim ha-Meforshim shel Rashi al Odot Targum Onqelos. Rabbi Schneerson's guidelines would also somewhat run contrary to Viesel's thesis (albeit more in spirit than in content).

11 Parenthetically, this is interesting because one of Rabbi Schneerson's more famous rules was that Rashi wrote his commentary for a child beginning to learn Torah. One of the ramifications is that Rashi will many times paraphrase Rabbinic statements when it will not compromise his commentary because a child would not know how to learn Gemara. Apparently, Rabbi Schneerson believed that children in Rashi's time did learn Targum.

12 Kellalei Rashi Be-Pirusho al Ha-Torah. Another instance is when Rashi wants to distinguish between Targum Onqelos and Targum Yonatan; Kellalei Rashi Be-Pirusho al Ha-Torah, Chapter 11, Sections 15 and 16. See also Likutei Sihot Vol. 15, pg. 441, note 28. (See also Vol. 10, pg. 15.)

13 Id. Section 12.

14 There are exceptions to the rule. See Kellalei Rashi Be-Pirusho al Ha-Torah, Chapter 11. Those exceptions, however, are not relevant to this discussion.

15 See Rafael Binyamin Posen's Yichuso Shel Rashi Le-Targum Onqelos, pg. 275, note 2. A similar position was expressed to the author by both Posen and Viesel in personal email correspondences.

16 Rashi ad loc.

17 Siftei Hakhamim ad loc.

18 Such a decision may have been purely stylistic. Alternatively, Rashi may have felt that because children studied Targum (see note 11), borrowing the language would help children remember his explanations better.

19 See Ibn Ezra, Ramban, etc.

20 Ad loc.

21 Ad loc.

22 Ad loc.

23 It is theoretically possible that Rashbam might agree with Rashi and just had a different connotation when using the phrase "ke-targumo".

24 Genesis 1:6

25 Ad. loc.

26 I.e. without there being a gap in between the two entities

27 See Mizrahi on Rashi. See also Rashi on Midrash Rabbah ad loc. Rashi is clearly merging the final two interpretations. (For another similar instance, see Rashi on Genesis 15:1. See also Ha'amek Davar ad loc.) This would explain the strange language. (See also Yerushalmi Berakhot 5a. This would answer the Mizrahi's question about Rashi interpreting against tradition.)

28 See Mizrachi and Gur Aryeh.

29 See Siftei Hakhamim, Mizrahi, and Maskil Le-Dovid ad loc.

30 Ad loc.

31 See Siftei Hakhamim, Mizrahi, Gur Aryeh, etc. However, see also Midrash ha-Gadol Bereishit, Bereishit Rabbah 15, and Zohar 3, 96. It does not appear that Rashi is quoting it (especially as shall be proven from the Leipzig Manuscript).

32 Id.

33 Ad loc.

34 One could defend both versions: By adding the word "gan," Rashi is indicating the reason for his decision to translate "be-tokh." Moreover, it would complement his former comment. On the other hand, by omitting the additional word, Rashi is signaling that his proof is not straightforward.

35 Ad loc.

36 See Pseudo Jonathan ad loc. and Midrash Rabbah (4, 2).

37 Ad loc.

38 See Mizrahi ad loc.

39 Tanhuma Yashan Leviticus 11. See Menachem Mendel Kasher's Torah Sheleimah Vol I and II and footnotes ad loc.

40 Bereishit Rabbah 5,2

41 One could also answer that Rashi would not use a hermeneutic tradition that ran contrary to his own understanding of the word. Instead, he quoted Onqelos to show that such a tradition existed and there was probably a midrash that would also utilize that translation. Indeed, such midrashim exist (see note 26). This answer, however, is also quite unlikely.

Tearing Water

A Hassidic-Halakhic Vort

By Yisroel Ben-Porat

Many Torah commentators relating to the episode of *Keri'at Yam Suf* (the splitting of the Reed Sea) overlook a simple, yet significant question: why do *Hazal,* the Jewish Sages,[1] refer to the miracle as a *keri'ah* – tearing – whereas the Torah describes it as a *beki'ah,* splitting? God instructed Moshe, *"Netei et yadekha al ha-yam u-vka'eihu* – Stretch forth your hand over the sea and split it," and when Moshe did so, *"va-yevake'u ha-mayim* – the waters were split."[2] Later intra-Biblical references to the miracle also employ the term *beki'ah.*[3] Not once in Tanakh does the term *keri'ah* appear in relation to water. Why, then, did *Hazal* deviate from the Torah's terminology and choose to refer to this incident as *Keri'at Yam Suf*?

Credit for this question goes to R. Shmuel of Sieniawa.[4] In his work *Ramatayim Tzofim*,[5] R. Shmuel relates that he posed the above question to R. Yitzhak Meir Alter (1799-1866), the author of *Hiddushei Ha-Rim*. R. Alter explained that in order to understand why *Hazal* used the term *keri'ah*, we must turn to another context in which the term appears: Shabbat.

One of the 39 *melakhot* is *kore'a*, tearing.[6] According to R. Alter, the essence of *kore'a* sheds light on *Keri'at Yam Suf* because they share the same conceptual underpinnings; in other words, the halakhic definition of *kore'a* is the same process that occurred during *Keri'at Yam Suf*.[7] How so?

R. Alter invoked a fundamental principle regarding *kore'a*. The *Tosefta* states, "[On Shabbat] one may tear the hide on top of a barrel of wine or brine provided that he does not intend to create a spout."8 This ruling is difficult to understand; why is there no prohibition of *kore'a* here? To explain the *Tosefta*, R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) suggested that the definition of *kore'a* is tearing apart two entities attached by artificial means – for example, sewing or gluing[9] – whereas tearing apart material that is naturally one piece does not constitute *kore'a*. Thus, in our case, since the hide is a single entity, one may tear it on Shabbat.[10]

Similarly, Rambam states that disconnecting the outer layer of a hide from its inner layer violates the *melakhah* of *mafshit* – skinning – yet elsewhere he states that tearing apart hides that were artificially glued together violates the *melakhah* of *kore'a*.[11] In order to explain the distinction between these two cases, R. Avraham Danzig (1748-1820) reached the same conclusion: the latter case involves separate hides artificially glued together, and thus tearing them apart constitutes *kore'a*; in the former case, however, the hide is naturally one entity, and thus does not pose a problem in terms of *kore'a*.[12]

What is the logic behind this distinction? The Mishnah presents the *melakhah* of *kore'a* in contradistinction to the *melakhah* of *tofer*, sewing;[13] thus, it is reasonable to suggest that whereas the latter is the joining of two entities through a third medium, the former is the separation of those two entities through tearing.

Now let us return to our initial question: why did *Hazal* call the miracle *Keri'at Yam Suf*? To complete his answer, R. Alter cited a midrash in which R. Yohanan states that God created the *Yam Suf* on condition that it would be "torn" before the Jewish nation at the necessary moment.[14] On the basis of the halakhic discussion above, as well as this Midrash, R. Alter suggested that God created the *Yam Suf* by fusing together two seas such that when the Jews would need to cross, the two seas would literally be "torn" apart. Although the true nature of the phenomenon was invisible to onlookers, *Hazal* knew that in reality a *keri'ah* had occurred; thus, to hint at this deeper understanding, they called the miracle *Keri'at Yam Suf*. [15]

R. Shmuel identified another connection between *Keri'at Yam Suf* and the *melakhah* of *kore'a*. There is a general rule regarding all 39 *melakhot* that only acts which constitute *tikun* – improvement – qualify as *melakhah*, whereas acts which constitute *mekalkel* – destructive action – do not qualified as *melakhah*.[16] Although *kore'a* is seemingly destructive, the Mishnah states that *kore'a* must be *al menat litpor* – tearing in order to sew.[17] In other words, *kore'a* is constructive because it is necessary for the sewing process; otherwise, it would be only *mekalkel*. So too, suggested R. Shmuel, *Keri'at Yam Suf* was *al menat litpor*, because God subsequently restored the sea to its original state. R. Shmuel concluded that the miracle "was a real *tikun* and not in the category of *mekalkel*," adding a philosophical rational: "God forbid that the miracle would occur as a result of a destruction of Creation."[18] In other words, since God created a perfect world, it is inconceivable that He would perform a destructive act on His creation; thus, it was imperative that the miracle be constructive.[19]

However, it is difficult to understand this notion of *tikun*. To simply tear apart two pieces of cloth and subsequently re-sew them – without any improvement in the process – certainly does not constitute *tikun*.[20] Similarly, if *Keri'at Yam Suf* was *al menat litpor*, then in what sense did God "improve" the *Yam Suf*? The sea remained exactly as it had always been! In order to fully understand the connection between *Keri'at Yam Suf* and the *melakhah* of *kore'a*, one must delve deeper into the nature of the requirement of *al menat litpor*. Why must *kore'a* be *al menat litpor* in order to constitute a *melakhah* on Shabbat?

One opinion views the requirement as preempting the issue of *mekalkel*, requiring a constructive purpose in an otherwise destructive act.[21] Others, however, maintain that *al menat litpor* is modeled after the *Mishkan*, where the purpose of tearing was to re-sew the curtains of the *Mishkan*.[22] According to the latter understanding, *kore'a* is only prohibited for the purpose of re-sewing, whereas any other constructive purpose would not pose a problem in terms of *kore'a*. However, there is a serious difficulty with the latter opinion. The Mishna states that it is prohibited on Shabbat to tear clothing out of anger or as an expression of *avelut*, even though there is no intention to re-sew the clothing.[23] In both of these cases, the tearing is not *al menat litpor*, so why is it prohibited?[24]

R. Eliyahu Mishkovsky suggests that usually *kore'a* functions merely as a means to an end. In other words, the goal is not the tearing *per se*, but rather the result thereof. Regarding such cases, *Hazal* had a tradition that the purpose must be specifically *al menat litpor*, following the model of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). However, when the tearing is an end in itself – that is, the goal is the tearing *per se* – there is no requirement of *al menat litpor*. In these instances, the act of tearing itself constitutes a bona fide *kore'a*. Thus, the Mishna prohibits tearing clothing to alleviate anger or to express *aveilut* (mourning), seeing as the goal is accomplished through the tearing itself rather than the result thereof.[25]

Now we can understand the *tikun* of *Keri'at Yam Suf*. God did not tear the sea in order to improve it; rather, the act of tearing *per se* achieved several valuable functions. The Torah states that the miracle terrified the enemies of the Jews: "The nations heard; they trembled... Terror and dread will descend upon them; through the might of your arm they will be still as stone."[26] This concept parallels the Gemara's case regarding one who tears clothing in order to intimidate others, which qualifies as *kore'a*.[27] Additionally, the stated purpose of *Keri'at Yam Suf* was that the Egyptians would ultimately realize the one true god: "*Mitzrayim* will know that I am God."[28] Accordingly, *Keri'at Yam Suf* demonstrated God's dominion over the laws of nature. Finally, *Keri'at Yam Suf* increased the Jews' *emunah*, faith, in God: "Israel saw the great power that God had used against the Egyptians; the nation feared God; they had faith in God and in His servant Moshe."[29] Now we can fully appreciate the depth of *Hazal*'s terminology in deliberately choosing to characterize the miracle of the splitting of the Reed Sea as *Keri'at Yam Suf*.

1 See e.g. Sotah 2a; Sanhedrin 22a.

2 Exodus 14:16, 21.

3 See e.g. Psalms 78:13; Isaiah 63:12; Nehemiah 9:11; cf. Psalms 136:15, which uses the term gozeir, "cutting."

4 An av beit din, head judge of a rabbinical court, in

late 19th-century Europe.

5 A commentary on the midrashic collection Tanna De-vei Eliyahu.

6 Shabbat 73a.

7 Ramatayim Tzofim to Tanna De-vei Eliyahu, Eliyahu Zutta 16:10. The chapter heading demarcates the section toward the teachings of R. Alter.

8 Tosefta Shabbat 17:9, cited in Beit Yosef, Orah Hayim 314 and Magen Avraham ad. loc. 314:14.

9 See Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Shabbat 10:11, who equates gluing with sewing regarding the melakhah of tofeir.

10 Shulhan Arukh Ha-Rav, Orah Hayim 340:17.

11 Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Shabbat 10:11, 11:6.

12 Hayyei Adam, Hilkhot Shabbat 29:5:2.

13 Shabbat 73a.

14 Bereishit Rabbah 5:5.

15 On this Midrash, see Maharal, Derekh Hayyim, Avot 5:6. On why the Torah used the term beki'ah, see further in Ramatayim Tzofim to Tanna De-vei Eliyahu, Eliyahu Zutta 16:10.

16 Shabbat 105b. However, they are rabbinically prohibited.

17 Shabbat 73a. The same holds true for other seemingly destructive melakhot; for example, moheik, erasing, is al menat li-khtov, in order to write.

18 Ramatayim Tzofim to Tanna De-vei Eliyahu, Eliyahu Zutta 16:10.

19 Cf. Maharal, Derekh Hayyim to Avot 5:6.

20 See Tosafot to Shabbat 94a s.v. rebbe; Shulhan Arukh Ha-Rav, Orah Hayim 313:17.

21 See Bei'ur Halakhah 340:14.

22 This view is implicit in Rashi to Shabbat 48a s.v. hayiv hatat; Tosafot to Shabbat 73b s.v. ve-tzarikh le-eitzim; Ramban and Ritva to Makkot 3a.

23 Shabbat 105b. In fact, the laws of aveilut prohibit re-sewing the torn clothing.

24 This question was asked by Rav Akiva Eiger, gloss to Shabbat 73b; Hayyei Adam, Hilkhot Shabbat 29:1-2; Pri Megadim, Orah Hayim 340 (Mishbetzot Zahav 6 and Eishel Avraham 18).

25 Cited in Noam Eliezer (Orah Hayim vol. 1), Ateret Yisrael 10:1 (pp. 323-324).

26 Exodus 15:14-16.

27 See Shabbat 105b.

28 Exodus 14:4, 14:18.

29 Ibid. 14:31.

The Fifth Maggid

Elie Wiesel and Hassidic Storytelling

By Yehuda Fogel

In the aftermath of the passing of literary luminary Elie Wiesel, there has been no shortage of obituaries offered and lamentations lamented. In the 75 years following the Holocaust, the world has embraced Wiesel as the unofficial mouthpiece of a sometimes silent generation, but one region of his work goes largely underappreciated, perhaps even ignored: his Hassidic sketches. This may be surprising given the degree of attention he has received over his lifetime, but less so once we analyze the nature of this attention. For example, President Obama, in his statement mourning Wiesel, called him "one of the great moral voices of our time, and in many ways, the conscience of the world… Elie was not just the world's most prominent Holocaust survivor, he was a living memorial."[1] One obituary goes even further, positing that "obituaries refer to him more consistently as a witness than a writer… His moral authority, which he earned and sought, derived from his experience, not any literary virtuosity."[2] This is not to say that Wiesel's writings have been ignored by the establishment, but it is my position that there is a particular Wiesel that the world understands and appreciates, and another that receives far less attention. In fact there is an astounding secondary literature analyzing his works,[3] but such works predominately ignore Wiesel's Hassidic tales and biblical sketches. Although one could very well defend such an emphasis under the presumption that the folkloric legends of rabbis past do not comprise the legacy of memory Wiesel has inscribed upon the world, I hope to show that his canon is a unified and composite whole. These legends are an important component of Wiesel's persona, and we dare not forget nor ignore any element of his that dared us not to forget, and never to ignore.

Origins

In order to understand these writings, we must first understand the origins of their writer. Wiesel grew up in the Romanian town of Sighet, a locale he returns to many times in his later writings. Although Sighet was home to many Hasidim, Wiesel himself was the child of a rational father and a Hassidic mother.[4] This dialectic influenced young Elie, but it was his Hassidic grandfather who gained the most attention in Wiesel's later writings. He would regale Elie with tales of sages past and present. This education was rooted not in facts and dates, but was an experiential entry into a fervent world of lore and legend. He writes that his grandfather "made me enter the universe of the Baal Shem and his disciples, where facts become subservient to imagination and beauty…tales that….appeal to the imagination rather than reason."[5] Throughout his literary oeuvre, Wiesel references this charismatic storyteller's favorite sages and stories, and one can envision a world in which Wiesel himself followed the tradition of his grandfather, living the life of a devout Hasid, far from the world of Nobel Prizes and presidential accolades that he would later inhabit. But then came the fateful year 1939, and the Jewish population of Sighet was forced into a ghetto. In 1944, Hungarian authorities deported the Jews of Sighet, and Wiesel entered the 'kingdom of darkness' that was Auschwitz and Buchenwald, perhaps never to truly leave. Wiesel's family was wiped out, and the idyllic spiritual naiveté of his Sighet was no longer.[6]

After the liberation of Auschwitz, in which Wiesel was a prisoner, he moved to Paris, where he attended lectures by Buber and Sartre and studied philosophy, literature, and psychology at the Sorbonne. Geographically and intellectually removed from the *shtetl* of his youth, here he gained exposure to the French existentialist thought and fiction that would influence much of his later work. The decade after the *Shoah* was the 'quiet after the storm' for Wiesel, and he refused to write about the Holocaust until he was eventually convinced by Nobel laureate Francois Mauriac.[7] *The World Remained Silent* was his first attempt at grappling with his memories, but it was *Night* that eventually catapulted Wiesel to worldwide fame. By the end of his life, he had added 55 more titles to this veritable library of works, which include novella, essays, biographical sketches, memoirs, and short stories.

Writings

Wiesel was fond of referring to the Holocaust by the term the 'kingdom of night,' and its reign is felt throughout most of Wiesel's written corpus. Although rarely explicated, the specter of the *Shoah* hovers consistently over his works, evoking the past without trivializing it by application. Wiesel has characterized his writings as "a *matzeva*, an invisible tombstone set up in memory for those that died without a burial." Wiesel's characterization of his writings as tombstones is especially apt, as - like tombstones - they refuse rational explanation and analysis, even as they beg to be probed and understood. Indeed, one would not dare to reduce such solemn monuments to mere historical artifacts as a means to understand the cruelty of genocide, even as the unspeakable cruelty of genocide puzzles the mind and demands an explanation that will never come. So too, Wiesel stresses the essential human inability to understand the horror of the Shoah, which defies rationality and yet demands understanding: we may weep out of sheer confusion and yearn for answers to our questions about humanity's capacity for cruelty, but we dare not deface the sacred memories and testimonials of the Shoah by analyzing them in support of a theory that would impose order over the madness that was Maijdanek or the unchecked evil that was Auschwitz. This is particularly true for a figure like Wiesel, who stresses the essential inability to understand the *Shoah*, which defies rationality yet demands understanding. Davis goes so far as to posit that "it is the elusiveness of hidden meanings and the consequential frustration of the intellect, rather than in its importance as a theme, that the Holocaust makes its most important impact on Wiesel's writing." Therefore we must be hesitant in attempting an interpretation. When facing the dark forest of the 'kingdom of night,' we cannot presume to find explanation, and perhaps acknowledgement of the forest is all we can do.

Most of the secondary literature dealing with Wiesel's work tends to focus on three major themes: protest,[8] silence/narrative,[9]and memory.[10] Put (relatively) simply, the first refers to the radical importance Wiesel places on theological and political protest, the second to Wiesel's embracing of the dialectical relationship between speech and silence, and in which lays the truer communication, and the third to the fleeting and illusory nature of memory. In support of these positions, the authors of such literature often turn to Wiesel's novels and memoirs, which are rife with philosophical asides and reflective comments. As these themes make up a majority of Wiesel's writings, they have received the overwhelming majority of analysis; however, the secondary literature generally ignore some ten books of Wiesel's biographical sketches of Biblical, Talmudic, and Hassidic figures. For a figure whose writings have received tremendous attention during his lifetime, it is astounding that these works are so underrepresented in the secondary literature. This phenomenon can be attributed to widespread uncertainty regarding the place of the biographical sketches in Wiesel's broader canon; we must interrogate the relationship between his analyses of ancient sages, in relation to a philosophically charged body of work that challenges a silent God. Through such an inquiry, we can understand if there is one true unified literary body of Elie Wiesel, of which these tales play an important role, or if these sketches are mere outliers to the true legacy of this man.

Although his treatment of the first two merit further critical consideration, we will focus on his work on Hassidim, in works such as *Sages and Dreamers*, *Hasidic Celebration, Wise Men and their Tales,* and *Somewhere a Master*. The first important factor to take note of is the contrast between Wiesel's stories and similar works. Martin Buber, sometimes thought of as the most influential of the Alt-Neu *maggidim* of the 20th century,[11] who in his masterful *Tales of the Hasidim* presents tales unadorned of super commentary, preferred to allow the stories to speak for themselves. He explains in the introduction to *Tales* that: "I considered it neither permissible nor desirable to expand the tales or to render them more

colorful and diverse...Only in those few cases where the notes at hand were quite fragmentary did I compose a connected whole by fusing what I had with other fragments, and filling the gap with related material." Buber's stories are skeletal and often present a teaching or miraculous story, naked of explanation or elucidation. Whereas Buber is satisfied in writing and recording the remnants of an oral tradition, Wiesel uses the stories as a foundation and an inspiration to draw parallels and understand themes. While Buber's *Tales* reads like an anthology, Wiesel's *Souls* reads like a monologue or narrative that draws from and is sprinkled with, but not overburdened by Hassidic stories.

Wiesel's comments are primarily devoted to understanding two distinct, but overlapping, elements of these accounts. Firstly, his works are attempts at understanding the theory and culture of differing Hassidic schools of thought; his words are meditations on the ideology of the many disparate Hassidic approaches. He focuses on particular *Rebbah* or *Hasidiot* and tries to find the particular essence of each brand of Hassidut, which in itself is an original flourish of Wiesel. Although there are (albeit few) methodological analyses of the spectrum of the Hassidic world, his works may have been the first to reach an English speaking, American audience.[12] Additionally, for Wiesel the stories are not simply stories, nor do they simply reflect the "expression and documentation of the Tzaddikim and their hassidim."[13] Readers of *Souls on Fire* are faced with too many abstractions on the thematic struggles of these thinkers for us to countenance the proposition that these books are strictly historical analyses. For example, commenting upon the dynamic nature of the tales of Rebbe Nahman of Bratslav, Wiesel notes that:

> "Danger and evil are not in the walk toward death, but in the digression. Man…lives on more than one level, loves and despairs in more than one way for more than one reason. Yet he does not even know whether his deeds fall into a main or secondary pattern or if his awareness is blessing or curse. The human condition gains in impact at the very moment it breaks apart. Every fragment contains the whole, every fissure bears witness that man is at once the most fragile and the most tenacious of creatures."

For the profound thinker and post Holocaust theologian that was Wiesel, these stories present a theological treasury, a moral ocean that was the source for many of the sentiments that pervade his other writings. His writings are meditations on themes originating in the *shtetlach* of Romania and Ukraine, but immanently relevant to 20th century witnesses of the very worst of the human condition.[14] Much of this material was the stuff of late night *tisches* in the Sighet of Wiesel's youth, a formative era, but one that he later repudiates for the likes of Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard, and only returned his grandfather's teachings (and the Kabbalah) later for the answers and questions that so plagued him. His comments on these stories are thus important for study, as they may have inspired, or at the very least reflected, much of the major leitmotifs redolent throughout his corpus, such as the significance of silence and protest.

The debate regarding the proper methodology of presentation of Hassidic story tales may find its roots in an earlier debate between Gershon Scholem and Martin Buber, in what is one of the most contentious quarrels in the ranks of academic Jewish scholarship.[15] This debate is particularly fitting for analysis in this forum, as it surrounds what may be the single most important story for understanding Wiesel's Hassidic stories: the tale of the four *maggids*. Wiesel recounts this story both in *The Gates of the Forest* and in *Souls on Fire*, and it is often referenced in the secondary literature surrounding Wiesel. Wiesel recounts that:

> "When the great Israel Baal Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his costume to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple, the Maggid of Mezeritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer." And again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, Moshe Leib of Sassov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say "I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished. Then it fell to Israel of Rizhin to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story." And it was sufficient."

Gershon Scholem quotes this story in his seminal *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, and comments that "this profound little anecdote symbolizes the decay of a great movement…nothing at all has remained theory, everything has become a *story*."[16] In short, this tale is a horror story in institutional decline, of the *Yeridat ha-Dorot* of a once-thriving thought system to a storybook community. Scholem argues that the best method to understand 'true' Hassidism is through the early theoretical writings, such as *Toldot Yaakov Yosef, Tanya*, and *Noam Elimelech*; the story is testimony only to the loss of what once was. Laurence Silberstein contends that Buber and Scholem were propounding differing rhetorical enterprises;[17] Buber was attempting a spiritual, or existential journey, and he utilized Hassidic legend and lore in the furthering of this goal. In his words:"I was concerned from first to last with restoring immediacy to the relation between man and God, with helping to end 'the eclipse of God.'"[18] Scholem, in contrast, was embarking on an academic expedition, with the goal of understanding the Hassidic texts and Hassidim "in their original context."[19] Therefore a major component of his biting critique focuses on Buber's subjective interpretations that "derive of his own philosophy…with no roots in the texts themselves."[20] To support his approach, Scholem points out that the corpus of theoretical writings is earlier and larger than that of Hassidic stories, many of which are faulty in light of historico-empirical factors. Buber disagrees, contending that "the legend is no chronicle, but it is truer than the chronicle for those who know how to read it."[21] For Scholem, stories have historical importance, as well as issues, but fades in comparison to the more important theoretical works, whereas Buber finds the unique truth offered by Hassidim in the stories they leave.[22] As Buber contended, "Because Hassidism in the first instance is not a category of teaching, but one of life, our chief source of knowledge of Hassidism is its legends, and only after them comes its theoretical literature. The latter is the commentary, the former the text…"

Where does Wiesel fit into this? His obvious engagement with the story as inspiration definitely leads one to posit that he veers closer to Buber,[23] but his simultaneous discomfort with allowing the story to remain as simply a story may suggest divergence from Buber. Wiesel's derivation of theoretical and philosophical messages from the texts may reveal that he was attempting to fuse the thought of Scholem and Buber, attempting to combine the approaches of these two figures by highlighting the story's importance as a theological and theoretical message in its own right. Wiesel was responding to Scholem's critique by revealing the sometimes latent depth to these stories, a theological profundity that Scholem may have been unwilling to perceive.[24] Wiesel's goals lie far closer to Buber's than to Scholem's; if Buber's works reflect "a desire to convey to our own time the force of a former life of faith to help our age renew its ruptured bond with the absolute," then Wiesel is much more the inheritor of Buber's tradition. Alternatively, Colin Davis argues that there is a tension in Wiesel's work, dialectically alternating between a positive embracing of the storytelling narrative and of a repudiation of the success of storytelling as a means of communication.[25] In any case, in the tradition of Alt-Neu storytellers Wiesel stands at the crossroads between Buber and Scholem, between story and theory, and blazes his own path in the forest, a path where the story and the theory need not be at odds, to master and novice alike.

Protest

In order to support the thesis that Wiesel's Hassidic stories are in fact an essential part of and influence on his weltanschauung, it is important to look for the presence in these works of his major themes. One such subject, of which much of the secondary literature surrounding Wiesel is devoted to, is that of the act of theological protest, the rebellion against God.[26] Alan Berger characterizes Wiesel's work as a "theology of protest," a call of arms against a silent God.[27] He points to Wiesel's three-act play *The Trial of God*, a work inspired by an incident in Auschwitz, in which "great masters in Talmud, in Halakha, in Jewish jurisprudence" put God on trial. He further points to a prayer offered by Wiesel, which is a post-Holocaust twist on the traditional *Shema Yisrael*; instead of Israel being called to listen, God himself is now called upon to listen. This perspective is far from the atheism adopted by so many after Auschwitz, but rather Wiesel has deigned to have "risen against His injustice, protested His silence and sometimes His absence, but my anger rises up within faith and not outside it." We do not respond to the Silence of the Holocaust with apathy, but rather with a passionate protest.

Although this rebellion may be radical to many, the *mesorah* of a redemptive revolt, or 'holy chutzpah' as some refer to it, has longstanding roots in the Hassidic tradition, roots that Wiesel stresses throughout his Hassidic works. Of Rav Israel of Rizhin, Wiesel recounts that he addressed God by saying "I am not a slave come to ask favors of the king. I come as a counselor to discuss matters of state."[28] Also, the daring *Rebba* of Rizhin once declared "Be our Father and we shall be Your servants; we shall be Your servants only if You are our Father."[29] Moreover, he once cried out "Master of the Universe, how many years do we know each other? How many decades? So please permit me to wonder: Is this any way to rule Your world? The time has come for You to have mercy on Your people! And if You refuse to listen to me, then tell me: what am I doing here on this earth of Yours?"[30] Wiesel raises similarly astounding stories regarding Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev[31] and the *Shpole Zeidi*; the latter himself was said to have brought God to trial centuries before Auschwitz, on a similar claim of parental negligence.

With all of the revolutionary anger that filled Wiesel's works, it was always the anger of a believer. "The revolt of the believer is not that of the renegade, the two do not speak in the name of the same anguish."[32] These stories do not exist in a vacuum in the broad corpus of Wiesel's works, but rather this amalgamation of stories and teachings created the Wiesel of *Night*, *Dawn,* and *Twilight.*

Conclusion

With what words can the intrepid traveler depart from a mere taste of this great man? Perhaps we can take leave as he would have, with a teaching from a Hassidic master. One can understand Wiesel's struggles with God through the lens of a thought by R. Simcha Bunam of Pshischa. The Rebbe points out a problematic word in the verse *"maamrim hayitem im Hashem,"* or "you have been rebels with God."[33] Surely the proper words shouldn't be '***im*** *Hashem,'* as this connotes that a rebel is 'with God'; a rebel is against God, not with God! The master of Pshischa explains that for some, their very acts of rebellion against God are in reality with God. The protester shouts, but in his vexing anger he declares the unity of the God he so opposes. The Maggid of Sighet was one such man; the 5th maggid, he taught to a world that didn't remember its own stories. His words speak best for us, as the silence of his departure sings through the air:

> *Did I say that the teller of tales would soon leave his old masters? In truth, he will not. For even if he wanted to, he could not; they surely would not willingly recede into the shadows of his burning memory. More than ever, we, today, need their faith, their fervor; more than ever, we, today, need to image them helping, caring, living.*

1 https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/02/statement-president-death-elie-wiesel

2 See Bernard Avishai, ""Postscript: Elie Wiesel 1928-2016", The New Yorker.

3 On a recent trip to Yeshiva University's Pollack Library this writer found two full bookshelves devoted to analysis of Wiesel's works.

4 Lothar Kahn, in "Elie Wiesel: Neo-Hasidism", in Responses to Elie Wiesel, ed. by Harry J. Cargas (New York: Persea Books, 1978).

5 Elie Wiesel, Souls on Fire, (New York: Random House, 1972), trans. by Marion Wiesel,

6 The clash between what Wiesel once was and would become is profoundly felt in his own poignant description in The Eternal Light:

"I did return to Sighet once…I went back to the home that used to be the home of my parents, my home….I became afraid, afraid that the door might open and a little yeshivah boy with side curls resembling me would come out and ask me innocently, "tell me stranger, what are you doing here? What are you doing in my dreams and in my childhood?" I was so afraid of being judged by that child, I was so afraid of shattering the dream and killing the child once again that I did not dare go in. I retreated and began running, running away from the street, from the town, from all the places that once were ours…. I ran so much that I reentered my own tale, and this is the tale of the tale itself." Qtd. In Against Silence, (New York: Holocaust Library, 1985) Vol. 3, 65.

7 Mauriac later described seeing in Wiesel "the death of God in the soul of a child." See Fine, Ellen S. Legacy of Night: The Literary Universe of Elie Wiesel (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982).

8 See "The Storyteller and his Quarrel with God" by

Alan L. Berger, as well as "Wrestling with Oblivion: Wiesel's Autobiographical Storytelling as Midrash" by Devorah Lee Ames, both in Elie Wiesel and the Art of Storytelling (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006). See also Abrahamson's Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel (New York: Holocaust Library, 1985).

9 See for example Simon Sibelman's Silence in the Novels of Elie Wiesel (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995). See also several essays collected in Carol Rittner's Elie Wiesel: Between Memory and Hope (New York: New York University Press, 1990), such as "Silence and Dialogue: Reflections on the Work of Elie Wiesel", by Eugene J. Fisher, and "Silence-Survival-Solidarity: Reflections on Reading Elie Wiesel" by Dow Marmur, as well as Irving Abrahamson's And God was Silent, ibid.

10 His acceptance speech for his Nobel Prize was titled Hope, Despair and Memory. See also Rittner's Elie Wiesel: Between Memory and Hope (New York: New York University Press, 1990).

11 My usage of altneu, opposed to the more prevalent 'neo-hassidic' is in part due to an attempt at avoiding a baggage-laden buzzword, and in part to draw attention to the particular character of Wiesel's storytelling. For example, Zalman Schachter Shalomi, or 'Reb Zalman', an important early figure in the American Neo-Hasidic community, draws from Hassidic tales an antinomian theology that embraces a New World spirituality, with ideological space for "eco-Halacha" and the Gaia Principle. For Reb Zalman, the emphasis is firmly on the neo-hasidic, in his adoption of certain hassidic doctrines, while ignoring the communal constraints and origins of these theological standpoints. In contrast, a major factor in Wiesel's works coincide with an acknowledgement and appreciation for the setting and societal qualifications of hassidic doctrine, and thus he embraces both the 'alt'and the 'neu' of Hassidic story tales. For more on the importance of societal context and authorial intent in the interpretation of hassidic thought, see Dovid Bashevkin, "A Radical Theology and a Traditional Community: On the Contemporary Application of Izbica-Lublin Hassidut in the Jewish Community", published on Torahmusings.com.

12 Aryeh Kaplan's writings, such as Chassidic Masters, are good examples of this genre, but were published twenty years after Souls on Fire. There has yet to be a definitive academic work analyzing such works, but a preliminary survey suggests that Wiesel may have been the first to have such works published in English, and early even as far as Hebrew scholarship goes. Later writers include Zalman Shachter-Shalomi (affectionately known as 'Reb Zalman') in A Heart Afire: Stories and Teachings of the Early Hasidic Masters (Jewish Publication Society, 2009), and the assorted writings of Dr. Arthur Green.

13 Buber, Introduction to Tales of the Hasidim. (New York: Shocken Books, 1947).

14 He formulates this idea clearly in Souls on Fire, (New York: Random House, 1972) in saying that "all the characters of our history are linked to each other. And we are the link. Tales are reformulated and rediscovered in every generation." Also, in Sages and Dreamers (New York: Summit Books, 1991) he says that "a hasidic story is about hassidim more than about their masters, it is about those who retell it as much as about those who experienced it long ago, in a time of both physical and spiritual hunger and solitude."

15 The critique originally appeared in a 1961 article titled Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism, later published in The Messianic Idea in Judaism (New York: Shocken, 1971). In order to fully appreciate this debate, one must recall Buber remains one of the leading interpreters of the Hassidic tradition, and Scholem of broader Jewish mysticism. Moreover, Buber was a major influence on Scholem's interest in mysticism, and thus this article was an attack of student against the foundation of the scholarly exposition of the master, at the very end of the master's life; Buber died but four years later.

16 Major Trends, 350.

17 Lauren Silberstein, in "Modes of Discourse in Modern Judaism: The Buber-Scholem Debate Reconsidered", published in Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal (Penn State University Press: 1988) Vol. 7, No. 4, 657-681.

18 "Interpreting Hassidism", Commentary, September 1963.

19 Scholem, The Messianic Idea in Judaism, 247.

20 Ibid.

21 Qtd. by Scholem in The Messianic Idea in Judaism (New York: Shocken, 1971), 234. Scholem there also comments that "it must be emphasized that, whereas the origins of this Hassidic life were deeply influenced and shaped by ideas laid down in the theoretical literature, its beginnings were certainly not influenced by legend."

22 Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism (New York: Horizon Books, 1960).

23 This becomes clear by observing Buber's own rationale for his methodological style: "The other, and essentially different, way of restoring a great buried heritage of faith to the light is to recapture a sense of the power that once gave it the capacity to take hold of and vitalize the life of diverse classes of people. Such an approach derives from the desire to convey to our own time the force of a former life of faith to help our age renew its ruptured bond with the absolute. The scholar bent upon unearthing a forgotten or misunderstood body of teaching cannot accomplish this renewal even if he succeeds in establishing a new interpretation." (Italics mine.) See Buber "Interpreting Hasidism," Commentary, September 1963.

24 This isn't necessarily to suggest that Scholem was unable to understand the significance of these tales; After all, one does not simply accuse the founding father of academic Jewish mysticism of gross misunderstanding lightly. Perhaps we can understand Scholem's understanding, or misunderstanding, of this topic through a vignette related by Wiesel in Sages and Dreamers: "One day he [The Apter] watched his followers push to approach his table. "Don't", he said quietly. "Its no use. Those who know how to listen will hear from a distance, those who don't know how won't hear even from close by." (Italics mine).

25 Colin Davis in Elie Wiesel's Secretive Texts, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994), 47.

26 Another such theme, although beyond the scope of this paper, in which one can find many parallels in Wiesel's hassidic writings is regarding the simultaneous sanctity and sacreligeosity of silence.

27 Alan L. Berger, "The Storyteller and His Quarrel with God", published in Elie Wiesel and the Art of Storytelling (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006). See also Bernard Schweitzer, "Agnostic Misotheism 3: Divine Apathy, the Holocaust, and Elie Wiesel's Wrestling with God", both in Hating God: The Untold Story of Misotheism (Oxford University Press, 2010). See also David Blumenthal, Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest (Louisville, KY: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993). The latter is an important work, and was favorably accepted by Wiesel.

28 Souls on Fire, (New York: Random House, 1972), 158.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 In Souls on Fire, he quotes Levi Yitzchak as having once cried out: "When a Jew sees tefillin on the ground, he runs to pick them up and kisses them. Isn't it written that we are Your tefillin? Are You not going to lift us toward You?" He once went so far as to propose a challenge: "Know that if Your reign does not bring grace and mercy, lo teshev al kissakha beemet, Your throne will not be a throne of Truth." Page 110.

32 Souls on Fire, 111. John Roth highlights this tension within the thought of Wiesel: "To deny God outright would go too far. But to affirm God's total goodness, to apologize for God, to excuse or exonerate God…these steps go too far as well." Roth as well argues that one can be "for God by being against God." See John K. Roth, "A Theodicy of Protest", in Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy ed. Stephen T. Davis and John B. Cobb (Atlanta, GA: J. Knox Press, 1981) Contrast this perspective with that of other post-Holocaust theologians, such as Eliezer Berkovitz, Emil Fackenheim, Richard Rubinstein, Primo Levi, and Irving (Yitz) Greenberg.

33 Deuteronomy 9:7 and 9:24.

Elucidating a Selection from *Tanya*

What it Means to Educate a Child 'According to His Way'

By Devir Kahan

Tanya is a philosophical treatise on some of the most important and fundamental principles of Hassidut. It was written by the founder of Habad Hassidut, R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, also known as the Alter Rebbe (or 'elder teacher'). Though the study of *Tanya* is generally attributed to those who follow Habad Hassidism, the profound truth and deep philosophical discourse contained within *Tanya* is equally relevant to all Jews. There is a tremendous amount to be gained by all from this book, as evidenced by an analytical reading and exposition of just one interesting selection from *Tanya*[1].

At the start of the second section of *Tanya*, entitled "The Gate of Unity and Belief," the Alter Rebbe spends a number of paragraphs in introduction; however brief they may be, it is clear that from just these few pages in *Tanya*, wellsprings of information and profundity burst forth. The Alter Rebbe begins: "Educate the child according to his way, even when he will be old he will not deviate from it [Proverbs 22:6]." Since it is written "According to his way," it is understood that it is not the path of Absolute Truth, hence of what merit is it that "Even when he will be old he will not depart from it?"[2] When it comes to education, writes the Alter Rebbe, one mustn't skip steps and expect from a child that of which he or she is not yet capable. Instead, one must educate each child according to his or her own current level of ability and individual personality. One should teach only that which will be most likely to resonate with each particular child, at each particular stage of his or her education. The Alter Rebbe first poignantly notes, though, that if one is obligated to educate only according to a child's current abilities, this must mean that one does not teach a child the 'Absolute Truth'.

What does the Alter Rebbe mean by 'Absolute Truth'? First, it is critical to distinguish between 'Absolute Truth' and 'truth', as they are not the same. While there are often different aspects of truths in different situations, there is only ever one Absolute Truth. Halakhic rulings are one such important example of this phenomenon. At times, stringencies are waved in certain situations due to extenuating circumstances, but the result is a Halakhic truth all the same. In order to properly educate a person, however, it is unwise to be harsh regarding the whole, Absolute Truth. If a teacher was educating a student about Shabbat, for instance, he or she would best begin by highlighting the aspects of Shabbat that are most beautiful and inspirational. Later, the student will come to recognize that what he was originally taught might not have been the entire picture. Indeed, such a person will see that along with the inspiration and rejuvenation he may have initially experienced, Shabbat also includes laws and strict prohibitions. Similarly, one would be unwise to begin an introductory course to Judaism with the commandment to eradicate the Amalekites, as such a precept necessitates a nuanced understanding of Jewish Philosophy. Instead such a course would be more effective if it began with more obviously pleasant aspects of the truth that would more likely be accepted as such. The Absolute Truth is that Judaism is not a simple religion, but one that involves deep and sometimes difficult concepts. In such situations that involve teaching children or newcomers, the partial truth one tells is indeed considered to be at a certain level true, but it is not the Absolute Truth. Still it is preferable to begin with this more partial truth in order to reach a person on his or her level. In line with this understanding, one should hold to the advice of King Solomon and educate "according to his way."

Considering the above, the Alter Rebbe points out a rather glaring problem: The verse states that one should educate a child only according to his current, limited abilities — and not according to the Absolute Truth — in the hopes that when he grows old he will not deviate from his ways. But why would one want someone to forever remain at the level of ability and understanding he or she possessed as a child — a level and understanding that is not the Absolute Truth? Why would one *not* want a person to deviate from his or her childish ways? Before he answers this question the Alter Rebbe takes a moment to lay out what it means to serve God in the first place, and thus what one should even be striving towards in the education of children: "It is well-known that Fear (or Awe) and Love are the roots and foundations of the service of God. Fear is the root and basis of "Refrain from evil," and Love [is the root and basis] of "and do good" [Psalms 34:15] and the observance of all the positive commandments of the Torah and the Rabbis, as will be explained in their proper place."

Logically, this dichotomy between Fear and Love could easily have been seen in the opposite way. When one is in fear of someone, one would do whatever the feared person would command. Similarly, when one loves someone, one would want to refrain from ever doing anything that might in any way hurt that person. What does it mean, then, to say instead that love specifically is the root of the positive commandments, and fear is the root of the negative prohibitions? To understand this, we must first know that the Hebrew words '*yirah*' and '*ahava'* really refer to concepts far beyond their usual simple translations of 'fear' or 'love' respectively. In truth, such terms do not refer merely to an expression of an emotion, but to a psychological reality within a person.

When in a state of love, a person's mood is expansive, creative, and all-encompassing. Everything looks positively beautiful and radiant and all is well. In such a state of love, the self becomes very large and encompasses everything and everyone around it. Thus, when it is said both colloquially and in countless Kabbalistic works, that God created the world in love, it means that He expressed His desire to create, expand, and encompass.[3] This psychological mode of expressiveness manifests itself through the human emotion that we call 'love'. When we speak of fear, on the other hand, we speak of the psychological reality that is the opposite of love. Fear is synonymous with the idea of contracting, constricting, cringing, and drawing back into oneself.[4] Fear is the emotional manifestation of the psychological reality of contraction. Love can then be said to be the expansive personality, whereas fear is the contractive personality.

Unchecked, love, expansion, or creation would result in sheer chaos. All creation, all expansiveness, must be limited or constricted at a certain point. Without constriction, any and all creation would be chaos. An infinite, unrestricted amount of wood, for instance, would be meaningless, but a precise and restricted amount of wood could enable the the creation of a table or a chair.

When the Alter Rebbe speaks of the root of the positive commandments being 'love', he means that their purpose is to construct, create, connect, and expand. One uses one's expansive self to draw closer to the Eternal, to bridge the gap between Man and God. When referring to the root of the negative commandments as 'fear', on the other hand, this means that their purpose is constriction of self and action: refraining from a sin does not create anything new, but rather ensures that there are no blockages in the spiritual pipes, so to speak. In Kabbalistic thought, negative commandments exist to prevent any possible 'blockage' in one's ability to establish and maintain spiritual connection with the Eternal. All negative commandments serve to restrict our behavior and actions in order to protect us; they are all various ways of constricting action.

After dealing with the above concepts, the Alter Rebbe now turns to explain what it means to love God, and how one can best accomplish this:

> Concerning the love [of God] it is written at the end of the *Parashah* of *Eikev*, "Which I command you to do it, to love God…" [Deuteronomy 10:12]. It is necessary to understand how an expression of doing can be applied to love, which is in the heart. The explanation, however, is that there are two kinds of love of God. One is the natural yearning of the soul to its Creator. When the rational soul prevails over the grossness [of the physical body], subdues and subjugates it, then [the love of God] will flare and blaze with a flame which ascends of its own

accord, and will rejoice and exult in God its Maker and will delight in Him with wondrous bliss.

The Alter Rebbe first questions what it means to "do" love relative to God. Why does this verse use the terminology of 'do' in reference to love? After all, one would assume that love of God (or anyone, or anything for that matter) is not something one *does*, but something one *feels*. To approach this question, the Alter Rebbe first explains that there are two different kinds of love of God. The first, and highest level of love of God is such that all of a person's knowledge of God becomes real, and all else falls away as a nuisance in the face of the Absolute Truth. To illustrate this point by example: For many, waking up to pray is an annoyance, and the act of sleeping is what is experienced as real. True love of God is the reverse of this. The only way to achieve this true love of God is to train oneself to such a point that the infinite becomes the only thing that is real, and all tangible reality becomes inconsequential in the face of the Eternal. This level of love is the recognition that everything in the physical world is but another expression of God. For example, when looking at a tree a person can merely see a plant, or he can appreciate the poetry, wisdom, and beauty of the Divine in nature. Seeing only a tree is easy because it only requires one to see only that which is presently tangible, while understanding that a tree is also actually an infinite and conceptual reality is far too difficult for most to truly process.

According to *Tanya*, true *avodat Hashem* (service of God) means taking that which is initially abstract and making it a tangible reality and taking that which is initially tangible and considering it as merely the medium and vehicle for the expression of the Absolute Truth. This idea is also expressed by the apocryphal story of a certain Hassidic *rebbe* who remarked, "We see a wall and are told it is the *devar Hashem* (the word of God). In truth, we should see the *devar Hashem* and be told it is a wall." To be able to achieve this is to be able to truly love God. In the view of the Alter Rebbe, the increased performance of commandments and the service of God will then follow naturally from an increased love of God. Thus, *Tanya* here is teaching that one should largely focus on a true love for God, and the rest will come.

The Alter Rebbe concludes his explanation of the first type of love of God as follows:

> Those who merit this state of "*Ahavah Rabbah*" [great love] are the ones who are called *Tzadikim* [the righteous] as it is written, "Rejoice in GOd, ye *Tzadikim*" [Psalms 32:11]. Yet, not everyone is privileged to attain this state, for it requires a very great refinement of one's physical grossness, and in addition a great deal of Torah and good deeds in order to merit a lofty *Neshamah* [upper soul], which is above the level of *Ruach* [spirit] and *Nefesh* [soul]…

To the Alter Rebbe, the definition of a *tzadik* has nothing to do with garb or length of beard. In his view, a *tzadik* is a person who achieves the aforementioned level of recognition and love of God.[5] It is a long road to such a love of God, and most will probably never reach the final destination. Due to this, the Alter Rebbe explains that there exists also a second type of love of God: "The second is a love which every man can attain when he will engage in profound contemplation in the depths of his heart on matters that arouse the love of God which is in the heart of every Jew." The other way to come to a love of God, explains the Alter Rebbe, is to both be a focused thinker, and to process that which you study in the "depths of your heart." A person's study must also include psychological involvement. Merely learning Hassidic thought, for instance, and feeling positive in the moment is not enough and will never truly change or improve a person. The Alter Rebbe is here stating that one needs to allow the truths he or she learns to actually penetrate the psyche and become perceptions of reality. This is only possible if a person is a serious thinker. Presuming this to be the case, one can achieve the second type of love of God by coming to the following recognition about Him:

> Be it in a general way, that He is our very life, and just as one loves his soul and his life, so he will love GOd when he will meditate and reflect in his heart that GOd is his true soul and actual life, as the *Zohar* comments on the verse, "[You are] my soul, I desire You;" [Isaiah 26:9]; or in a particular way, when he will understand and comprehend the greatness of the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, in detail, to the extent that his intellect can grasp and even beyond. Then he will contemplate GOd's great and wondrous love to us to descend to Egypt, the "Obscenity of the earth," to bring our souls out of the "iron crucible" …to bring us close to Him and to bind us to His very Name, and He and His Name are One. That is to say, He elevated us from the nadir of degradation and defilement to the acme of holiness and to His infinite greatness, may He be blessed. Then, "As in water, face reflects face," [Proverbs 27:19] love will be aroused in the heart of everyone who contemplates and meditates upon this matter in the depths of his heart — to love GOd with an intense love and to cleave unto Him, heart and soul…

The second form of love of God derives from recognizing God's place in the life of a Jew. The Alter Rebbe provides two avenues to reach just such a recognition. The first path is love of self, which can exemplify a love of God. The deepest sense of Self one has is God. The very fact that life exists — indeed, the very fact that there is existence at all — is owed wholly and solely to God. A person's very soul and life-force is God; the deepest and most elemental aspect of Man is Divinity. Thus, in a very real sense, love of the Self is love of God. This is, of course, only true once a person has eliminated all the superfluous and fake reasons for self-love — but if one has accomplished this, and recognizes the Godliness within him, what remains is a love of the Self that is in fact a love of God. The second path involves the recognition of God's love as evidenced by Jewish history. In this avenue one must contemplate all that God has done for the Jewish nation throughout history. If one can see God in history, then one can subsequently come to a love of God. Indeed, why else would God do all that He has done for the Jewish people if not for love? Once a person recognizes God's love for the Jewish people, he or she will be naturally aroused to a love for God, just as in the simile of the verse which the Alter Rebbe quotes, "As in water, face reflects face." As basic human psychology dictates, we are usually inclined to love those who love us.

The Alter Rebbe then returns to explain how it can be true that there is a commandment to feel a love for God:

> Thus, there can be applied to this second type of love an expression of charge and command, namely, to devote one's heart and mind to matters which stimulate love. However, an expression of command and charge is not at all applicable to the first kind of love, which is a flame that ascends of its own accord. Furthermore, it is the reward of the *Tzadikim* to savor of the nature of the World to Come in this world. That is the meaning of the verse, "I will give you the priesthood as a service of gift," [Numbers 18:7], as will be explained in its proper place.

What this all means, then, is that the love of God is a natural outgrowth of certain actions. This is why we are commanded to "*do*" it. The commandment is to meditate on and contemplate those truths that will then naturally bring a person to a love of God. When we contemplate the truth and reality of the world, and our place within it, we will naturally be stirred towards a love of God. While the highest level of love of God is unlikely to be attained by most, we are recommended by the Alter Rebbe to come to a love of God via the two meditations just mentioned: the general recognition that God and the self are one, and the more specific recognition of all that God has done for the Jewish people out of love.

After explaining that the critical foundation for true *avodat Hashem* is in fact a love of God, together with what this really means and how best to achieve it, the Alter Rebbe finally returns to his initial question of what King Solomon meant when he seemed to suggest that we should educate children such that they never deviate from their youthful ways. To do so, he first explains a famous verse:

> Now, those who are familiar with the esoteric meaning of Scripture know [the explanation of] the verse, "For a *Tzadik* falls seven times and rises up again."[6] [Proverbs 24:16]. Especially since man is called "mobile" and not "static," he must ascend from level to level and not remain forever at one plateau. Between one level and the next, before he can reach the higher one, he is in a state of decline from the previous level.

Between two levels, or two stages of growth, before a person finally attains the stability of the new level, a person loses the stability he or she possessed at the previous level; however, this is the way of growth and striving to a higher stage of personal development. In order for the *tzadik* to develop all stages of righteousness, he must fall before reaching the next stage. One must let go of the comfort and certainty of the present in order to reach towards a greater, yet unknown, future.

The Alter Rebbe further explains what it means to "fall" in the process of personal growth: "Yet, it is written, "Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down" [Psalms 37:24]. It is considered a decline only in comparison with his former state, and not, GOd forbid, in comparison with all other men, for he is still above them in his service [of GOd], inasmuch as there remains in it an impression of his former state." A person does not lose everything he achieved previously as he transitions to a new stage of life. Rather, all that is lost is the prior sense of comfort, certainty, and stability. When one "falls" in the process of growth, it is not a real "fall" in the sense that there is still that which was acquired and is carried over from the previous stages. The knowledge and experience of the past is surely brought along into the future. The only thing that is lost between stages of life is that sense of stability and comfort. This may explain why personal growth and life transitions can often be difficult.

In order to successfully grow, and make it through the discomfort of growth, without losing one's way, a person needs a healthy and strong foundation — a foundation that remains no matter what. When a person falls as he grows, he will then fall not into nothingness, but instead onto the foundation established during his childhood. With this, he will then be able to remain steadfast in his growth, and push up and off the steady ground of the foundation upon which he fell. Without such a foundation as a safety net for the inevitable "falls" that accompany each stage of life, true growth would be at best dangerous, and at worst impossible.

The Alter Rebbe concludes by explaining what it means that a child should never deviate from the education of his youth:

> The root of his service, however, is from the love of GOd to which he has been educated and trained from his youth before he reached the level of *Tzadik*. This, then, is the meaning of "Even when he will be old…" And the first thing which arouses Love and Fear, and their foundation, is the pure and faithful belief in His Unity and Oneness, may He be blessed and exalted.

We must educate children "according to their ways" in a pure faith in God's Unity and Oneness as a foundation towards a true love of God. This is what King Solomon means in the verse quoted at the very start of this essay: "Educate the child according to his way, even when he will be old he will not deviate from it." The Alter Rebbe sees in this verse a powerful and profound message for life, education, and growth as a human: growth creates instability; it causes pain and discomfort. While most find the storms of instability that accompany growth too difficult to bear, we must not allow our children to likewise succumb. The Alter Rebbe teaches that the principle education of a child must be towards the Love and Fear of God via the instillation of a pure belief in God's Unity and a recognition of His Oneness. Then, as the child grows and strives towards the highest levels of love of God, and towards the ever-elusive Absolute Truth, he or she will always be able to fall back on and build upon this solid childhood foundation— a foundation from which we hope he or she will never deviate.[7]

1 Much of the elaboration and analysis in this essay is based off a series of lectures on Hinukh Katan (education of minors) delivered by R. Mendel Blachman in 2007. While this essay was reviewed by R. Blachman, any and all possible errors herein ought to be attributed solely to this author.

2 All excerpts from the Tanya are taken from English translations of the work found on Habad.org, Habad.org/library/tanya/tanya_cdo/aid/1029163/jewish/Introduction.htm

3 See "A World of Love" by Aryeh Kaplan and, for Kabbalistic sources, the "The Purpose of Creation" by Nisson Dovid Dubov, both on Habad.org.

4 This idea is very relevant to the fundamental Kabbalistic notion of tzimtzum, i.e. the contraction of the Divine.

5 Throughout Tanya, a tzadik (righteous person) is similarly defined as one who does not even struggle to overcome the inclination to sin, but rather naturally does good. The beinoni (average person) is one who struggles but prevails, while the rasha (wicked person) is one who struggles, gives in, and never does teshuvah, (repentance).

6 This is to say, all that the Alter Rebbe is about to explain is true at the level of sod (secret meaning), not peshat (literal meaning).

Tzimtzum, Divine and Human Constriction

A Meeting-Place Between the Divine and Human

By Leah Klahr

"Whenever I think about God, I am at first saddened, because I realize that in thinking about Him, I distance myself from Him. But then I remember that since He is all, He is also my thought and my distance, and I am consoled," said the 19th Century Hassidic thinker, Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav.[1] Rabbi Nahman's philosophically and theologically laden statement about thinking about thinking about God embodies within it the concept of *tzimtzum*, one of the foundations of Hassidic theology. *Tzimtzum*, or Divine Constriction, is founded upon the questions of how an Infinite God could create a finite world, how a finite world manages to overcome nullification in the face of Infinity, and the nature of the relationship between an Infinite God and a finite world.

The 16th Century Kabbalistic scholar, Rabbi Isaac Luria, also known as the *Ari-zal*, developed the visual model of *tzimtum*, or Divine Constriction, in response to these questions. *Tzimtzum* posits that prior to the world's creation, there was nothing but the *Ein-Sof*, the 'Never Ending'. The light emanating from the *Ein Sof* is called the *Ohr Ein Sof*, and refers to all power and action deriving from the *Ein Sof*. Though everything, including finitude, existed within the *Ohr Ein Sof*, no individual part could distinguishably exist in face of the overwhelmingly infinite light of the *Ohr Ein Sof*.[2] In order for the distinguishable existence of anything other than the *Ein-Sof*, there was a Divine 'withdrawal' from, or constriction of, the *Ohr Ein Sof*,[3] which enabled a possibility for creation.[4]

Though the *Ari-zal*'s model of *tzimtzum* was meant as a symbolic illustration of creation, it created further theological questions for his students. Namely, it raised the issues of 'change' within a perfect God, a 'before' and 'after' attributed to a timeless God, and to the possibility of a space devoid of an omnipresent God. These issues led to the development of *tzimtzum lo ke-pshuto*, or the allegorical interpretation of *tzimtzum*, first coined by R. Yosef ben Immanuel Irgess[5] and R. Immanuel Chai Ricchi[6] in the early 18th Century.

According to the allegorical interpretation of *tzimtzum*, rather than describing a literal process of change within God, the concept of *tzimtzum* establishes a construct through which one can understand the relationship between the world and God. Concealment of an aspect of God's omnipresence empowers creation with an illusory sense of independence, enabling it to exist in the face of Infinity. As contemporary scholar Tamar Ross writes, "The act of divine *tzimtzum* was likened by some to the situation of a teacher who conceals the full scope of his knowledge so that some limited portion of it may be revealed to his student. Just as the wisdom of the teacher is unaffected by this concealment, so too all forms of existence gain a sense of their selfhood as a result of the hiding of God's all-pervasive presence, yet God's all-embracing monolithic unity remains the same. All appearances of diversity and particularization – while real enough – are swallowed up by His infinite unity, just as drops of water are contained by the sea and indistinguishable from the surrounding waters."[7] *Midrash Rabbah* captures this panentheistic[8] theology in the formulation, "He is the place of the world, and the world is not His place.[9]" In panentheistic terms, the world exists within God, but God exists beyond the world.

While solving earlier theological questions, the allegorical interpretation of *tzimtzum* posed the threat of undermining the foundations of the entire Halakhic system. The Halakha, and traditional Jewish worship as a whole, are based on distinctions and binaries: Divine and human, holy and profane, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden. To many, the suggestion that these distinctions are only illusions threatens the entire framework of Halakha and Divine worship.

Interestingly, two leaders of opposing movements, R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, representing the Hassidic movement, and R. Hayim of Volozhin, representing the *Mitnaged* (anti-Hassidic) movement, both adopted the allegorical understanding of *tzimtzum* as an essential part of their philosophies. Their development of the allegorical understanding of *tzimtzum* also addresses the questions that the concept itself raises. Both thinkers agreed that according to the allegorical interpretation of *tzimtzum*, from God's Divine vantage, the world is not distinct from God. This is likened to the ocean's perception of a drop of water within it; to the ocean, the drop is a part of the whole. However, it is regarding the human perception of the world, how the drop of water see itself in relation to the ocean, where these thinkers' views differed.

According to R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Divinity in this world, which was drawn through successive constrictions,[10] is qualitatively lesser. Therefore, from the human point of view, God's reality is both greater than, and distinct from, the reality of the world. Though this distinction is only perceived by humanity, and not by God, it creates a sense of separation from God, enabling a human relationship with God.[11] This sense of distinction, accompanied by the knowledge that it only exists from the earthly perspective, serves as the basis of Hassidic thought. Hassidic thought demands of humanity to overcome this illusory sense of separation. Torah learning and Halakhic fulfillment are integral tools in achieving this goal. However, according to R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, prayer and meditation, which can transform a person's consciousness, are also integral tools in overcoming a sense of separation from God.[12] At the same time, the Hassidic approach also embraces the tension between Divine transcendence and immanence. It is only through a sense of separation that one can create a relationship with God, where a person can relate to God as "Other," as a King, Father, or Lover. Yet, simultaneously, it is the knowledge of God's immanence, of the reality of one-ness with the Divine, which drives a person to overcome this sense of separation.[13] The Hassidic understanding of *tzimtzum* establishes this duality by positing that from the human perspective, the world is qualitatively distinct from God, while also maintaining that from the Divine perspective, there is no such distinction.

According to R. Hayim of Volozhin, even from the human perspective, there is no distinction between the human and Divine. Unlike the Hassidic approach, which inspires one to overcome an illusory sense of separation, R. Hayim's approach inspires one to fully embrace the reality of this world. Rather than striving for transcendence, the Jewish person's mission within this already transcendent world is only to learn Torah and fulfill the Halakhah. However, R. Hayim of Volozhin adamantly cautions against thinking too much about the one-ness of this world with God. He compares the knowledge of God's immanence, and the unity of the world within God, as "embers of fire; as background warmth, such knowledge can serve a positive function in fueling our devotion, but if approached too closely we face the danger of being consumed.[14]" This approach serves as the basis for *Mitnaged* thought, which rejects the Hassidic emphasis on overcoming the illusory separation from God. According to the *Mitnaged* approach, the emphasis of Divine worship should be in the concrete actions of Torah study and Halakhic fulfillment.[15]

Importantly there exists a plausible alternative to the aforementioned understanding of the respective positions of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi and R. Hayim of Volozhin.[16] According to this alternate understanding, both thinkers agree that from the human perspective as well as Divine perspective, this world bears no separation from the comprehensive Divinity. However, limited human perception prevents people from recognizing this reality. Thus, the Hassidic approach attempts to overcome the confines of limited human reality to perceive the larger reality of one-ness. The *Mitnaged* approach, on the other hand, acknowledges the larger reality of one-ness, while also embracing its limited human perception, claiming that this larger reality shouldn't impact one's religious worship. However, this alternative understanding does not affect the distinction between Hassidic and *Mitnaged* approaches of overcoming separation versus embracing it.

Whether one identifies with the Hassidic or *Mitnaged* implications of *tzimtzum*, or perhaps with both, the allegorical interpretation of *tzimtzum* serves as a powerful model within Jewish thought. It provides a foundation for the concept of Divine immanence. It also portrays the Divinity inherent in our world. If Divinity perceives no separation between itself and the world, everything of this world is brimming with Divinity. And this Divinity unites all things.

Much in this vein, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik writes: "Is this Lurianic doctrine of *tzimtzum* just a Kabbalistic mystery, without any moral relevance for us; or is it the very foundation of our morality? If God withdrew, and creation is a result of His withdrawal, then, guided by the principle of imitatio Dei, we are called upon to do the same. Jewish ethics, then, requires man, in certain situations to withdraw."[17] Perhaps one of the human "withdrawals" that Rav Soloveitchik's words allude to is the Halakhic framework itself. The Halakhah constricts the boundless freedom, or Infinity within people, enabling them to create a unique space within themselves. It is this space, empty of the overwhelmingly boundless "I," that serves as the dwelling place of the Divine. This human reflection of *tzimtzum* serves as the ultimate act of imitatio Dei. Just as the *Ein Sof* constricted itself to create a space for humanity within itself, humanity too, constricts itself to create space for the Divine within its being. It is this dual process of *tzimtzum* that allows for a meeting place between the "I and Thou,"[18] between a person and the Divine.

Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav described human *tzimtzum* as a process of intellectual, emotional, and character refinement within a person. He writes: "Just as the *tzimtzum* process on the *Ein Sof* forms the worlds which are created with God's Characteristics,[19] similarly, the mind, through the *tzimtzum* of the enthusiasm of its thoughts, forms and reveals worlds, a process which is equated with revealing a person's characteristic traits."[20] Just as the different elements existing within the *Ohr Ein Sof* were individually indistinguishable from the whole, the unique talents and abilities of a person can be originally undistinguishable from the boundless "I" of the person's being. And just like the *Ohr Ein Sof* withdrew and concealed its overwhelming Infinity in order to reveal the individual parts within it, Rabbi Nahman writes that through withdrawing and concealing the boundless "I," people can reveal the originally indistinguishable elements of their characters. Perhaps, Rabbi Nahman is alluding to the human power of creation, the ultimate act of Imitatio Dei. *Tzimtzum* explains how God created our world. Yet, it also can explain how people too are capable of creating and revealing worlds within themselves and their surroundings.

Though the allegorical interpretation of *tzimtzum* may initially seem to be an abstract concept, its integration into one's life can be deeply meaningful. *Tzimtzum* simultaneously defies, delineates, and blurs the boundaries we live with. It points to the unity between all kinds of people, between people and nature, and even between people and God. It serves as the philosophical and theological foundation for the idea that "earth is crammed with heaven,"[21] and perhaps, that heaven is crammed with earth.

1 Rabbi Nahman is cited as the author of this articulation by Tamar Ross in "Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Biblical Criticism".

2 This explanation of the Ohr Ein Sof is an adoption of Nissan Dovid Dubov's article titled "Tzimtzum" on Chabbad.org.

3 According to most understandings, one cannot speak of the constriction of the Ein Sof. Rather, it is the Light of the Ein Sof that successively constricted through the emanation of the Divine Characteristics, or Sephirot.

4 Tamar Ross compares this to a living being which must first inhale in order to exhale. See Youtube video "Tamar Ross on the Allegorical Interpretation of Tzimtzum".

5 Author of the work Shomer Emunim. R. Yosef ben Immanuel Irgess was a leading proponent of tzimtzm kipshuto, the literal understanding of the doctrine of tzimtzum.

6 Author of Yoshar Levav. R. Immanuel Chai Ricchi expounds upon tzimtzum lo ke-pshuto, the allegorical interpretation of tzimtzum.

7 Tamar Ross, "Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Biblical Criticism"

8 Panentheism is "the belief that God is greater than the universe and includes and interpenetrates it" according to Google's Dictionary.

9 Genesis Rabbah 68:9

10 The light of the Light of the Ein Sof was constricted through the emanation of Sefirot, and thus its quality is weaker and lesser than the original light

11 Tamar Ross Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Biblical Criticism

12 Tamar Ross Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Biblical Criticism

13 Rabbi Norman Lamm discusses the centrality of this duality in The Religious Thought of Hassidism. He writes, "Theism must embrace these two opposite notions, immanence and transcendence, and allow for the tension between them to be played out both in the history of God's relationship with mankind and in the individual's religious experience and consciousness. It is for this reason that Judaism...has always embraced both immanence and transcendence in its conception of God."

14 Nefesh HaTzimtzum pp. 101-102, and Tamar Ross Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Biblical Criticism

15 Tamar Ross, Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Biblical Criticism

16 This understanding of the distinction in approaches between R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi and R' Chaym of Volozhin is described in a chapters 4, 5, and 10 of the book Nefesh Hatzimtzum Vol II: Understanding Nefesh HaChaim through the Key Concept of Tzimtzum and Related Writings

17 Majesty and Humility, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, pp. 35, 36.

18 See "I and Thou" by Martin Buber

19 Within Lurianic Kabbalah, this refers to the ten sefirot, or Divine Characteristics which successively

descend into the formation of the physical reality we inhabit.

20 Nefesh Hatzimtzum pp. 133, footnote 6

21 Excerpt from Elizabeth Barret Browning's poem Aurora Leigh. "Earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God, But only he who sees takes off his shoes. The rest sit round and puck blackberries." Additionally, in Hassidic thought, the burning bush represents the Divinity within this world. For example, the book "Open to Me the Gates of Righteousness": The Pursuit of Holiness and Non-Duality in Early Hassidic Teaching by Seth Brody.

Making a Mikdash

Classical Understanding With Hassidic Illumination

By Rebecca Labovich

Immediately following Moshe's forty-day and forty-night stay atop Mount Sinai, Hashem instructs him to command Benei Yisrael to make a Mishkan. Hashem first tells Moshe that he should take Terumah, a monetary donation that is set aside for Hashem,[1] from anyone in *Benei Yisrael* "whose heart inspires him to generosity," "*Mei'eit kol ish asher yidvenu libo,"*[2] and so gives willingly from his heart. The Torah then lists the material considered *Terumah*, which are the fifteen items necessary for the building of the Mishkan. Hashem tells Moshe to take those specific items from the materials donated and use them to "make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them," *"V'asu li Mikdash, v'shakhanti be-tokam*,"[3] While this command may seem on the surface to be straightforward enough, the verses proceeding and following "*V'asu li Mikdash v'shakhanti be-tokham*" refer to the structure that is to be built for God as a Mishkan and not a "*Mikdash*." Many classical commentaries approach this discrepancy by explaining that the "*Mikdash"* serves a greater purpose for both God and *Benei Yisrael*, far beyond the command to build the physical structure of the Mishkan. Hassidic philosophy and interpretation can in turn illuminate and deepen these more classical understandings, giving them particular resonance for the individual.

Rashbam[4] explains that a *Mikdash* is a place where Hashem is sanctified and where Hashem addresses *Benei Yisrael.* He quotes another verse in Exodus[5] which says regarding the Mishkan, "*Ve-no'aditi shama li-benei yisrael,*" "And there I will meet with the Israelites." In other words, the Mishkan is the "meeting spot" for Hashem and *Benei Yisrael*; a place where Hashem can communicate with His people,

Sforno[6] understands the purpose of the Mishkan from the opposite perspective. While both commentators see it as a "meeting spot," Sforno is unique in that he sees it as a place for *Benei Yisrael* to communicate with Hashem. Sforno says that the Mishkan is the place for Hashem to dwell amongst them, "to accept their prayer and worship." Not only will Hashem talk to *Benei Yisrael* from the Mishkan, as Rashbam pointed out, but it will be a place for *Benei Yisrael* to pray and bring sacrificial offerings to Hashem – a place for the expression of man's participation in a divine relationship.

Rashi[7] explains that "*V'asu li Mikdash*" refers to a "*beit kedusha,"* a house of holiness. Hashem is asking *Benei Yisrael* to make a holy place "*lishmi,"* for My name.[8] The idea of building a Mishkan is that it is *kadosh,* holy. Ramban[9] highlights the fact that right before this mitzvah was given, *Benei Yisrael* was made into a "*Mamlekhet Kohanim,"* a Kingdom of Priests, and a "*Goy Kadosh,"* a Holy Nation. Once given the title of a Holy Nation, *Benei Yisrael* need a holy place for Hashem's presence to reside. The necessity for a *Mikdash*, a holy place, is then channeled into the specific command to build the Mishkan, which would fulfill that need. In this light, the command for a "*Mikdash"* is the reason, or the predecessor, of the command for the Mishkan.

While Ramban sees the Mishkan as necessary because *Benei Yisrael* is *kadosh*, Ibn Ezra[10] notes that the Mishkan is called "*Mikdash*" because *Hashem is Kadosh,* and therefore needs a holy place to dwell. According to Ibn Ezra, the purpose of the Mishkan is for Hashem's honor by providing Him with a Holy place in which to dwell.

The very first mitzvah discussed in Rambam's *Hilkhot Beit Behira*[11] quotes "*V'asu li Mikdash*" as the source-text for the general command to make a house for Hashem, whether that house be the Mishkan or the Beit Hamikdash. Based on this understanding, the Ohr Ha-hayim[12] elaborates that this command is for all times. The Ohr Ha-hayim points out that this command to make a house for Hashem applied in the desert, in the Land of Israel, and even during the Diaspora. The only reason that the Jewish people cannot build a house for Hashem in exile is because Torah prohibits the building of such a house anywhere other than in the exact spot of the Beit Hamikdash, and in exile access to the precise location is limited. Because Hashem gave the general command to build a "*Mikdash,"* a house for Hashem, while *Benei Yisrael* were travelling in the desert, Hashem instructed them how to build such a *Mikdash* in the desert, namely, the Mishkan, because the desert is not a practical place for a stone building such as the Beit Hasmikdash.

The Ohr Ha-hayim takes note of the specific wording in the command of "*V'asu li Mikdash ve-shakhanti* ***be-tokham****,*" "You will make me a *Mikdash* and I dwell in **them**. One would expect the verse to say, "*V'Asu Li Mikdash ve-shakhanti* ***bi-tocho***," "You will make me a *Mikdash* and I dwell in **it**," meaning that God will dwell in the Mishkan. Ohr Ha-hayim explains that "*Bi-tokham*" refers to "*bi-toch Benei Yisrael,*" meaning that God will dwell amongst *Benei Yisrael.* This understanding reflects the physical placement of the Mishkan encircled by the four camps of the tribes, placing it directly in the midsts of *Benei Yisrael*. It is in this context that the Ohr Hachayim points out the purpose of the *Mishkan*: "*V'asu li Mikdash*" serves the purpose of "*ve-shkhanti bi-tokham*" – to dwell in the midst of *Benei Yisrael.* Hashem desires to be within *Benei Yisrael*, and it is because of this love and desire that He commands them to make a place for Him to dwell with them. According to Ohr Ha-hayim, the purpose of the Mishkan is to create a place in which Hashem can be close with His chosen people.

Abarbanel[13] explains that the specific commandments for how to make the Mishkan are given in order to provide merit for *Benei Yisrael.* He further emphasizes that the larger purpose behind the Mishkan is for *Benei Yisrael* to prepare a Mikdash in such a way that Hashem could dwell in it as he dwelled on Mount Sinai. Hashem's presence is explicitly said to have dwelt at Mount Sinai, therefore the Mishkan should serve as a home for Hashem's presence in much the same way.

Hashem worded His command in a way that would allow *Benei Yisrael* to glean the most merit from the making of the Mishkan. The donations are *"Mei-eit kol ish,"* from every person,[14] not only from the tribal and community leaders. Additionally, it was "*Mei-eit kol ish asher yidvenu libo,*" "whose heart inspires him to generosity," indicating that this was a voluntary donation as opposed to an obligatory offering. The donations are to come from the people's own will, rather than an obligation. Additionally, *Benei Yisrael* are not told what materials to donate; instead Moshe is to take what is needed from their donations, allowing them to give freely of whatever materials they want to give. All this is meant to add to their merit, for it allows the Jewish people to serve God out of their own will and with their own hearts.

Given the above, Abarbanel understands the organization of the verses in this section as such: Hashem tells Moshe to take the *Terumah* from the donations that *Benei Yisrael* give out of their own free will. Because *Benei Yisrael* donates of their own volition, Moshe needs to take specific materials from these donations which are actually needed for the Mishkan; which the verses then enumerate right there. Then Hashem explains what to do with these donations, namely, *"V'asu Li Mikdash,"* to make for me a holy place that He can dwell in. To clarify how such a structure should be made, Hashem goes on to explain the specifications of how to construct the *Mikdash* of the desert, the Mishkan. The Abarbanel sees the wording "*Mikdash*" as the general idea of making a holy place for Hashem to dwell in, and the specific instructions for the Mishkan as the fulfillment of this idea.

Abarbanel explains the purpose of the Mishkan, or really any *Mikdash,* is to allow for Hashem's presence to attach to *Benei Yisrael* without land, desert, or any other forms of physicality getting in the way. The Mishkan is meant to show that Hashem's presence and providence is with *Benei Yisrael* even in the corporeal human world. The Mishkan forces *Benei Yisrael* to think differently than the other nations. It is an answer to those who deny God's providence in the details of the world and instead believe that Hashem rejects corporeality, claiming that "*Hashem ba-shaymayim heikhin kis'oh,*" "Hashem makes His throne in Heaven,"[15] and so resides in the heavens, and only in the heavens. We easily relate to God as a spiritual entity who we can surely connect to through prayer, learning Torah, and doing His will, but it is less natural for us to relate to God as a presence in the physical and mundane aspects of life, such as in the workplace or in the grocery. Bringing G-d into the parts of life that are deeply steeped in "worldliness" is a much more difficult task than serving God while being involved in objectively religious acts. Abarbanel understands the Mishkan as a physical structure that can teach us to recognize God in the physical and worldly aspects of our lives. Hashem commanded *Benei Yisroel* to build a *Mikdash* in order to remove the false beliefs of the other nations and allow them see Him as a God who lives in their midst, "*Vi'hai Bi-kirbam,"* and whose providence permeates even the mundane details of their lives. Abarbanel points out that this dwelling in our midst occurs even "*bi-tum'atam,"* in their impurity, meaning that even in their corporeality and in the context of the physical world, Hashem still swells with them. Arbabanel argues that the central purpose in Hashem's command to build a mikdash is "*Ve-shakhanti be-tokham,"* for Hashem to dwell with *Benei Yisrael* in the physical world.

Midrash Tanhuma[16] quotes R' Shmuel bar Nahman as saying: "*Bi-sha'ah she-bara Hakadosh Baruch Hu et ha-olam, nisava she-yehei lo* ***dirah bi-tahtonim*** *kemo sheyesh bi-elyonim," "*in the time that Hashem created the world, He desired that there should be for Him a dwelling place in the lower places like that there is in the high places." Hashem wants a dwelling place "*bi-tahtonim*," down on earth, in the lowliest of places. The Midrash describes the movement of Hashem's presence in its ascent away from the world: At the beginning of the creation, His presence was in the world, but the sin of the Adam and Eve pushed G-d away and up to the first "*rakia,"* or sphere. After six more monumental sins Hashem's presence totally left the seven *rakiot* of this world. Then Abraham, with his good deeds, drew Hashem's presence back down a sphere, Yitzchak another, Yakov another until Moshe brought It all the way down to our world during the historical event that occurred at Mount Sinai, as the verse states, "*va-yared Hashem al har Sinai,"* "And Hashem came down upon Mount Sinai."[17] The renewal of Hashem's dwelling in the physical, lowest world began at Mount Sinai, but it was solidified through the service in the Mishkan. The Midrash Tanchuma quotes a verse from Song of Songs, in which Hashem proclaims, "*Basi li-gani*," "I have come to my garden,"[18] and asks: When did Hashem come into His garden? The Midrash answers that Hashem came to His garden "when the Mishkan was erected."

Abarbanel's understanding of the Mishkan touches upon the idea of this Midrash that God is not meant to be in the *rakia*, but rather He is meant to dwell down on earth, with man. Not only is that the purpose of the Mishkan, but this is also the actual purpose of creation. The Midrash demonstrates this point: Hashem "*nisavah*," wanted, a "*dira bi-tac\htonim,"* a dwelling place down on earth. In this light, the Mishkan is not just a holy place for God and *Benei Yisrael* to communicate; it is actually the fulfillment of the purpose of creation for it allows God to specifically dwell in the physical world. In fact, some of the most corporeal sections in the Torah are found in the descriptions of the materials needed for building the Mishkan. It is so physical, so technical, but that is precisely the point; these sections are just as much "Torah" as any other section, because God dwells in the physical too.

To Abarbanel, the Mishkan was not just about the dwelling in the actual Mishkan as described in the Torah, but, more importantly, it serves as the archetype of God's dwelling in this world. The Mishkan captured the essence of the idea of "*dira bi-tachtonim"* and emphasized the need to emulate this idea in our everyday lives. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in his first *ma'amar,* or Hassidic discourse, outlined this very concept as the central theme for his generation and therefore the central theme that he would highlight during his leadership. Throughout his tenure, this Midrash that emphasizes the idea of "*dira bi-tahtonim"* as the purpose of creation and its source in this *pasuk*, *"V'asu li Mikdash ve-shakhanti be-tokham,"* were both constant sources of inspiration for the way that he looked at the world. In the aforementioned *Ma'amer,* titled *Basi li-Gani* (eluding to God's presence returning to dwell in the world as discussed in the Midrash above), the Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that the Beit Hamikdash, and the Mishkan before it, encapsulate this concept of "*dirah bi-takhtonim,"* that God wants to dwell in this world. He even quotes our verse, "*V'asu li Mikdash ve-shakhanti be-tokham,*" to prove the point that both

structures are all about bringing God down to earth.[19]

The Hassidic perspective sees '*V'asu li Mikdash ve-shakhanti be-tokham'* as a general *Avodah,* a mode of worship, to bring God into the world. The *hitzoniut* of the verse, or the external and revealed meaning, is to build a physical *Mikdash*, but the *pnimiut,* or the underlying intent and inner meaning of the verse, is to engage in this greater calling, to bring God into the world and into our everyday lives. In his *ma'amer*, the Lubavitcher Rebbe quotes Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, in the original *Basi Li-Gani Ma'amer,*[20] on which his *ma'amer* is based: "The language of the verse is precise [in saying] 'and I will dwell in them,' it doesn't say 'in it' [which would refer to the Mishkan], rather, 'in them,' [meaning] within each and every Jew." If "*Ve-asu li Mikdash"* refers to every individual Jew, then the verse becomes a directive for every person to make a personal *Mikdash* by bringing God down to dwell within ourselves, in our own lives.

Hassidut is the *Pnimiut* of Torah, the inner intent and message behind the text.[21] The Torah has four levels of interpretation: *peshat* – the simple meaning, *remez* – the hinted meaning, *derash* – the expounded meaning, and *sod* – the mystical meaning. These methods advance our understanding of the *hitzoniut*, the external or revealed aspect of the Torah.[22] In contrast, Hassidut brings out the inner, *pnimiut,* idea of a particular passage, which imbues the external interpretations of the passage with life and vitality.[23] Understanding the underlying intent of something can give clarity and vitality to otherwise dry and technical actions or material. This is why we love to know *why* before *what*, and why even taking out the garbage can be an act of love for another person, for when we understand the underlying intent behind something, the thing gains clarity and vitality. When we understand the underlying idea, the inner intent, behind a passage in Torah, it brings life and vitality as well as clarity to every aspect of that passage's interpretation.

The Hassidic interpretation of "*V'asu li Mikdash ve-shakhanti be-tokham"* as a general approach to bringing God into our lives and into the world is the *pnimiut* perspective of this verse. Therefore, every *peshat*, *remez*, *derash* and *sod* interpretation of this verse gains clarity and vitality in light of this perspective. When looking closely, it is possible to see the presence of this underlying message in the classic commentators and their views on the Mishkan as discussed above. For example, a *dira bi-tahtonim* is sometimes spoken about in Hassidic works as the "meeting spot" for heaven and earth, a guide for how we can bring the two together, united in the physical world.[24] This can be seen in the Rashbam's usage of the words from the verse, "*V'noaditi shema li-Benei Yisrael,"* "and there I will meet with the Israelites,"[25] to explain that the purpose of the Mishkan is to act as a meeting spot. While Rashbam focuses on Hashem's communication with *Benei Yisrael*, Sforno focuses on our service to Hashem. Taken together these two approaches encapsulate the two aspects needed to make a *dira bi-tahtonim:* G-d coming down to us and us going towards Him. This concept is referred to in Hassidic thought as *mi-li-ma'ala li-mata*, from above to below, and *mi-li-mata li-ma'ala*, from below to above.[26]

Ohr Ha-hayim explains that Rambam understands the aforementioned command to be a general one and explicitly notes that this applies for all times, including during exile. While Ohr Ha-hayim refers to the physical building which we are technically obligated to build even in exile, this idea lends itself easily to the *pnimiut* idea that building a *Mikdash* is a general directive for all times, even in exile, for each person on an individual level. Ohr Hachayim points out that the purpose of the Mishkan is for Hashem to dwell "amongst them," meaning amongst *Benei Yisrael*, because "*Ahav li-hiyot ken be-tokham,*" "He loves to be amongst them." This concept is similar to the Midrash's statement "*nisava she-yehei lo dirah bi-tahtonim,"* "He desired that there should be for Him a dwelling place in the lower places," which the Midrash states as the purpose of creation. Abarbanel also touches on this *pnimiut* message by pointing out that God dwells in the Mishkan, even though *Benei Yisrael* may be in a state of impurity. As the Midrash highlights, God desires to dwell amongst us, even as we are immersed in our deeply human and sometimes impure lives. In Hassidic thought, the desert is used to describe a place void of Godliness;[27] the Mishkan shows that Hashem will dwell with us, even as we are in a desert state of impurity, devoid of Godliness.

Abarbanel's commentary even further expresses the *pnimuit* ideas of the Mishkan. His view that the Mishkan served to bring down Hashem's presence as it was brought down on Mount Sinai fits well with the Midrash's understanding that Hashem's presence was brought back into the world at Mount Sinai and the Mishkan functions as a solidification and continuation of that process. He also notes that donations of *Benei Yisrael* were entirely voluntary both in the size and substance. On a psychological level, this method of donations would bring out *Benei Yisrael*'s endearment for God that in turn would cause them to be more endeared to God. The purpose of God coming into our lives is to aid us to forming a relationship with Him and this relationship between God and His people can be understood as mutual endearment. By giving their donations in a way that increases mutual endearment between them and God, *Benei Yisrael* engage in their relationship with God, which is the ultimate fulfillment of bringing God into our lives.

Abarbanel understands the Mishkan as a symbol that God is in the physical world, with total involvement in the details of our lives. This echoes the very same notion brought forth by the Midrash Tanchuma and in Hassidic thought. The details regarding the Mishkan come to help us internalize the understanding that Hashem is with us. The Mishkan and all its details provide lessons teaching us how to make our very own *Mikdash*, by bringing God into the very mundane nature of our lives so that "*Ve-shakhanti be-tokham,"* Hashem can have His wish and reside amongst His people.

1 As defined by Rashi 25:2

2 Exodus 25:2

3 Exodus 25:8

4 Rashbam to Exodus 25:8

5 Exodus 29:43

6 Sforno to Exodus 25:8

7 Rashi to Exodus 25:8

8 ibid

9 Ramban to Exodus 25:8

10 Ibn Ezra to Exodus 25:8

11 Hilchos Beis Bechira 1:1

12 Ohr Hachayim to Exodus 25:8

13 Abarbanel on the Torah to Exodus 25:8

14 Exodus 25:2

15 Psalms 103:19

16 Medrish Tanchuma 1:35

17 Exodus19:20

18 Song od Songs 5:1

19 For the full text of Basi L'Gani 5711/1951 see: http://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2333961/jewish/The-Rebbes-First-Maamar.htm

20 Basi L'Gani 5710 / 1950

21 Kunteres Ha'inyanos Shel Toras Hachassidus, or its translation, "On the Essence of Hassidut." See sections 1 and 2. This Hassidic discourse explains how Hassidut acts as Pnimiut of Torah in depth.

22 While Sod has an element of Pnimiut, as it reveals the hidden, secret meaning, Hassidut is the "Pnimiut of the Pnimiut," understanding the underlying message behind the verse, which permeates all four interpretations.

23 See in The Keys to Kabbalah, the section in Practical Kabbalah titled "Torah Study" by Nissan Dovid Dubov for a discussion of different methods of interpreting Torah in relation to Hassidic teaching, found on Chabad.org

24 Basi L'Gani 5711 / 1951

25 Exodus 29:43

26 Likkutei Torah: Vayikra – "Adam Viyakriv Mikem" This Hassidic discourse actually discusses how we can learn from the service of the Bet Hamikdash for our own service of God, in "coming towards Him."

27 Likkutei Torah: Ani Ledodi Roshei Teivos Elul, Section 2. Hassidut takes this idea from a verse in Jeremiah (2:2) that a desert is "an unsown land, a place "where no man has dwelt" (ibid 2:6), which is understood as a place outside the sphere of holiness.

A Perspective of Habad Hassidut Towards Music

By Judy Leserman

The [Rebbe] noticed an old man among his listeners who obviously did not comprehend the meaning of his discourse. He summoned him to his side and said, "I perceive that my sermon is unclear to you. Listen to this melody and it will teach you how to cleave unto the Lord." The [Rebbe] began to sing a song without words. It was a song of Torah, of trust in God, of longing for the Lord, and of love for Him.

"I understand now what you wish to teach," exclaimed the old man. "I feel an intense longing to be united with the Lord."

The Rebbe's melody became part of his every discourse henceforth, though it had no words.[1]

Music is an invariably powerful entity; a solid beat can, in one instant, urge thousands of individuals to dance and a sweet melody can bring even the hardest heart to tears. Music has the potential to bring man to the deepest depths and to the highest heights. As with all such potent matters, there are several Jewish perspectives – attributed to a variety of Jewish thinkers spanning from Rishonim to Aḥaronim, Hassidim to *Mitnagdim* (Jewish opponents of Hassidism) – which seek to understand and harness music for the ultimate goal of achieving closeness with God. Though music is appreciated across the Jewish spectrum, Hassidic literature is known for being filled with stories and explanations of the power of a *niggun*, a Jewish melody, to arouse closeness to God and repentance. Once one understands some of the nuanced perspectives and approaches to music, this powerful tool can be used and integrated in order to uplift the individual's *avodat Hashem* (service of God).

There is an innate connection between music and spirituality; on one hand, music has a pure emotional power because it is free from any lyrical structure, not bound by words, and on the other, music has a timeless component that can bridge between past, present, and future. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks similarly draws this connection between music and spirituality:

> Music is a form of sensed continuity that can sometimes break through the most overpowering disconnections in our experience of time… Faith is more like music than like science. Science analyses; music integrates. And, as music connects note to note, so faith connects episode to episode, life to life, age to age in a timeless melody that breaks into time. G-d is the composer and librettist. We are each called on to be voices in the choir, singers of G-d's song. Faith teaches us to hear the music beneath the noise… The history of the Jewish spirit is written in its songs.[2]

Music's connective quality has the ability to transcend space and time in order to link individuals to that which is otherwise out of reach.

The fact that music is an entity from the realm of Torah is discussed by the Talmud Bavli (*Arakhin* 11a). One biblical source referenced there is Deuteronomy 18:7, where the Torah discusses the Levite: "*V-sheret be-shem Hashem Elokav,"* – "And he may serve in the name of the Lord his God."[3] The Amoraic sage Shmuel derives exegetically that this service in the name of God to which the verse refers is song. A second source the Gemara cites is Deuteronomy 28:47: "*Tahat asher lo avadeta et Hashem Elokekha be-simhah u-ve-tuv levav*"- "Because you would not serve the Lord your God in joy and gladness." Rashi[4] (ad loc.) explains that singing is necessarily an expression of *simhah* and gladness, as the verse from Isaiah states, "*Hinei avadai yaronu mi-tuv lev"* – "Behold, my servants sing from gladness" (Isaiah 65:14). According to *Shirat Shelomoh,* a contemporary commentary on Song of Songs, song has the power to bring out one's love for something and increase it; when a person sings out of his love for God, he is performing an act that affirms his gratitude and brings him closer to God. Many Torah scholars perceive a connection between song and the learning of Torah and keeping of the mitzvot. The Vilna Gaon[5] explains that the deepest and most secret parts of the Torah are inaccessible without song, so much so that a song can both be life taking and life giving. The Steipler Gaon[6] elaborates upon this idea, adding that there is so much more to song than physical pleasure. Rather, song can awaken the heart to a consistent burning passion and can also arouse inspiration in one's religious practice.[7]

While several sources expound on the power of music, Habad Hassidut has a tradition of an in-depth understanding of a spiritual hierarchy and anatomy of melody. According to the Lubavitcher perspective, music and its performance are conceptualized as inherently neutral powers, the art form itself being neither particularly divine or otherwise. Listening to music has an equal potential to pull one's heart closer to the Divine as it does to pull one away. The Lubavitcher approach sees music, like anything in the physical world, as a vessel that contains within it a spark of the Divine, but it is the degree of accessibility to that spark that determines the quality of the vessel. Music that has the potential to draw one closer to the Divine is traditionally associated with Lubavitcher *niggunim*. Such songs are said to be a blessing to perform, to the extent that they have the ability to even uplift an evil person performing them for an evil purpose.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, music that has the potential to debase an individual spiritually is characterized by anti-Jewish music. Such music is said to be so thickly encased in a metaphysical husk of impurity (*kelipah*) that only the highest spiritual leader, a *rebbe*, could extract the holiness that lies within.[8]

Music that is wholly divinely inspired and music of anti-Jewish origin represent two poles on the spectrum of accessibility to holiness; however, in between them exists a large area of neutral genres. This music is referred to by music historian Ellen Koskoff as "potential *niggunim*." These melodies, often from non-Lubavitcher sources, are said to have perceptible sparks of holiness in them which can undergo a spiritual *tikun* (repair) that elevates them towards their holy source. In the process of musical *tikun*, a melody is first identified as having potential for holiness and then somehow "acquired" by a lofty personality; this means that a *rebbe*, a *tzadik* (righteous individual), or perhaps even a *beinoni* (an individual whose spiritual labors have brought him to a level of perfection in thought, word and deed, despite his still-active evil inclination)[9] must be able to perceive a holy spark within the music. The next part of the *tikun* involves textual and compositional manipulation, in which words are evaluated and either changed or reinterpreted to have a religious meaning. Finally, the actual music is modified to conform to Hassidic religious and aesthetic principles.[10]

Music that has Hassidic origin or has undergone spiritual *tikun* is musically and structurally unique in that the sound itself carries multileveled musical, spiritual, and social meanings. Like most Eastern European Jewish music, Lubavitcher music often contains an augmented second, which, when included in a musical scale, has a sort of "yearning quality" that evokes images of wandering and the pain of unfulfilled spiritual love. Mark Slobin, an ethnomusicologist who specializes in Eastern European and klezmer music, describes three distinct augmented second melody-types that are found in the 347 *niggunim* notated in the *Sefer ha-Niggunim*, which is a compilation of Lubavitcher *niggunim*.[11] Further, the musical structure of *niggunim* carries religious meaning as well; for example, the overall structure of the song "*Niggun* for Four Worlds" is believed to incorporate the essence of the "four-ness" associated with the tetragrammaton, the four worlds of the ten *sefirot*, and the four-stage process of achieving closeness with God. The music of each stanza moves upward, which reflects the Lubavitcher ideal of upward spiritual trajectory that is described in a metaphor of movement from the heart to the head. The combination of melody-types, stylistic features, vocables such as "bam, bam" or "ai, ai", is part of what creates the unique effect of Jewish music, lending musical, social, and religious meaning.[12]

The power ingrained in music has been understood across all cultures and times. It is one of humanity's oldest and most universal languages, and is often more powerful than the spoken word. In light of this, the music of Habad Lubavitch approaches the realm of music with delicate care. It is not merely a combination of notes, but rather a unique key to spiritual development. In today's day of earbuds and the constant bubble of music in which we live, it is incumbent upon the sensitive soul to take a closer look at just how deeply music can affect an individual, and ascertain that we are maximizing its deep and powerful potential.

1 Newman, L. I, The Hasidic Anthology (London: Jason Aronson, 1988), 293.

2 Sacks, Jonathan, "The Spirituality of Song (Ha'azinu 5776)," Covenant and Conversation, http://www.rabbisacks.org

3 Biblical translations by The Jewish Publication Society, The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh (Philadelphia, 2003).

4 Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, France, 1040-1105

5 Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon of Vilna, Ukraine, 1720-1797

6 Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky of Bnei Brak, Israel, 1899-1985

7 Tzofioff, Shlomo, Shirat Shelomo (Jerusalem: Ginzei Ha-Melekh, 1996), 4-5.

8 Koskoff, Ellen. Music in Lubavitcher Life (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2001), 74-79.

9 "The Beinoni," Chabad.org, http://www.chabad.org

10 Koskoff 76-77

11 Description of the musical theory and form of these three melody-types go beyond the scope of this essay, but suffice it to say that they are characteristic of Eastern European Jewry and some are even congruent with the Turkish-Arab Jewish styles.

12 Koskoff 77-78

Neo-Hassidism and Modern Orthodox Spirituality

The Spiritual Climate at Yeshiva University

By Netanel Paley

Last year, I wrote an article[1] for this magazine that attempted to unearth, in sweeping, largely utilitarian terms, the philosophical anatomy of Modern Orthodox Neo-Hassidism. While I was fortunate to receive mostly positive feedback on the piece from friends (some of whom, admittedly, might consider themselves "neo-Hassidim"), I realized that something was eminently lacking from many of these conversations, and that is constructive, forward-thinking dialogue. For this, I fault none but my article and its writer, both of which missed an opportunity to initiate a university-wide, and perhaps community-wide, discussion on our spiritual climate. To my knowledge, my article did not beget a migration toward Yeshiva University's few opportunities for the study of Hassidut[2] or practice of Hassidic prayer[3] – yet, more to the point, neither did it inspire the formation of alternative spiritually-minded groups or group-oriented explorations of alternative spirituality.

Now, fourteen months later, I feel obligated to continue what I started. The earnest complaints and yearnings of my friends and peers for 'intellectual spirituality', 'genuine spiritual dialogue', 'meaningful conversation about *Avodat Ha-Shem'*, and other expressed varieties of this authentic religious need have only grown louder and run deeper with the passing time. These are friends and peers to whom Hassidut speaks, and these are friends and peers to whom Hassidut does not speak. Some of them are friends and peers who study Torah for hours each day with painstaking rigor and still feel a spiritual lack, and some of them are friends and peers who do not study Torah precisely because they feel a spiritual lack. For all of these people, and for everyone who seeks greater and deeper meaning from his or her religious life, I believe Hassidut and Neo-Hassidism have an answer – and it does not involve so much as opening a book of Hassidut or donning a *gartel* for prayer.[4]

I. Prayer and Torah-Study: Does A Framework Constrain?

It would be counterproductive, and certainly unfair, to bring the spiritual[5] void felt at YU into focus without first defining and appreciating the real substance that surrounds that hole; we cannot truly know what we lack without knowing and loving what we have. Most obviously, Yeshiva University is blessed with an overflowing wealth of opportunities for serious, religiously enriching study of Torah. Admittedly, that wealth is not, I believe, distributed fairly between the Wilf and Beren campuses, as I will elaborate below. The men of the Wilf campus have the unenviable task, but undeniable privilege, of choosing among over fifty talented scholars and educators across four morning programs, with whom to devote hours to study of Torah and Jewish knowledge each day. Each teacher, in supplement to his regular curricula of Bible, Talmud, Halakha, Jewish philosophy, or Jewish history, may serve as a spiritual guide and mentor for his students and/or arrange informal forums for religious conversation and camaraderie.[6] For those students seeking more personal attention, the Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) division of RIETS has nine *Mashgihim* (religious mentors) on staff, including one specifically for Sephardic students and two for students in the Stone Beit Midrash Program. In the evenings, students on the Wilf campus enjoy a rich, well-staffed Night Seder program with a variety of options including incentives for Talmud study and nightly classes on Jewish thought.[7] Among others, these classes include two well-attended *ḥaburot* (study groups) given by Rabbi Moshe Weinberger on Hassidut[8], which draw both YU alumni and non-students in addition to current YU students. Not least of all, the Glueck Beit Midrash is vibrant with the sound of Torah study into the late hours of the night, which recreates the Israel yeshiva experience for many young men, and, for some, is visceral enough to imbue them with authentic spiritual fulfillment.

The same, sadly, cannot be said of Torah study on the Beren campus. Though women at Yeshiva University benefit from a healthy assortment of teachers and classes (in some cases, healthier than that of the Wilf Campus[9]), they are afforded a fraction of the Torah study opportunities available to men. The Beren Judaic Studies department staff is less than half the size of its Wilf counterpart, and course offerings include far fewer Halakha options and just three Talmud classes. Class sizes for many courses are thus larger as well, making it difficult for both teacher and student to nurture religiously fulfilling relationships. In stark contrast to the Wilf campus, Beren campus employs only one Director of Religious Guidance, who is tasked not only with offering spiritual direction to students but also with arranging religious programming, which inevitably detracts from the time she can make available to students. Perhaps most troubling of all, the Stern College administration itself arranges few, if any, opportunities for informal Torah study besides the weekly Torah with the Roshei Yeshiva lecture arranged by the office of Religious Guidance, which, while certainly consistent and appreciated, is still only once a week. To their immense credit, Stern student-run clubs such as the Beit Midrash Committee and Bavli Ba-Erev are primarily responsible for arranging extracurricular Torah programming in the evenings. There is even a position on the Torah Activities Council board devoted almost entirely to inviting speakers to give Torah classes during students' free time (Vice President of Speakers). Why this is necessary, especially since it is not required of Wilf Campus students, is beyond the scope of this article, but it nonetheless highlights the spiritual initiative and motivation of these young women, which will be discussed below. The fact that the Stern Beit Midrash now has a student-run Night Seder program each week, in addition to the regular presence of women learning *be-chavruta* each night, is a testament to the religious passion and fortitude of Stern College students, who, unlike Wilf campus students, do not have the luxury of being served replete religious programming on a silver platter.

When it comes to prayer, however, both campuses seem to be lacking. The Wilf Campus does boast thirteen *minyanim* for Shacharit, up to fifteen *minyanim* for Mincha (during the summer), and up to nineteen *minyanim* for Maariv (during the winter). Still, of those myriad *minyanim*, only three[10] offer a consistently measured pace that allows a slower *davener* (prayer participant) to recite the entire service; my friends, who attend other *minyanim* because of their schedules, tell me of their longing for that simpler time in *yeshiva* when they could pray the entirety of Shacharit with *kavvanah* (concentration) and without having to worry about being late to class or skipping breakfast.[11] One cannot even be assured that these other *minyanim* will sing any part of the *Hallel* service on Rosh Hodesh and Hanukkah. Finally, what upsets this writer most is the conspicuous lack of an explanatory *minyan* for students with limited Jewish day school or yeshiva backgrounds, and any other students who wish to infuse meaning into their prayer with the help of a teacher.[12] Imagine how many more students would attend prayers, and perhaps find spiritual fulfillment, if such a *minyan* existed! All the same, I am at least in part comforted by the prayer options, current and planned, on the Wilf Campus for Shabbat. Each week I attend, without fail, I am uplifted by the Carlebach-style *minyan* for the *Kabbalat Shabbat* (acceptance of the Shabbat) service in the Klein Beit Midrash, which is filled to capacity with men and women even on "out" Shabbatot when many local students go home for Shabbat. And I would be remiss not to commend the work of the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) leadership[13] for their establishment of a new student-led *minyan* for Shacharit on Shabbat morning, which, according to an article in the most recent edition of the Commentator, is designed to "create an opportunity for students to be placed at the forefront of the religious atmosphere that fits their needs."[14] It is these kind of creative, yet essential, initiatives that will reinvigorate the spiritual milieu of Yeshiva University, as I will contend below.

Where the Beren campus is lacking in structured communal prayer, it makes up for that with collective spontaneity. Besides for the (usually) monthly *minyan* on Rosh Hodesh, there is no *minyan* on campus; students who desire to pray with a *minyan* must arise before 7:00 am and walk to Congregation Adereth El, which is seven blocks away from the farthest dormitory building. Since this is unquestionably difficult for college students with packed schedules and heavy workloads, most Stern students pray on their own before going to class. In past years, however, a select few have sometimes prayed together in the Beren Beit Midrash, and, on some occasions, one student would lead the prayers as an informal *Hazzanit*. Beginning this semester, this phenomenon has become a regular occurrence, as a few students have coordinated a *Tefillah* group for Shacharit (in accordance with Halakha) that meets in the Beit Midrash. On Shabbat, as many as 150 women gather for a spirited *Kabbalat*

Shabbat on Friday evening, also led by a *Hazzanit*. These two prayer gatherings each possess one quality – the first spontaneity, and the second unity – that are nowhere to be found in the formulaic *minyanim* of the Wilf Campus. To my knowledge, there is no *minyan* or smaller prayer group that meets only on occasion or forms in an impromptu fashion, nor is there one *minyan,* even on Shabbat, at which all students who wish to pray attend together. Yes, there is halakhic and spiritual value to structured prayer with a *minyan*. But, speaking in terms of giving rise to a spiritually dynamic environment, Beren's model is far more well-positioned for success than that of Wilf, and the latter indeed has much to learn and gain from the former.

II. Institutional Efforts to Inspire: Too Many Left Behind?

Even so, in recent years, administrators and student leaders on the Wilf Campus have made a concerted effort to expand opportunities for spiritual expression.[15] Since the appointment of Rabbi Moshe Weinberger as *Mashpia* (spiritual leader, literally "influencer") of RIETS in 2013, RIETS has sponsored a *farbrengen* (Hassidic gathering) in honor of each Rosh Hodesh. At the gatherings, which regularly draw over one hundred students, Rabbi Weinberger, in the manner of a Hassidic *rebbe*, leads students in wordless *niggunim* (devotional melodies) and spirited dance, interposed by an often passionately delivered – and emotionally relevant - *ma'amar* (Hassidic discourse) on religious service and struggle. True to their name, the *farbrengens* bring together students from many different *yeshiva* backgrounds and morning *shiurim* (albeit almost exclusively MYP and BMP), from the "Neo-Hassidic" contingent of Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Weinberg's BMP *shiur* to alumni of less Hassidically-inclined *yeshivot* such as Har Etzion and Kerem Be-Yavneh. Even more popular is the annual yeshiva-wide *Melave Malka* with the well-known musician Eitan Katz, which is well-advertised and attended by many RIETS faculty members as well as students. Both of these events represent efforts to foster religiously-oriented collectivity among students[16], and, in a certain sense, to recreate the *yeshiva* milieu some students feel is lacking at Yeshiva University.[17]

While these efforts are certainly noble, I cannot help but wonder: where are the students who do not like singing, or are not religiously inspired by Hassidic teachings? If they struggle to find meaning in their daily prayers and Torah study, and if they are looking for alternative outlets in which to find that meaning, where are they to turn? And should not an institution which is built on a mission of preparing young adults to lead their own spiritual lives rouse them to create spiritual habitats of their *own*, rather than create a nostalgia-powered environment for them that can only so much as mimic the yeshiva experience?

Even if the answer to the latter question is no, this alone cannot excuse where this single-minded focus on the yeshiva has left the women of Yeshiva University. Students on Beren Campus have no events comparable to the monthly *farbrengen* or annual *Melave Malka* concert, nor are they welcome at either event. This is in spite of the fact that there are many Stern students who would find such an event spiritually enriching; impromptu *kumsitzen* are not an uncommon occurrence on the Beren Campus and the Hassidic Torah commentary *Netivot Shalom* is a popular favorite among *havrutot* in the Beren Beit Midrash.[18] Instead, students seeking organized, extracurricular spiritual activities must turn to their respective *Midrasha*/seminary groups led by fellow students, which, while conducive to real spiritual growth because of their small size, may reinforce the seminary-clique-driven social fabric with which some Stern students take issue.[19] I can only speculate on the origin of this imbalance between the two campuses – is it funding, false and outdated assumptions about students' religious needs, a combination of both, or something else entirely? Regardless of the answer, I believe the administration has some soul-searching to do to ensure that all students, uptown and downtown, have as equal an opportunity as possible to religious fulfillment.

III. Individual Spiritual Fulfillment: Creativity, Community, and Conversation

Until this point we have been discussing religious life at Yeshiva University within an institutional context – that is, religious programming primarily initiated and maintained by the university administration. In addition to lacking the sort of active creative element I argue is crucial to a spiritually vigorous atmosphere,[20] institutionalized Torah study and prayer are alike in that participation alone cannot serve as a barometer for spiritual fulfillment and wholeness. To clarify, in this context I use the word "spiritual" to refer to the elements of religious life that inform and affect one's emotional and intellectual personae, without exclusion of one another. Students may pray and attend morning *Seder* because they feel they are halakhically or morally obligated to do so, and participate in Judaic studies classes out of purely academic motivations or pressures. In this religious framework, there is no way to know whether a student feels content with his or her spiritual life without asking him or her directly, and, by extension, there is no way to measure the spiritual ambience of an entire university without conducting an exhaustive sociological survey.

A parallel phenomenon exists with respect to collaborative spiritual initiative in the college context: because it is generally the case that college students feel uneasy discussing their personal spiritual lives with peers who are not their close friends,[21] it is especially difficult for college students to create or even participate in a milieu of spiritual élan. Take, as an example, the pulsating hum of Torah study in YU's *batei midrash*. A Romantic – or a Hasid – might feel the presence of God hovering between the undulating words of eternity.[22] There are always exceptional individuals who can seek out and find the spiritual in the finest details of their surroundings. But for the rest of us, there may be nothing uniting the men and women talking and studying other than the mere fact that they are learning the same holy Book in the same room. How are we, as feeling and thinking spiritual beings, supposed to feel and think in such a context?

The answer, in truth, is different for each and every one of us, and it may take a lifetime to find. But if part of us wants to sit on the edge of a glassy lake or the top of a mountain and meditate on our own existence for the rest of our waking days, another part of us demands to create and actively bring spirituality into our own human handiwork. This is why Beren Campus students give weekly *haburot* organized by the Stern Beit Midrash Committee; this is why Yeshiva College students are reviving the Tanakh Club; and this is why both Beren and Wilf Campus students started the Religious Approaches to Faith and Theology lecture series (RAFT) last year.[23] This is what lies behind the myriad student-led efforts of previous years, from the Jewish Meditation Club's weekly groups, to the highly successful discussion and lecture group TEIQU (Torah Exploration of Ideas: Questions and Understanding).[24] The particular missions of these groups of spiritually minded students, and the varying content of their activities, are beside the point; regardless of their external manifestations, they are, at their core, cohorts of spiritual creators. Their often-short lifespans bespeak not a failure to sustain relevance or student interest, but the bounty of creative thinkers and dreamers with which our university has always been blessed. Successive groups of students work to actualize their own ideas rather than maintaining those of their forerunners, not because the preexistent ideas are not worth maintaining, but because the newcomers choose to seize an opportunity to create something of their own. It is this creativity, I believe, which is one of three components vital to the engenderment of collective spirituality, and which is the crown jewel of the current spiritual landscape of Yeshiva University.

Here, at the heart of these creative student initiatives, I wish to hone in on what is missing, an absence that reflects a larger absence within the variegated tapestry of Modern Orthodox spirituality.[25] Many of the initiatives begun over the past five years, I have noticed, orient themselves around a common goal: the deepening of students' intellectual approaches to Judaism. It need not be stated that this is a worthwhile endeavor, especially in these formative years of early adulthood and in a university endowed with some of the finest scholars of Torah and Judaic studies in the world. And the groups that have undertaken this laudable effort have reaped impressive fruit, with consistently high attendance at events, a veritable spectrum of theological and ethical topics, and attention from outside the student community.[26] But what the groups also share is a focus on the intellectual to the exclusion of the emotional dimension of religious life and service.[27] Faith is discussed without mention of the emotional challenges posed by *emunah* (religious faith) and *bitahon* (trust in God); Jewish law without mention of the daily struggle with the *yetser ha-ra* (Evil Inclination); prayer without mention of practical advice to improve *kavvanah*. The term *avodat ha-Shem*, and its meaning "service of the Lord" does not enter the conversation, as if at war with intellectual discourse. Why this spiritual dissonance, this trench between the two sides of ourselves, at events which are, at their core, unmistakably spiritual? There is no one to blame. But I believe there are interfering gaps in our spiritual experience here at YU which, when filled, will allow us to fill this internal chasm just as well.

As observant Jews, we are acutely aware of the fact that community enhances our spiritual moments and lives, on both the individual and collective levels. Prayer with a *minyan* is of an elevated spiritual quality[28]; Torah study with a partner draws the Divine Presence into the exchange.[29] We welcome our families, friends, and people we have never even met to our weddings, *britot milah*, and *kiddushes*; we are commanded to invite needy strangers into our homes to partake in our Festival meals.[30] Yet there is little, if any, aura of collectivity to be sensed at our student-run spiritual gatherings on campus. Students come as strangers and leave as strangers; though some outward souls may kindly extend themselves towards unfamiliar faces, nothing innate to the ambience of the gathering urges them to do so. This, I believe, owes to the lecture format, and necessity of a non-student presenter, assumed by almost all student-run religious events on campus. The advantages of this formula are self-evident: it is easy to follow, it attracts more students, and it entrusts the chosen topic to capable hands of expertise and authority. But because it relegates students to roles as listeners, it stifles conversation before any conversation can even begin. The mere fact that a person with seniority and authority – be it academic or intellectual – is the only person in the room speaking about that topic for the duration of the event implies, if only subliminally, that students are not capable of conducting a conversation about the topic on their own, even with adequate preparation. The focus on the speaker, in opposition to the audience, as the axis of the gathering forestalls the possibility of the formation of a collective, a community of individuals who can freely share their thoughts without a precondition of authority. Professors and experts *should* be invited to discuss their unique contributions to their fields, and to share original ideas – in those cases, there is a clear reason, other than their mere authority, why they should speak and everyone else should listen. This sort of event is appropriate on occasion, as an intellectually, and hopefully emotionally, enriching experience. But most times, as young adults still paving a path to spiritual enlightenment, we should use these opportunities to build community and camaraderie with one another, without the presence of a guest lecturer.

Community itself gives rise to a third value I consider essential to collective spiritual vitality: conversation. The ideal spiritual gathering, in my opinion, is driven by open, honest dialogue that does not fear venturing into the domains of the emotional and the personal, and does not mask that fear with the defense mechanism that is cynicism. Some of my friends complain to me that the discussion-driven events they attend on campus are "pretentious", or at least have many "pretentious" people in attendance whose chief aim is to showcase their intelligence to their peers. I, for one, find it difficult to believe that there are enough people on campus like that to dominate an entire event. More fundamentally, though, I think that it is not "pretense" which my friends are detecting; it is a basic discomfort with candid group conversation that afflicts our entire generation. As young adults maturing into older, more secure adults, we are loath to make ourselves appear vulnerable at this transitory period in our lives, and are thus averse to sharing our emotions with anyone other than the people closest to us.[31] We protect ourselves by veiling our true feelings in long words and short wisecracks, making genuine connection all but impossible. For spending time with friends or meeting new people, this kind of interaction is perfectly acceptable, if not ideal. But if we are to re-envision our spiritual horizons, if we are to foment spiritual revolution, we need to be able to have the sort of authentic, earnest conversation in which our spiritual yearnings and aspirations are transparent.

IV. Looking Ahead

There is no question that spirituality is alive and well at Yeshiva University. Though it can be difficult to discern on the communal plane, many students feel spiritually fulfilled in their Torah and Judaic studies as well as prayer routines. I find it challenging *not* to be heartened by the roar of Torah in the Glueck and Fischel Batei Midrash in the morning, by the students I see running from their last class directly to the Beit Midrash for night *Seder*, and by the students I see

praying soulfully in front of the *Aron Kodesh* long after *Ma'ariv* has ended. And the creative groups orchestrating spiritual change on campus exhibit at least some aspect of the three characteristics I consider critical to the development of a rich, self-sustaining spiritual ecosystem, based on the most definitional qualities of successful Neo-Hassidic movements: creativity, community, and conversation.[32] It is my belief that these groups, and the Modern Orthodox community as a whole, need look no further than the recent history of Neo-Hassidism for a spiritual model that allowed these three values to blossom, and that can serve as a beacon shining towards uncharted territory of religious devotion.[33]

1 Netanel Paley, "Behind the Beards: A Philosophical Survey of Modern Orthodox Neo-Hasidism." Kol Ha-Mevaser 9:1 (November 2015), available at www.kolhamevaser.com.

2 Including, but not limited to, the three weekly classes given by Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, Mashpia of RIETS, and the shiur of Stone Beit Midrash Program teacher and Mashgiach, Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Weinberg.

3 Such as the 7:00 am Nusah Sefard Shacharit minyan in the Rubin Shul, informally known as "Rav Moshe Tzvi's Minyan", which typically lasts for an hour and features audible chanting of Pesukei de-Zimra and dancing at the conclusion of the service. This group meets on Rosh Hodesh in Zysman Hall for a monthly "Happy Minyan", the centerpiece of which is an hourlong, often musically accompanied Hallel prayer. The Happy Minyan is itself the brainchild of the close group of friends who started the Stollel, which is elaborated upon below.

4 In seeking this answer, I am indebted to Rabbi Dr. Ariel Evan Mayse, himself an accomplished scholar of Hassidism and Neo-Hassidism and a treasured mentor and friend of many of us at YU, for his invaluable contributions to this article and my perspective on spirituality in contemporary Orthodoxy. The forthcoming second installment of this article draws heavily from Rabbi Dr. Mayse's forthcoming essay "The Development of Neo-Hasidism: Echoes and Repercussions," to be published in the near future in the next edition of The Orthodox Forum, which is at once a thorough history of Neo-Hassidism as well as a crystalline vision for the future of Orthodox spirituality. Without Rabbi Dr. Mayse, this article would certainly never have seen the light of day.

5 I use the term 'spiritual' here in a rather broad fashion, encompassing all areas of religious life. Elsewhere in the article, I will use the word in more limited senses.

6 For instance, Rabbi Jeremy Wieder, in whose shiur I am privileged to study, delivers a brief Mussar "schmooze" each week related to contemporary ethical issues; many other teachers do so as well, each with his own unique religious perspective and rhetorical style. Rabbi Wieder also devotes time to eat lunch with his students once a week, as does Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Weinberg and other teachers on occasion. Many MYP, BMP, and JSS/Mechina classes also organize shiur shabbatons, and IBC has an annual program-wide shabbaton.

7 See, however, Wilf campus student Binny Shapiro's fine article in the most recent issue of The Commentator on the shortcomings of the Night Seder program: http://yucommentator.org/2016/11/investing-in-night-seder-yus-focus-on-the-yeshiva-elite/

8 One on R. Nahman of Bratslav's Likutei Moharan, and one on R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira's Esh Kodesh.

9 The Jewish Philosophy department at Stern, notably, has more staff and class offerings this semester than its Yeshiva College counterpart.

10 These are minyanim for Shacharit: the aforementioned 7:00 Nusah Sefard minyan in Rubin Shul, the 7:45 "Yeshiva" minyan in the Glueck Beit Midrash, and the newest reincarnation of the 8:00 minyan in Zysman Hall, led by Rabbi Hershel Reichman. I have prayed at almost all of the other minyanim for Shacharit and they regularly complete the service in approximately thirty minutes on days when the Torah is not read.

11 This is to say nothing of the limited minyan options for Sephardic students (one minyan per service), and the fact that there was no Nusah Sefard minyan on campus until the previous year.

12 The 9:00 Shacharit minyan in Rubin Shul, colloquially known as the "IBC Minyan" and listed on the IBC schedule of the classes as "Explanation of Prayer", does not, in fact, feature any explanatory element. In previous years, Rabbi Zev Reichman, a teacher in IBC, delivered a short explanation of the service each day, covering the entire service over the course of the academic year.

13 Particularly the gabbaim (beadles), Aryeh Laufer and Dovid Simpser

14 Elliot Heller, "New Minyan, Coffee and Tea, and Free Meals: Shabbat at Wilf Gets a Makeover" The Commentator Online Edition, 27 November 2016, available at: www.yucommentator.org.

15 Outside of events held on special occasions, such as the Chagigot for Hanukkah, Purim, and Yom ha-Atzmaut.

16 See the comments of students in Josh Blicker, "Melave Malka: An Opportunity For Unity" The Commentator Online Edition, 30 November 2015, available at www.yucommentator.org

17 This was a general sentiment echoed by alumni of Sha'alvim and similar yeshivot during last year's SOY presidential election, and utilized as a primary platform point of candidate and Sha'alvim alumnus Itamar Lustiger. See David Rubinstein, "Opposition Fails to Unseat SOY Establishment", The Commentator Online Edition, 10 May 2016, available at www.yucommentator.org

18 As reported by a Stern student.

19 As reported by several Stern students.

20 As I will contend in the second installment of this article, based on the successes of 20th century Neo-Hassidic movements.

21 Many psychology studies demonstrate the prevalence of "social sharing" of emotion, especially among college students; see, for example, Rime, Bernard, Pierre Philippot, Stefano Boca, and Batja Mesquita. "Long-lasting Cognitive and Social Consequences of Emotion: Social Sharing and Rumination." European Review of Social Psychology 3.1 (1992): 225-58. Web. Nonetheless, these studies also indicate that most people share emotions only with people with whom they have a significant relationship, such as spouses/partners, family members, and close friends.

22 Hayyim Nahman Bialik's classic poem ha-Matmid ("The Talmud Student") may come to mind.

23 Yakov Stone, "RAFT Hosts Discussion with Aaron Koller on Biblical Creation in the Modern World" The Commentator Online Edition, 29 September 2016, available at www.yucommentator.org

24 "Bridging the Cultural Divide" YU News, 1 February 2011, available at www.blogs.yu.edu/news

25 It should be clear that my objective is only to assess those shortcomings that can be addressed, not to criticize indiscriminately; on the contrary, I am filled with childlike excitement over the possibilities opened by these ideas.

26"Spurred by the AgriProcessors Controversy, Students Sponsor Panel on Morality and Kashrut" YU News, 12 December 2008, available at www.blogs.yu.edu/news

27 I myself have observed this while attending several of these events, and friends of mine have noted it to me as well.

28 See Talmud Bavli Berakhot 6a and 21b

29 Avot 3:6 and Talmud Bavli Berakhot 6a

30 Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Shevitat Yom Tov 6:18

31 See Bernard Rime , Catrin Finkenauer , Olivier Luminet , Emmanuelle Zech & Pierre Philippot (1998) "Social Sharing of Emotion: New Evidence and New Questions," European Review of Social Psychology, 9:1, 145-189

32 Which I will address, at length, in the next installment of this article.

33 Netanel Paley thanks Rabbi Dr. Ariel Evan Mayse and Miriam Pearl Klahr for their contributions to this article.

Of Obligation, Brotherhood, and Confusion

Why Did Yonah Run?

By Avraham Wein

In the waning hours of Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, the book of Yonah is read. A standard explanation for this practice is that Nineveh's repentance and subsequent redemption following God's decree serve as both a critical and timely reminder of the opportunity for repentance. However, while the notion of repentance is obviously a vital theme in the book, many other important lessons and themes can be gleaned from the episodes found therein. Indeed, the diverse narrative of the book of Yonah is singular in a number of ways. For one thing, the seemingly indiscriminate detail of the verses in the first chapter of the book gives rise to many pressing theological questions. For another, the book of Yonah contains the only instance in Tanakh where a *navi* – a prophet – runs away from an explicit prophetic mission from God, as well as the only instance in Tanakh where a *navi* demonstrates an overt desire to commit suicide.[1] Further still, Yonah is the only book of the entire *Trei Asar* (the last 12 books of the Latter Prophets) whose narrative is occupied by the telling of a story rather than solely by descriptions of prophecy. A careful analysis of the opening verses of the first chapter introduces a variety of important messages and themes that are relevant to understanding the entirety of this book.

The Lack of Detail

A cursory reading of the initial verses of the first chapter of the book of Yonah quickly triggers several questions. The first logical narrative subsection of the book encompasses verses 1:1 through 1:3.[2] In the opening verses, the reader immediately learns of God's command to Yonah to go to Nineveh in order to make a proclamation against their sinful ways: [1] Now the word of the LORD came unto Yonah the son of Amittai, saying: "[2] 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.'" (Yonah 1:1-2) These initial verses beg important questions about the author's literary style.[3] Why, for instance, is there no dating or background provided at the beginning of the book? The reader is left in complete darkness with regard to the historical background of the narrative, remaining ignorant as to where Yonah is from and whether he had other prophecies in his lifetime.[4] Moreover, why does the author choose to omit the content of the proclamation in these verses?[5] And similarly, why do these verses detail neither the sins committed by the inhabitants of Nineveh, nor any reason whatsoever for the relevance of Nineveh's warning and punishment? Why does God send Yonah to an exclusively Gentile town, failing to relate directly to *Benei Yisrael*, the Jewish People, at all?[6] After all, as Radak points out, this is the singular instance in Tanakh where a prophet goes to a non-Jewish nation to call for *teshuvah*, repentance.[7]

The ensuing verse only raises more questions: "[3] And Yonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD; and he went down to Yaffa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish, from the presence of the LORD. (ibid. 1:3)" Why does Yonah run away? Does he really believe that by running away he doesn't have to fulfill the direct command of God? Why does he choose to run specifically to Tarshish? Furthermore, why does the author make use of the phrase "And Yonah rose up" ("*va-yakam Yonah*"), mirroring the command of "Arise" ("*kum*"), thereby producing an expectation that Yonah is actually going to carry out God's command when, in fact, he is not? It is quite clear that the verses intentionally leave out these seemingly critical details, leaving the reader and commentators to address the ambiguity.

Lack of Background

Several commentators take note of the lack of background at the beginning of the book of Yonah.[8] One primary explanation proposed by a variety of commentators is that historical background is in fact unnecessary because Yonah's background is already provided in a different book of Tanakh—namely, the book of Kings. The verse in Kings describes Yonah: "[25] He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Ḥamat unto the sea of the Aravah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Yonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gat-ḥepher. (Kings 2:14:25)" In the context of the narrative of Kings, Yonah is identified as the prophet who prophesied that the wicked king, Yerav'am ben Yoash, would expand the borders of the kingdom of Israel. While the specifics of Yonah's prophecy there are also important, this approach assumes that it is unnecessary to reintroduce Yonah when the reader ought already to recognize him.

In addition to the former approach, two alternative explanations can be suggested to address this textual problem. One promising option is to suggest that the author's goal is to emphasize that these earlier stories and facts are not necessary to understand the primary messages of this book; the messages of this book are relevant anytime and anyplace.[9] In this vein, the reason for the conspicuous absence of detail at the beginning of the book of Yonah may be to amplify the elements of the story which *are* given: Yonah is a prophet, and he is seemingly disobeying a command from God.[10] Another complementary option is that the author intends for these verses to have a certain effect on the reader. Perhaps the author intends to "sweep the reader off his feet," rushing him immediately into the story of the boat. If this is in fact the case, the swift pace set by the lack of detail in the opening verses of the book of Yonah may relate to the most obvious question in the narrative—that is, why Yonah runs.[11]

Why Run?

Prior to answering why Yonah ran, an investigation into a secondary question is necessary. His motives notwithstanding, why did Yonah ever think that he *could* run from God? As Dr. Yonatan Grossman argues, the mere attempt by a man to run away from God is extremely surprising. Doesn't Yonah know that "*melo ḳol ha-aretz kevodo*", that God's presence fills the entire world?[12] Dr. Grossman points out further that the notion of trying to run away from God is already addressed and strongly rebuked by the prophet Jeremiah:

> [23] Am I a God near at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? [24] Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? says the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? says the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:23-24)

Putting aside the halakhic problem of one who is *kovesh nevuato*, who suppresses his prophecy, what further compounds this issue is that prophets are not ordinary laymen; how, then, could someone with the spiritual stature of a prophet make the foolish mistake of thinking he could run from God?

Many commentaries make note of this troubling issue. The Radak, for one, expresses the problem as follows: For the prophet was [by definition] a person full of wisdom and understanding—and how could such a person have possibly endeavored to escape from before God? (ad. loc.) In response to this quandary, the Ibn Ezra makes note of the text's formulation "*mi-lifnei Hashem*," i.e. 'from before God', as opposed to "*mi-penei Hashem*," i.e. 'from the face of God': And behold, I have not found in the prophecy of Yonah that he fled *from the face of God*, but rather *from before God* – [as] it is written, 'By the life of God, *before whom* I have stood'. And indeed, all the time that he receives prophecy he is considered to be *before God*. (ad. loc.) The Ibn Ezra explains that Yonah isn't running from God; instead, he is running "*mi-lifnei Hashem*," 'from before God'. Yonah is well aware that he cannot escape from God, and instead intends to run from the mission with which God had commanded him. He doesn't want to fulfill this mission, and in this sense, he wants to run 'from before God', i.e. from being a prophet. Apart from being internally satisfying, this explanation concords with other Biblical verses that describe a prophet as being "*lifnei Hashem*," 'before God'.[13]

An alternative explanation of this puzzling phenomenon[14] is suggested by the commentary *Metzudat David*. He writes:

[3] "*Livroaḥ Tarshishah*" (i.e., 'to flee to Tarshish') – This is a place outside of the Land of Israel, where prophecy does not rest upon prophets. (ad. loc.) The *Metzudat David* explains that Yonah wanted to run outside of the Land of Israel to a place where prophecy does not take place because he simply no longer wanted to prophesize. This explanation is admittedly slightly problematic, given that by the time Yonah flees, he has already received the prophecy of his mission, thereby rendering his subsequent flight both surprising and seemingly unproductive.

Dr. Yonatan Grossman attempts to explain the purpose of Yonah flight in a manner that dovetails with the Ibn Ezra's explanation of the logic underlying Yonah's flight. He points out that although the author of the book of Yonah leaves this matter unaddressed in the first chapter, verses in the fourth chapter following the repentance of Nineveh relate directly to this very issue:

> [1] But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2] And he prayed unto the LORD, and said: 'I pray Thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in mine own country? Therefore I fled beforehand unto Tarshish; for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy, and repent Thee of the evil. [3] Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.' (Yonah 4:1-3)

From these verses, it seems that Yonah knew that God would accept the repentance of Nineveh, and it was this expectation which caused him to run away from his mission in the first place. This explanation gives rise to another obvious question, however. Why did Yonah take such great issue with calling for a nation to repent? Indeed, as Dr. Grossman contends, such is in fact the essence of a *navi*'s role![15]

Dr. Grossman argues that it is necessary to understand the historical background of this book in order to adequately explain Yonah's mindset in this circumstance. When Yonah is first introduced in the book of Kings (2:14:25), the verses mention another prophecy attributed to him: Yonah prophesizes that the period of Yerav'am ben Yo'ash will be a successful one for the kingdom of Israel, and the people of his kingdom will thereby be redeemed. While, as the book of Kings details, the people of the kingdom of Israel were indeed successful in the days of Yerav'am ben Yoash, it is nevertheless clear that the success they experienced was not a result of their meritorious actions. One need look no further than the ensuing verses (2:14:26-27) for proof to this end: God sees the bleak state of the people of the kingdom of Israel, and only saves them because He does not want to wipe them out entirely. Additionally, the prophecies of Hoshe'a and Amos emphasize that the People of Israel were serving idolatry and committing many social injustices during that very time. Based upon this background, the Abarbanel insightfully explains the difficulty Yonah had with his mission:

> … And for this reason, the Blessed One endeavored to save Assyria from the future evil incumbent upon them due to the iniquity of their hands: in order that Assyria be saved from destruction, and that it should be the tool of God's wrath whereby to destroy Israel – and as it is said, 'Lo Assyria, the staff of My wrath, etc." And due to this, the Holy One Blessed be He wanted to straighten out Nineveh, the royal capitol. And this was the reason for Yonah's mission to Nineveh to call to her that her evil had arisen before God: not out of God's love of [its inhabitants], nor out of desire for them, but rather in order to save them from harm in order that they should be ready in the future for the appointed time of [destruction and exile of] Israel… which is the truth of this matter. And therefore, [Yonah] concluded in his heart not to go to Nineveh, so that the people of Assyria should not be spared from the destruction by his hand – for how could his going be the reason for the saving of the Assyrian People and the destruction of the Jewish People! And how could he bear to see the evil that would befall his nation at the hands of the Assyrians! And because of this, he fled from before God… (ad. loc.)

The Abarbanel writes that Yonah was concerned that if he caused Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to repent, thereby saving them, Assyria would survive and eventually wipe out the kingdom of Israel. This is, in fact, what historically occurred: within seven months of the death of Yerav'am ben Yo'ash, Assyria began to tax Israel. Twelve years later, they took over northern Israel, exiled its inhabitants, and eventually destroyed and exiled the entire kingdom of Israel.[16] Furthermore, the Abarbanel uses this idea to explain a famous *ma'amar Ḥazal*, a teaching of the Jewish Sages:

> There are, in a sense, three types of sons: one who demands the honor of the father and the honor of the son; and one who demands the honor of the father and not the honor of the son; and one who demands the honor of the son and not the honor of the father. Yirmiyah demanded the honor of the Father and the honor of the son… Eliyahu demanded the honor of the Father and not the honor of the son… [and] Yonah demanded the honor of the son and not the honor of the Father. (*Midrash Yalkut Shim'oni*, Jeremiah, passage 325)

In light of this midrash, the argument seems to be that Yonah cares more about the Jewish people not being hurt than listening to the Father, i.e. God. Nineveh's repentance would inevitably cause *Benei Yisrael* to look worse and ultimately allow Assyria to function as the weapon of *Benei Yisrael*'s destruction, and Yonah knew this. Thus, Yonah doesn't go to Nineveh out of Jewish nationalist sentiments.

Several questions can be raised against the Abarbanel's explanation. How does Yonah know all of this, for one thing? How does Yonah know that all of Assyria will be destroyed if he doesn't transmit this prophecy to Nineveh? Finally, why does Yonah assume that even if Assyria is destroyed, God wouldn't have an alternate plan as to who would destroy *Benei Yisrael*? While these questions are indeed strong ones, it is nonetheless clear that this is the predominant view of the commentaries on the book.[17]

Another explanation for Yonah's puzzling flight found in the commentaries of both Ibn Ezra and Abarbanel[18] is that Yonah was worried that the people of Nineveh would mock him. His logic was as follows: once the people of Nineveh repented, they would be forgiven and spared punishment, at which point they would accuse Yonah of being a false prophet. The Ibn Ezra writes: "And [some] interpret that [Yonah] was afraid that [the people of Nineveh] would call him a false prophet when God was appeased from the evil. (ad. loc. 1:2)" An earlier and similar formulation can be found in the Midrash *Pirkei de-Rebbi Eliezer.*[19] This explanation is conceptually significant in that it makes Yonah's flight a matter of self-concern rather than a matter of principle. It is, however, problematic for a number of reasons. The Ibn Ezra reasons against this explanation on the grounds that it wouldn't make sense for a prophet of God to flee from God simply out of self-concern. Additionally, he argues, why would Yonah have been concerned by the criticisms of the people of Nineveh? After all, Yonah did not live amongst them, and would not have even been there to hear their critiques! Finally, he contends, the people of Nineveh wouldn't be so foolish as to exhibit the faulty logic that this explanation demands of them, and in the event of their salvation would surely presume that the only reason they were spared from punishment was a result of Yonah's declaration and their subsequent repentance.

Why the Narrative Ambiguity?

The aforementioned answers recognize ambiguity in the narrative and attempt to clarify what really happened. A different way to approach this lack of detail is to look at the purpose of the textual ambiguity itself, attributing a narrative significance to its prominence. He purposely chooses not to let Yonah explain his actions. What does this teach us? Two different approaches can be taken. The first is that of Dr. Grossman, who argues that the lack of an explicit answer in the verses itself possesses great significance. It is as if the moment the prophet refuses to go to Nineveh and declare the message that God had, so to speak, "put in his mouth," he is muted and not entitled to provide an explanation for his actions. As noted, only when Yonah actually fulfills his mission is his mouth opened again, and only then is he rendered capable of defending his reservations as to God's command. Dr. Grossman argues that this is the first message of the book of Yonah: Running from God neutralizes one's ability to converse with Him. Similarly, if a person has grievances against one sending him on a mission, he is not able to escape from him, and it falls upon him to carry out his mission. (*Be'er Miriam, Yom ha-Kippurim*)

Rabbi Shalom Carmy offers a second, novel explanation for the author's literary technique. He bases his explanation on the remarks of R. Eli'ezer of Beaugency in his commentary on Yonah. R. Eli'ezer writes that it is not the case that Yonah ran because he did not want to save the sinful Ninevehites. Instead, he argues:

> *'The great city'* – and therefore he fled, for he said: it is a great city, and it is impossible that all of them shall repent, and also God is merciful and will not destroy a great city such as that. *'And Yonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before Hashem'* – that is, he wanted to remove himself from his mission, that God should send somebody else; for [Yonah] was at that point a frail old man, and if he should go, and – the city being so large – they should fail to repent, and God being merciful should have mercy even upon the sinners, it would turn out that [Yonah] would have broken his body on that long journey for nothing, seeing as they wouldn't return anyway, and also God would not deliver to them judgement through Yonah anyway. And to refuse outright and say, 'I shall not go' – he did not wish to do, so as not to refuse brazenly. Rather, Yonah chose to remove himself, saying as it were 'send, please, in the hands of somebody else'.

R. Eli'ezer of Beaugency essentially argues that Yonah didn't go to Nineveh because he thought the whole mission was pointless: he would surely be unsuccessful in causing Nineveh to repent, he would exhaust himself on the mission, and God would surely end up forgiving the people of Nineveh in any case. According to this line of understanding, Yonah wasn't against Nineveh's redemption in theory, but rather felt that it would be a waste of his time and energy to go on this mission. This innovative explanation is belied by a few issues. First and foremost, this approach seems to run against the grain of the simple *peshat* (literal understanding) of the verses in chapter four where Yonah seems distressed by the repentance of the Ninvehites. This issue alone causes R. Eli'ezer to suggest that Yonah did not actually know that Nineveh had been saved, thereby adding to the *ḥiddush* (novelty) of his approach. A further question one could ask against this approach is how Yonah knows that Nineveh will not repent. This expectation becomes even more surprising considering that Nineveh does in fact repent almost immediately upon receiving Yonah's proclamation. Finally, the notion of a prophet of God deciding to disobey direct orders from the *Ribbono Shel Olam* (Master of the Universe) out of mere fear of discomfort is at least very creative and at most more than a little unsettling.

Rabbi Carmy therefore decides to take this difficult *peshat* and adapt it to what he considers to be a much more conceivable explanation, thereby alleviating some of the natural discomfort of the assertion that Yonah was in some way guilty of fault. Yonah was indeed an old man, and he didn't want to take a long ride on a donkey; thinking that a sea voyage would be more comfortable, he decided to take a ship to Nineveh instead. All of the aforementioned suggestions for why Yonah ran are good possibilities regarding *parshanut,* Biblical commentary. Yet Rabbi Carmy believes that far more important than what we hold to be true is the question of what Yonah himself held to be true. Rabbi Carmy suggests that it is possible that Yonah would not have thought or acted along the lines of any of the possibilities suggested earlier. He argues that we are making the assumption that people always know why they do what they are doing, but in reality people don't always have all of their opinions worked out. In real life, people don't always know exactly why they are doing what they are doing, or what will become of their actions.[20]

Rabbi Carmy therefore argues that if, in the heat of the moment, one would ask Yonah whether or not he is refusing to do what God asked him to do, it is not clear whether Yonah would say that he is. If Yonah is saying that he did refuse to do what God asked him to do, then he would have to supply a reason. However, if he does not yet know that he is rebelling at this point in the narrative, then he may not feel the urgency to justify his activities. All Yonah knows is that he feels uncomfortable with the command. Rabbi Carmy believes this is a deeper take of R. Eli'ezer of Beaugance. He suggests that, as responsible readers of the Biblical narrative, it could be that we should suspend judgment at this point in the narrative. Yonah knows that he does not want to go, but as far as he is concerned, he has no fully-developed doctrine or opinion. This is an important approach because of its relevant methodological considerations, as well as for its insight into the human personality.

How Much Did Yonah Pay

An interesting debate surrounds the words "*va-yitein sekharah*," 'and he paid its fare', found in chapter 1, verse 3. The Ibn Ezra argues that these words mean that Yonah paid exclusively for his fare: "And he paid its fare" – not all its fare, i.e. so as to finance the entire voyage, but

rather, only that which he was obligated to pay on his own behalf. (ad. loc.) An alternative explanation can be found in the Midrash *Pirkei de-Rebbi Eli'ezer*, and is also proposed by Rashi in his commentary to this verse: "'And he paid its fare' – that is, [Yonah] paid his fare in advance. [I]t is not the usual way of those who travel by sea to pay the fare of their journey until the moment of their departure, but he paid in advance – and not only that, but he even financed the entire voyage. (Rashi, ad. loc.; *Pirkei de-Rebbi Eli'ezer*, ch. 5)" Rashi believes that Yonah not only paid for his fare but also paid the fare for the entire ship. Additionally, Rashi argues that Yonah paid his fare unusually early on: whereas generally travelers paid their fares at the end of a sea journey, Yonah paid at the beginning. This explanation of Rashi and the Midrash fits plausibly with the understanding that the author's purpose at the outset of the book of Yonah is to emphasize the urgency with which Yonah wanted to leave. The swift pace of the opening verses mirrors this point, as the author wants to emphasize how Yonah's actions occur quickly and not over an extended period of time.[21] Furthermore, Rashi's interpretation here may help clarify why it is that, when Yonah asks to be thrown overboard later on in the narrative, the sailors do not immediately oblige: seeing as Yonah had already paid his fare, perhaps the sailors were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt and try to spare his life.

Conclusion

The opening verses of the first chapter of the book of Yonah do much to set up the rest of the book by foreshadowing questions about Yonah's intentions that arise and are examined throughout the rest of the narrative. Yet these verses themselves also contain significant messages about obligation to God, the nature of prophecy and the human personality. As such, a careful reading of opening verses of this book is critical in order to uncover the wealth of meaning couched therein.

1 See Rabbi Amnon Bazak's lecture on Yonah, available at http://www.hatanakh.com/tanach/18.0.2.

2 See the commentary of the Da'at Mikra, page 2.

3 Owing to word and space constraints, not all of these questions will be addressed in the continuation of the article. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to raise them here so as to emphasize the confusing and problematic nature of the verses.

4 This question is sharpened especially when Yonah is contrasted against other nevi'im. For example, see Isaiah 1:1, where the verse details that Isaiah prophesied during the reign of King Uziyahu.

5 A discussion of this issue by modern Biblical commentators demonstrates this point. Dr. Yonaton Grossman argues that it is probable that the proclamation found in the third chapter, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4), is the same content of the original proclamation Yonah was supposed to transmit. Rabbi Shalom Carmy points out that it is unclear from the word "ki" in the verse whether Yonah is supposed to speak to them because they have sinned or that Yonah is supposed to tell them that they have sinned. Rabbi Carmy argues that this indicates some freedom regarding what Yonah should say.

6 For an inquiry into the messages of the universal dimension of the book of Yonah see Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's analysis in his lecture, "The Haftarah of Jonah on Yom Kippur" in Abraham R. Besdin, "Reflections of the Rav, volume 2."

7 A contrasting view can be found in the Da'at Mikra commentary, which argues that there were other prophets who went to prophesize to other nations. See the Da'at Mikra commentary, pgs. 4-5.

8 See for example the comments of the Ibn Ezra and Radak ad. loc.

9 See footnote 4b in the Da'at Mikra commentary on Yonah.

10 I think this suggestion flows well with Dr. Grossman's approach.

11 I think this idea meshes well with a suggestion made by Rabbi Shalom Carmy, as will be discussed in the continuation of this paper.

12 Another problem is that from verse 1:10 it seems abundantly clear that Yonah is well aware that God "hath made the sea and the dry land."

13 For example, see Kings 1:17:1.

14 The two proposed explanations might well be understood as complementary. One can suggest that Yonah wanted to run from his mission and therefore went to Ḥutz La-Aretz, i.e. outside the Land of Israel, where there is no prophecy.

15 Dr. Grossman points to several verses in Yirmiyahu to emphasize this point. See Jeremiah 1:10, 17:7-8.

16 For an earlier formulation of this type of idea in Hazal, see Talmud Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 11:5.

17 See the commentaries of Rashi, Radak, Ibn Ezra, and the Mahari Kara for either the same or very similar answers.

18 It should be noted that both end up rejecting this answer.

19 On the fifth day, Yonah fled from before his God. And why did he flee? Because one time, God sent him to restore the border of Israel and his words held, as it says "He restored the border of Israel"; then a second time, God sent him to Jerusalem [to announce] its destruction, and the Holy One Blessed be He acted in accordance with His abundant mercy and was appeased from the evil and did not destroy it, and they called him a false prophet. Then a third time, God sent him upon Nineveh to destroy it; thereupon Yonah made a personal calculation, and said: 'I know that the gentiles are wont to do repentance – now they shall repent, and God will send His wrath upon Israel! And not only this, but also: is it not enough that Israel calls me a false prophet, that the gentile nations of the world should also do so? I shall therefore flee from before God, to a place where His Honor is not seen… ("Horeb" ed., Ch. 9)

20 An example of this phenomenon is that on a cold winter morning, a person might wake up at 6:30, look at his alarm clock and say, "I won't get up now; I'll go later to the 7:30 minyan." At that point, the person may wake up an hour later and say he'll go to the 8:30 minyan, etc. If you ask the person why he didn't get up at 6:30, he may simply say "don't bother me." There isn't necessarily a clearly worked out doctrine as to how things are going to end up.

21 Another possibility is to understand this unusual act in its historical context. At that time, boats weren't commonly used for transporting passengers, but rather for trade, and as such simply left port when they needed to go.