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THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO®

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PESACH

Dedicated in memory of Cantor Jerome L. Simons



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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INTRODUCTION: THE COVID-19 CRISIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SANCTIFY OUR HOMES

As we go to press with this year's Pesach edition of the *Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To-Go*®, it is difficult to believe that only weeks ago, our theme of anti-Semitism was the most pressing concern for world Jewry. While anti-Semitism certainly remains a serious concern, and the COVID-19 crisis certainly has the potential to exacerbate it, we find ourselves preparing for Pesach this year in the context of an entirely new reality. *Torah To Go* is branded as a publication that can be picked up at a local shul or school and enjoyed at home or anywhere else. Over the past few days we have watched as the entire Jewish world has transitioned to the world of "Torah to go."

The Torah (Shemos 25:15) tells us regarding the Aron, the Holy Ark of the Mishkan:

בְּטַבְעֹת הָאָרֶן יִהְיוּ הַבְּדָיִם לֹא יִסְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ.
In the rings of the Ark there shall be poles. They may not be removed from it.

Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary to that verse, writes that the poles used to carry the Aron were never removed, even when the Aron was stationary, because ultimately our Torah is always "to go." It is portable.

It can be transported to any place, any time, and any circumstance.

This crisis has shown the incredible strength of the Jewish people. We have seen that our values and service to Hakadosh Baruch Hu can be applied to any environment in which we find ourselves.

The korban Pesach offered in Mitzrayim was unique in that it was a korban that was offered in the home.

The korban Pesach was the first sacrifice commanded to the Jewish people. The korban Pesach offered in Mitzrayim was unique in that it was a korban that was offered in the home. It personified the notion that the foundation of our people, of our nation, is the sanctity of our homes.

Our preparation for Pesach 5780 is completely different than what we are used to. We find ourselves confined almost entirely to our homes. Beyond the opportunity for more focused

cleaning, it is a chance to infuse those homes with the sense of meaning and purpose that Pesach is all about. Our faith in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and a recognition that He controls both nature and history, is the greatest source of our resilience and perseverance through this challenge.

Rav Kook, *Midbar Shur* pg. 139, writes that the word "Pesach" does not mean to "pass over." Rather, based on the verse in Melachim I 18:25, "*poschim al shtei haseifim*" — hopping between two opinions — it means to "hover." Hakadosh Baruch Hu did not simply "pass over" the Jewish homes; he hovered and made his presence felt while the final plague of Egypt was carried out. May Hakadosh Baruch Hu hover above our sacred homes and protect us once again. May He provide our community with the strength and the blessings to emerge from this great challenge with health and with bracha.

Wishing you a wonderful Pesach,



BREAD FOR THOUGHT

In August 2019, a physicist and bread enthusiast in Pasadena, California named Seamus Blackley baked a loaf of bread using 4,000-year-old yeast extracted from an ancient loaf of Egyptian bread.¹ Yeast, of course, is a leavening agent that produces carbon dioxide when it metabolizes carbohydrates, creating bubbles that help otherwise dense bread expand into a fluffy loaf. As we observe Pesach and the command not to eat leavened bread (chometz), it is interesting to note that it was the ancient Egyptians who are credited with discovering the leavening process and producing leavened breads, probably with the help of the beer they liked to drink, or with the addition of spontaneous

sourdough to the baking process. From ancient Egypt, the use of sourdough as a leavening agent later spread throughout Greece and the Roman Empire. Egyptian pride in their bread-making process is memorialized in wall paintings found in numerous Egyptian tombs, which testify to the production of both leavened and unleavened loaves.² Histories of ancient bread-making cite the Torah's description of Pharaoh's baker imprisoned with Yosef and the Torah's distinction between matzah and chometz as evidence of the importance of bread-making in ancient Egypt, and the presence of both leavened and unleavened breads. Thus, the removal of chometz on Pesach can signify the removal of

something quintessentially Egyptian from our midst.

On a deeper level, we can draw a lesson from the distinctive baking processes of matzah and chometz. The Shelah ha-Kadosh explains³ that abstaining from eating leavened bread on Pesach signifies our belief in Hashem as the creator, who brought forth the world *ex-nihilo*, *yesh me-ayin*, from no pre-existing matter. Chometz, as noted above, was always baked using a starter or sourdough from an older batch of dough, paralleling the mistaken belief in an eternal world and no creator. In contrast to chometz, matzah is a new creation, so to speak. The combination of only flour and water to create matzah, with no leavening agent added, symbolizes

the creation of Heaven and Earth from nothing. The flour parallels the dust of the earth, and water, the moisture of the Heavens, all created *yesh me-ayin*.

The Shelah further notes that after the initial creation of matter Hashem formed the rest of creation from that matter, a process referred to as *yesh me-yesh*. The distinction between *yesh me-ayin* and *yesh me-yesh* is reflected in the special obligation to eat matzah on the first night of Pesach, because matzah symbolizes the initial stage of creation: that of *yesh me-ayin*. For the rest of the week of Pesach, we are not obligated to eat matzah, but only to refrain from eating chometz, symbolizing the subsequent days of creation that utilized already-created matter — *yesh me-yesh* — as stated in the verses:

בְּרֵאשִׁון בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעֶרְבֹת תֹּאכְלוּ
מִצַּת עַד יוֹם הָאֶחָד וְעֶשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעֶרְבֹת.
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים שְׂאֹר לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּבֵיתְכֶם כִּי כֹל
אֲכַל מִחֻמֶּצֶת וְנִכְרַתָּה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מֵעַמֶּת
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵר וּבְאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץ.

In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. No leaven shall be found in your houses for seven days. For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a citizen of the country.

On still a deeper level, the Shelah explains that Adam ha-Rishon was like matzah, a new creation without parents. Through his sin, the *yetzer hara* — compared to the leaven — entered him, clouding his mind and introducing death to his body. The Torah, here, as well as in the subsequent verse (Shemot 12:20), uses the word *machmetzet* to describe chometz:

כֹּל מִחֻמֶּצֶת לֹא תֹאכְלוּ בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבֵיתְכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ
מִצּוֹת.

You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.

The word *machmetzet* (מחמצת) itself hints at the introduction of death to the world after the sin of Adam. The center of the word spells chometz (חמץ) surrounded by a *mem* before it and a *tav* after, to spell *met* (מת), or death. Chometz signifies the contamination of our beings through sin brought about by obeying the *yetzer hara* now within us, which can lead to our downfall. For this reason, before Pesach, we gather and burn

As we eat our matzah, we choose life and aim to live lives of righteousness.

the leaven in our homes signifying the removal of the *yetzer hara* that contaminated Adam. In contrast to the destruction wrought by the *yetzer hara* — symbolized by chometz — matzah symbolizes the *tzaddik*, whose good deeds and correct beliefs earn life in the World to Come. The Alshich ha-Kadosh explains⁴ that the *tzaddikim* are therefore referred to as *chai* — living, a word with the numerical value of 18. Matzah likewise has the numerical value of 18 when calculated by the *mispar katan*⁵ (5-ה, 9-צ, 4-מ). As we eat our matzah, we choose life and aim to live lives of righteousness.

On the seder night, we are elevated and pristine after having removed the chometz from without, and we focus on the chometz within. We are granted extra help on that auspicious night called *leil shimurim*, a night where Hashem grants us protection against the *yetzer hara* and other spiritual forces that wish us harm. On that special night we are granted the strength to break free from whatever holds us back from actualizing our potential, just as Hashem liberated us from the confines of Mitzrayim, as the *pasuk* (Shemot 13:14) states:

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךְ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מָה זֶה
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם
מֵבֵית עֲבָדִים.

And when, in times to come, your son asks you, saying, "What is this?" you shall say to him, "It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage."

Matzah is referred to as “bread of faith” in the Zohar, and as we fulfill this mitzvah let it reaffirm our faith in Hashem as the creator and ruler of the world, as well as our faith in our own abilities to overcome both internal and external obstacles that may be holding us back.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/08/science/egyptian-yeast-bread.html>.
2. *Flour and Breads and Their Fortification in Health and Disease Prevention*, Second Edition, Edited by Victor R. Preedy and Ronald Ross Watson (Academic Press, 2019) 178.
3. *Mesechet Pesachim, Perek Torah Ohr*, 11.
4. Alshich on Shemot: 13:11-17.
5. *Mispar katan* is a form of *gematria* where the zeroes are dropped from the value of all letters valued above 9.



DOES CHAMETZ REPRESENT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM?

Quintus Turnus Rufus the Evil, a senator and provincial governor under the Roman Empire, appears in several midrashim and Talmudic discourses, mostly in conversation with Rabbi Akiva.

In the Gemara in *Bava Batra* 10a, the following conversation appears:

וְזוֹ שְׂאֵלָה שֶׁאֵל טוּרְנוֹסְרוּפּוֹס הִרְשַׁע אֶת ר"ע
אִם אֱלֻקִּים אוֹהֵב עֲנִיִּים הוּא מִפְּנֵי מָה אֵינוּ
מִפְּרָנְסִים? אָמַר לוֹ כְּדֵי שְׁנִיצוֹל אָנוּ בְּהֶן מְדִינָה
שֶׁל גִּיהֵנָם. אָמַר לוֹ [אֲדַרְבֵּהּ] זֶה שֶׁמַּחֲיִיבֶתֶן
לְגִיּהֵנָם!

And this is the question that Turnus Rufus the wicked asked Rabbi Akiva: If your God loves the poor, for what reason

does He not support them Himself? Rabbi Akiva said to him: He commands us to sustain the poor, so that through them and the charity we give them we will be saved from the judgment of Gehenna. Turnus Rufus said to Rabbi Akiva: On the contrary, it is this charity which condemns you, the Jewish people, to Gehenna because you give it.

They both continue with different parables to illustrate their points.

Turnus Rufus here is accusing Rabbi Akiva of trying to be better than God. Hashem has created the world a certain way — with poor and downtrodden people. If we interfere, we are going against God's plans and

we are deserving of punishment. Rabbi Akiva counters and teaches us that we have a responsibility to make the world a better place. We are not forced to accept the world as it is; in fact we have a requirement to provide sustenance and support to those in need.

How do we do make the world a better place? By partnering with Hashem. Generally, Rabbi Akiva tells us this should be our approach. But is this true all the time? We can relate to Hashem and be a junior partner most of the time. However, to truly appreciate this partnership and our role, we need to step back and not partner with God but rather focus on

Him as our Master. When do we do this? During the holiday of Pesach — the holiday in which Hashem showed His mastery and as we left Egypt, we as a nation accepted G-d as our master.

With all the rites and rituals performed over the seven-day holiday, just how exactly do we demonstrate not just our recognition of G-d as our master, but our self-abnegation in deference to G-d? We are all familiar with our abstention from chametz and all things leaven, but is this commandment to have no leavened bread in our possession related to the concept of self-abnegation?

Chametz is an enigma. The rest of the year, not only is chametz permitted, there are several mitzvot associated with it. Yet for these seven days, it is forbidden. And we're not just forbidden from eating it, we can't own it or receive any benefit from it whatsoever. In fact, there are more prohibitions relating to chametz than for any other forbidden item in the Torah. The Torah (Shemot 12:15) says:

שבעת ימים מצות תאכלו... כי כל אוכל חמץ ונכרתה הנפש ההיא מישראל
For seven days we must eat matzah ... anyone who eats chametz will be cut off from the nation.

In Shemot ch. 13 (verse 7) we are told:

מצות יאכל את שבעת הימים ולא יראה לך חמץ ולא יראה לך שאר בכל גבולך.
Throughout the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in all your territory.

In Shemot ch. 12 (verse 19) we are told:

שבעת ימים שאר לא ימצא בבתיכם כי כל

אכל מחמץ ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מעדת ישראל בגר ובאזרח הארץ.

No leaven shall be found in your houses for seven days. For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a citizen of the country.

We remove all chametz from our homes and perform *bittul* chametz, giving up possession of any chametz in our homes and making it like the dust of the earth. If we retain possession of any chametz over Pesach, it remains forbidden for us and any other Jew forever.

All these prohibitions beg the question — why are we so strict with chametz? What is so unique about it that it has more *issurim* connected to it than any other item in the Torah? One common explanation connects chametz and the *yetzer harah*, the evil inclination. As the Zohar states, we need to remove the *yetzer harah* from our midst completely during Pesach. Yet this explanation is countered by the midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 9:7):

רבי נחמן בר שמואל בר נחמן בשם רב שמואל בר נחמן אמר: הנה טוב מאד, זה יצר טוב. והנה טוב מאד, זה יצר רע. וכי יצר הרע טוב מאד אתמהא?! אלא שאלולי יצר הרע, לא בנה אדם בית, ולא נשא אשה, ולא הוליד, ולא נשא ונתן. וכן שלמה אומר: (קהלת ד): כי היא קנאת איש מרעהו:

Rabbi Nahman said in Rabbi Samuel's name: "Behold, it was good" refers to the Good Desire; "And behold, it was very good" refers to the Evil Desire. Can then the Evil Desire be very good? That would be extraordinary! But without the Evil Desire, no man would build a house, take a wife and beget children; and thus said Solomon: "Again, I considered all labor and all excelling in work, that it is a man's rivalry with his neighbor." (Ecclesiastes 4:4)

So how could we be required to

remove it — wouldn't the world cease to function as usual? Another commonly taught idea is that the difference between chametz and matzah is yeast, with chametz representing ego and matzah representing humility. But this too is troublesome because all year we eat chametz and are commanded to use it to perform several mitzvot. If so, how can we associate chametz with something negative?

So the question remains: Why are we required to completely remove chametz from our lives, incurring serious consequences for owning even a small amount of it?

We must view chametz in a different light. Chametz represents our relationship and partnership with Hashem. All year we partner with Hashem, as Rabbi Akiva tells us. But during Pesach, this relationship changes.

This idea of partnership and chametz is evident from the Gemara in *Brachot* 38a, which discusses the nature of the bracha made on bread. There is a debate between the Rabbis and Rabbi Nechemya about this bracha:

שעל הפת הוא אומר "המוציא" וכו'. תנו רבנן: מיהו הוא אומר? — "המוציא להם מן הארץ". רבי נחמיה אומר: "מוציא להם מן הארץ". אמר רבא: ב"מוציא" כולי עלמא לא פליגי דאפיק משמע, דכתיב: "אל מוציאם ממצרים". כי פליגי ב"המוציא", רבנן סברי המוציא דאפיק משמע, דכתיב: "המוציא לך מים מצור החלמיש". ורבי נחמיה סבר המוציא דמפיק משמע, שנאמר: "המוציא אתכם מתחת סבלות מצרים".

We learned in the mishna that over bread one recites: Who brings forth bread from the earth. The Sages taught in a baraita: What does one who eats bread recite before eating? Who brings forth bread from the earth. Rabbi Nechemya says that the blessing is

phrased: *Who brought forth bread from the earth. Rava said: Everyone agrees that the term motzi means brought, in the past tense, as it is written: "God who brought them forth from Egypt is for them like the horns of the wild ox" (Numbers 23:22). When do they disagree? With regard to the term hamotzi, as the Rabbis hold that hamotzi means that God brought forth, in the past tense, as it is written: "Who brought forth for you water from a rock of flint" (Deuteronomy 8:15), which depicts a past event. Rabbi Nechemya holds that the term hamotzi means that God brings forth in the present tense, as it is stated in Moses' prophecy to the Jewish people in Egypt: "And you will know that I am the Lord your God who is bringing you forth from under the burdens of Egypt." (Exodus 6:7)*

What is the disagreement between Rabbi Nechemya and the Rabbis? On the surface, the question appears to be that when we make the bracha on bread, are we referring to a current event — God is bringing forth the bread from the earth — or are we referring to something that God has done in the past — that He brought forth the bread? Is this a continuous action or only one that refers to the past?

But if we look deeper there is another layer to this discussion. The language of the bracha states that Hashem brings bread from the earth. But we don't pick bread off trees, so is Hashem really bringing the bread forth from the earth? What comes from the earth? Wheat. But what turns it into bread? *Man* must add other ingredients: water and yeast, and perhaps sugar, salt, eggs and oil. With these ingredients, *man* then turns it into bread from which we gain sustenance. It is not God who is

creating the bread nor is He bringing the actual bread forth. It is rather a joint effort; a partnership where God brings the water and weather that enables the wheat to grow, while *man* takes the wheat and turns it into the actual finished product that is bread. If that is the case, then why does the bracha describe bread as from Hashem?

A hint to the answer may lie in the *Midrash Tanhuma*, Tazria 5, in another conversation between Turnus Rufus and Rabbi Akiva:

מעשה ששאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את רבי עקיבא: איזו מעשים נאים, של הקדוש ברוך הוא או של בשר ודם? אמר לו: של בשר ודם נאים. . . . אמר לו: למה אתם מולין. אמר לו: אני הייתי יודע שעל דבר זה אתה שואלני, ולכך הקדמתי ואמרתי לך, שמעשה בני אדם נאים משל הקדוש ברוך הוא. הביא לו רבי עקיבא שבליים וגלסקאות. אמר לו: אלו מעשה הקדוש ברוך הוא, ואלו מעשה ידי אדם. אמר לו: אין אלו נאים יותר מן השבליים

It happened that Turnus Rufus the wicked asked R. Akiva, "Which works are the more beautiful? Those of the Holy One, blessed be He, or those of flesh and blood?" He said to him, "Those of flesh and blood are the more beautiful." ... He said to him, "Why do you circumcise?" He said to him, "I also knew that you were going to say this to me. I therefore anticipated [your question] when I said to you, 'A work of flesh and blood is more beautiful than one of the Holy One, blessed be He.' Bring me wheat spikes and white bread." He said to him, "The former is the work of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the latter is the work of flesh and blood. Is not the latter more beautiful?"

In the midrash, Turnus Rufus asks which is more beautiful — something that Hashem or man created? In his answer, Rabbi Akiva compares bread and wheat. The bread is more

beautiful — that which is created by people in partnership with God. Hashem puts forth wheat, which is an essential staple in life, but the most beautiful item in the world is created when we take this wheat, in partnership with God, and turn it into something that is the sustenance of life.

Perhaps then, the Gemara in *Brachot*, when discussing the bracha on bread, is alluding to this symbiotic relationship. We say "hamotzi"; God brings forth the wheat and then we take it and turn it into something beautiful — something more beautiful than even what God creates on this Earth. This is true whether we view the bracha as relating to the past or to the present — this is a relationship that began in the past — when we left Egypt and confirmed our belief as a nation in God, and continues to this day. Each time we make bread, we are beautifying God's world, we are partnering with Him to improve the world. And it is when we partner with Hashem that we make the most beautiful item that can provide sustenance to others — bread — a food whose bracha comes first in the order of brachot.

During the rest of the year, this partnership with Hashem is absolutely necessary. Man takes the wheat He gives us and produces bread. We partner with God, improving the world and making it a better place. Moreover, as Rabbi Akiva tells us, it is an expectation that Hashem placed upon us.

But what is the origin of this partnership? Yetziat Mitzrayim. What are we commemorating on Pesach? Yetziat Mitzrayim and the origins of our relationship with Hashem. At that point in time, we were not equal

partners — we did not have complete faith and could not take what Hashem gave us and make it perfect. At that point, we were like children and Hashem was like our father. We could not intervene in the world. Hashem had to intervene on our behalf and guide us every step of the way, showcasing His might and kindness throughout the process. He gave us protection when He punished the Egyptians. He saved us from not just the Egyptians but also from ourselves, showing love and devotion like a benevolent master.

Pesach is a time when we step back from being partners with Hashem and recognize the origins of our relationship with Him, reminding ourselves that our partnership with God only works if we recognize that He is the Master and Creator of the world. And how is that done? By removing all bread from our midst. Not only can we not eat it, we cannot make it nor own it nor do anything that might bring us close to making bread. We need to go back to our roots — our beginning — when we had just gained our freedom but couldn't truly partner with God. This is a time when we eat only matzah: wheat and water baked for a short period of time. Nothing beautiful, nothing fancy. Only simple food, nothing that provides sustenance in the way chametz does.

As Rav Melamed says in *Peninei Halacha*:

חג הפסח ובמיוחד ליל הסדר נועדו להשריש בנו את יסודות האמונה, שיש בורא לעולם והוא משגיח על ברואיו, ובחר בעם ישראל כדי שיגלה את שמו בעולם. ובכל עת שמתגלה יסוד אלוקי בעולם, הוא מופיע בדרך ניסית

לגמרי, כדי להודיע לנו שמדובר בעניין אלוקי ולא אנושי. לכן בפסח, החג שנועד להשריש יסודות האמונה, נצטוו להיזהר מאוד מכל שמץ של חמץ במאכלינו וברשותנו, שהחמץ מבטא את הצד האנושי שלנו, ואסור לערבו בעת שאנו עוסקים ביסודות האמונה ושוורשיה. אבל במשך כל השנה, אנו עוסקים בענפים, ואותם אנחנו צריכים לפתח ולשכלל, ואז החמץ רצוי.

Pesach, and especially the Seder, is designed to instill in us the fundamentals of faith: that the world has a Creator,

As Pesach is a time when we step back from being partners with Hashem and recognize the origins of our relationship with Him, reminding ourselves that our partnership with God only works if we recognize that He is the Master and Creator of the world.

that He watches over His creatures, and that He chose the people of Israel to reveal His name in the world. Whenever there is revelation of an aspect of the divine in the world, it appears in a

completely miraculous fashion, to show that it is not a human endeavor. Therefore, on Pesach, the holiday geared toward imparting the fundamentals of faith, we are commanded to be extremely cautious to avoid eating and possessing even a smidgen of chametz, which symbolizes our human aspects that must not get mixed in when we speak about the roots and foundations of faith. During the rest of the year, however, when we are involved with developing and improving the branches, chametz is allowed and even desirable.

Bread, we see, is not something negative — in fact, it is desired and desirable to create bread the entire year. Bread signifies our incredible partnership with Hashem, which we recognize each time we make the bracha, *hamotzi lechem min haaretz*. But during Pesach, we are recognizing the origins of our faith, of our beginnings before we were partners with Hashem. We need to remove the bread from our midst, because at this point it is not the right way to connect to Hashem. Only when we recognize that it all comes from Hashem and that He is the creator of the world can we understand what our relationships need to be and what Hashem expects of us in the world. We can take our deep faith and understanding and use this knowledge and experience to further our relationship with Hashem during the year, engaging with the world and making His world, our world, the best it can be for all living souls.



WHERE AND WHEN CAN I SHOP AFTER PESACH?

One of the strict laws of Pesach is the halacha of *chametz she'avar alav HaPesach*.

According to this halacha, it is forbidden to eat or derive any benefit whatsoever from chametz that was in the possession of a Jew during Pesach. Sometimes this can lead to tremendous loss, such as in the case when a Jew fails to sell a huge amount of chametz liquor during Pesach that is worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Furthermore, this prohibition is not only applicable to products that are full-fledged chametz such as breads, cookies, pastas, and liquor. Even products that contain admixtures of chametz are prohibited after Pesach unless the chametz ingredient was less than one-sixtieth of the entire mixture (*Mishna Berurah* 447:101).

The halacha follows the opinion of R. Shimon (*Pesachim* 29a) that this law is not a Torah prohibition but rather a rabbinic penalty for the transgression of the violation of “*bal yeraeh u’val yimatze*” — for the possession of chametz during the Pesach holiday. Because of the severity of such a transgression, this penalty was imposed even in cases where the ownership came about inadvertently, or by accident (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 448:3).

Possible Cases of Leniency

Are there any leniencies, especially given that the prohibition is rabbinic in nature? Some authorities are lenient in a situation of “*ones gamur*”

(a complete accident) — when the transgression came about due to circumstances that were completely beyond the control of the owner of the chametz. The *Mishna Berurah* (448:9) brings one such example: If a non-Jewish owner of a mill decided on his own to grind a Jew’s wheat kernels during Pesach, and then turned the flour into bread, the *Beis Meir* ruled that the bread would not become prohibited to the Jewish owner after Pesach, since there was nothing that the Jew could have done to prevent this from happening.

What about a case in which someone nullified his chametz prior to Pesach, so that it no longer belongs to him according to Torah law? The halacha follows the opinion of R. Yochanan in the Talmud Yerushalmi that a

person who nullified his chametz but otherwise did not sell or remove the chametz from his possession may not derive benefit from the chametz after Pesach, since there is a concern that his nullification may have been insincere (see Rosh, *Pesachim* 2:4, *Shulchan Aruch* OC 448:5).

However, in a case when a person nullified his chametz and performed a thorough *bedikas chametz* (searching for any chametz prior to the Pesach), and then discovered a previously unknown stash of chametz on his premises after Pesach, the *Mishna Berurah* (448:25) rules that in a case of great loss, such chametz would be permitted for benefit after Pesach, although not for consumption. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (OC 448:8) appears to be lenient even with respect to consuming such chametz.

Buying Chametz from a Jewish Store Owner after Pesach

Absent any of these possible leniencies, chametz that was in the possession of a Jew over Pesach becomes forbidden not only for the Jewish owner but also for every other Jew in the entire world as well (see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 448:3). Furthermore, the chametz remains forbidden forever. This creates a difficult situation for individuals who wish to buy food after Pesach from a non-observant Jewish store and from Jewish supermarket owners who may have possessed chametz over Pesach. Indeed, in recent years it was discovered that one of the major suppliers of kosher liquor was owned by a Jew, thus prohibiting forever the chametz liquor that was in its possession during Pesach.

One might argue that there is a special dispensation in the Gemora (*Chulin* 4a-4b) to purchase chametz after Pesach from a non-observant Jew who only sins based on temptation (*mumar l'teavon*) and not out of rebellion, based on the premise that such an individual would trade his prohibited chametz for a non-Jew's permitted chametz after Pesach in order to mitigate his violation. However, most of the Jewish storeowners nowadays who possess chametz during Pesach are not individuals with either the knowledge or the inclination to take such measures to avoid benefiting directly from their chametz after Pesach, so this leniency is no longer applicable (see *Be'er Hetev*, 448:11, explaining that non-observant Jews today are considered to be in the more stringent category of *mumar l'hachis* for purposes of this halacha; see also *Igros Moshe, OC* 4:91).

The Problem with Stores that Sell Their Chametz but Remain in Operation on Pesach

The most obvious solution would be to effectuate a sale of the store owner's chametz ("*mechiras chametz*") before Pesach (see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 448:3). Even R. Yochanan would agree that if an individual sold his chametz during Pesach to a non-Jew, that individual and others may partake of such chametz after Pesach once it is purchased back from the non-Jewish purchaser. Indeed, selling one's chametz to a non-Jew has become the accepted practice of Jews all over the world (see *Shevet HaLevi* 4:49).

However, the major problem with this option is that the sale may not ultimately be legitimate if the Jewish storeowner leaves his business open

during Pesach, thus appearing to negate the fact that the chametz was sold to a non-Jew. Indeed, in many cases where Jewish-owned supermarkets and liquor stores participate in a sale of chametz prior to Pesach, they continue to sell that very same chametz during Pesach itself. Some authorities indeed have written that any such continued business activity nullifies the sale of chametz, so that all the chametz of those enterprises is considered *chametz she'avar alav HaPesach* and remains forbidden forever (see, e.g., Maharam Shick, OC 205).

Nonetheless, Rav Moshe Feinstein ruled (*Igros Moshe, OC* 1:149) that such a *mechiras chametz* remains valid because the storeowner who sold his chametz before Pesach intends to maintain the permissible status of any chametz that is not sold during Pesach. The chametz that is sold during Pesach constitutes an act of theft by the Jewish seller from the non-Jewish purchaser, but that is only an issue for the storeowner and not for the store's customers. Similarly, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (see *Halichos Shlomo, Pesach* 6:9) upheld the validity of such a sale based on the ruling of the *Noda B'Yehudah* (OC 18) that so long as a *mechiras chametz* transaction was performed by the parties prior to Pesach and could be enforced by the non-Jewish purchaser, it is a valid sale.

However, even Rav Feinstein conceded (*Igros Moshe, OC* 2:91) that the *mechiras chametz* would not be valid with respect to any new chametz that is purchased by the storeowner during Pesach, which would indeed remain forbidden for customers to purchase following Pesach. Accordingly, he ruled that a

kashrus agency could not ultimately recommend that customers purchase chametz from those stores after Pesach.

Selling the Entire Business during Pesach

Are there any other solutions? Some authorities suggest that maybe it is better to have the Jewish owner sell the entire business to a non-Jew for the duration of Pesach, in addition to selling the chametz to the non-Jew. This indeed would be a fine solution if the sale of the business would be genuine. However, the problem is that often the sale is obviously a sham. Accordingly, Rav Yisroel Belsky held that the sale of the business would be completely void even according to the reasoning of Rav Moshe Feinstein if the Jewish owner continued to run the business and derive profits from the business during Pesach, since it is clear in such a case that there was no interest in selling the business altogether (*Shulchan HaLevi* 1:12[18]; see letter from Rabbi Eli Gerstein to Rabbi Zvi Ryzman in *Ratz K'tzvi*, Pesach, pages 331-332).

However, if the sale of the business is genuine, some authorities allow such a sale in cases of great loss and dire need, as long as the sale complies with all necessary halakhic specifications (see *Aruch Hashulchan* 448:20, *Dovev Meisharim* by the Chebiner Rav, 2:4). For example, at the Chicago Rabbinical Council, we recently facilitated such a sale of chametz

from a major Jewish-owned liquor supplier to a non-Jew, subject to the following stipulations: (a) the Jewish owner may not have any involvement in the business during Pesach; (b) the non-Jewish purchaser must be someone who is capable of running the business during Pesach (such as the manager of the store); (c) there must be an accounting made of all the profits generated during Pesach; and (d) the non-Jewish purchaser must receive payment of all of those profits. If such a sale is made properly under proper rabbinic auspices, it would be permissible to purchase chametz from such businesses and stores immediately after Pesach because none of the chametz would have been owned by a Jew during Pesach.

Partial Jewish Ownership

What if the Jewish owner is only a partial owner of the establishment? If the Jewish owner is only a minority owner of the establishment, some authorities (see *Zecher Yitzchok* by the Ponevezher Rav, #8) allow the purchase of chametz after Pesach from such an establishment even if there wasn't a valid sale of a store's chametz. However, other authorities are stringent in a case where a Jew owns a substantial minority interest in a corporation that enables him to have a substantial voice in the management of the enterprise (see *Igros Moshe EH* 1:7). Nonetheless, there is greater room for leniency when the store is owned by a publicly held corporation in which Jews only have a minority

stockholder interest, since according to a number of rabbinic authorities the Jewish stockholders would not be considered owners of the assets of the business but rather only stakeholders in the revenue stream of the non-Jewish owners (see *Minchas Yitzchok* 3:1, *Igros Moshe*, id).

Moreover, Rav Asher Weiss (*Minchas Asher*, volume 1, simanim 105-106) suggests that there is never any halakhic ownership by a Jew in any corporation that possesses chametz, regardless of the degree of Jewish ownership or involvement, since the respective roles of equity holders, administrators, and major decision makers reside in three different bodies (shareholders, CEO, and board of directors). However, his position does not appear to represent the predominant view among most rabbinic authorities.

How Long to Wait before Buying Chametz after Pesach

If a Jewish-owned store did not sell its chametz in a valid fashion, one may not buy chametz products from the store until it can be safely assumed that the products most likely came into the store's possession after Pesach (see *Mishna Berurah* 449:5). In terms of how long one should wait, the amount of time may vary based on the shelf life of the product in question.

The usual amount of time that is recommended by the rabbinic authorities with respect to most store items is until either Lag B'Omer or



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Shavuos. As a general rule, rabbinic authorities are more likely to rely on a shorter time span when there are other mitigating considerations, such as a case when the Jew is only a minority owner in a corporate entity, or if there was at least a questionable sale, or when the turnover rate for the chametz product in question is relatively short.

Other Considerations

It is important to note that in addition to Jewish shop owners, there are also Jewish distributors of food, and sometimes a store owned by a non-Jew may still have many products that could be prohibited for consumption if the products came from a Jewish distributor who owned or purchased the chametz during Pesach.

The kashrus agencies do their best to research these types of issues, but there is sometimes room for leniency when one is not able to ascertain the original source, particularly when there is no compelling reason to presume that the chametz in the supermarket came from a prohibited source (see generally, *Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim* 4:96, who is lenient in certain doubtful situations regarding supermarkets).

Concluding Thoughts

The Gemora relates (*Berachos* 17a) that Rabbi Alexandri would append a prayer to his Shemoneh Esreh in which he would cry out to Hashem that we all want to do the will of the Almighty but the “yeast in the dough” (a term for chametz) and the oppression of the hostile kingdoms get in the way. Rashi comments that the “yeast in the dough” refers to the evil inclination within each of us.

Our punctilious observance of the laws of abstaining from *chametz she’avar alav HaPesach* enables us to come closer to performing the will of Hashem during the entire year. It is therefore appropriate to conclude this article with the final words of Rabbi Alexandri’s prayer: “May it be Your will that we be rescued from these negative forces and that we return to You to fulfill the precepts of Your will with a full heart.” Chag Kasher v’Sameach.

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FINDING CHAMETZ ON PESACH

“**R**abbi, help! I found chametz on Pesach. What should I do?”

This question arises surprisingly frequently considering the great diligence most employ in their homes when preparing for Pesach. The truth is that after further inquiry, the items discovered are often not your classic chametz items. Frequently they are medications that do not appear on one of the “approved for Pesach” lists or various toiletries that contain oatmeal or other chametz ingredients.

What, in fact, is the halachic status of those items, and if they are chametz what should be done with them in light of the prevalent practice of selling chametz before Pesach?

A brief overview of the different types of chametz will help clarify the status of these items when discovered on Pesach.

Chametz is the result of any one of the five grains that come in contact with water and are left to leaven for more than 18 minutes prior to being baked. There are other factors such as heat, leaving the dough without being worked, and liquids mixed with the grain that can speed up or change the leavening process.¹

However, there are times when the chametz mixture is not fit for human consumption. This type of chametz, *chametz nuksha*,² is not forbidden biblically to own or to see in one’s possession over Pesach, and the

requirement to destroy it prior to Pesach is only *mederabanan* (M”B 442:2).³ If the chametz is not even fit for canine consumption — it is completely inedible — then it has no halachic status as chametz and there is not even an obligation *mederabanan* to destroy it prior to Pesach (Sh”A 442:2).

This, then, is the basis of allowing all medications, soaps, creams, shampoos, deodorants and other toiletries to be used on Pesach even if they contain chametz ingredients. None of the chametz is fit for consumption, it is completely inedible and therefore does not have the status of chametz at all.

So why the lists?

The main concern stems from the opinion of the Rosh (*Pesachim* 1:2), codified in the *Mishna Berura* 442:43, that when one eats chametz that has been rendered inedible he has, by the very act of eating, given significance (*achshevei*) to the inedible as food and it is therefore once again considered chametz, even though for others it would not have the status of chametz. Thus, it would seem that in particular, when it comes to medications that are consumed orally, even if the chametz has been rendered inedible, the act of eating it should be problematic according to this opinion of the Rosh.

However, many *poskim*, including Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe Orach Chaim* 2:92), do not think that this opinion of the Rosh would apply to a case such as medicine where often times people must eat bitter or otherwise disgusting items for their health, even if they would not otherwise eat them. Therefore, Rav Moshe says that medications with inedible chametz ingredients would not be problematic on Pesach even according to the Rosh.⁴

In a similar vein, Rav Moshe writes that the logic of *achshevei* would not be relevant to other types of benefit from the chametz such as washing or anointing, and therefore toiletries containing chametz would not be a chametz concern.⁵

However, Rav Aryeh Leib Gunzberg writes in his *Sha'agas Aryeh* (75) that it seems that chametz foods and drinks that are not fit for consumption are not permitted even for medicinal purposes. In his opinion, "*achshevei*" still applies, even though these products are not even fit for canine consumption and are like "the dust of the earth." As such, it is prohibited to

ingest them. **It is important to note that one should not discontinue use of liquid, chewable or any other medicine without consulting with one's doctor and rabbi.**

One specific area that may be different relates to cosmetics containing alcohol. There are different types of alcohol, and while isopropyl alcohol comes from petroleum, ethyl alcohol is made from the fermentation of starch, sugar, and other carbohydrates. Ethyl alcohol can be produced from grains, which would render it chametz. As a general rule, all alcohol not intended for human consumption is denatured, meaning it contains additives to make it unfit for consumption. However, it is important to note that denatured alcohol does not have a different chemical composition and therefore the process can theoretically be reversed.

Seemingly, denatured alcohol should be considered unfit for canine consumption, and products containing this alcohol should therefore be permitted to own and use on Pesach. However, *poskim*, including Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe Orach Chaim* 3:62), are concerned that a suffering alcoholic who is desperate for alcohol will consume this denatured alcohol, and therefore even in its denatured state it does not have the status of being inedible.

There are those who will refrain from any of these products because of the severity of the prohibition of chametz. One should consult his or her rabbi to determine what the appropriate practice should be. However, it would seem that according to all opinions, if these inedible items, even if they contain actual chametz ingredients, were found on Pesach, there would be

no reason at all to destroy them, and the products could simply be put on the side for after Pesach.⁶

What would be the halacha if actual, edible chametz is found on Pesach?

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 446:1) records that if you find chametz on Chol Hamoed you must burn it immediately; if it's found on one of the days of Yom Tov you must cover it lest you come to eat it, and then you burn it on motzei Yom Tov.⁷

What if the chametz you find in your possession doesn't belong to you, but to a non-Jew? The *Shulchan Aruch* writes (446:3) that if chametz from your non-Jewish neighbor rolls onto your roof on Pesach, you push it back with a stick (if it was on Chol Hamoed), and if it was on Yom Tov itself you cover it until after Yom Tov because it is *muktzah*. Why? You don't violate *bal yeraeh* (the prohibition against owning chametz) since it's not yours (M"B 9), so there's no need to burn it (and you wouldn't be allowed to burn it since it's not yours), but we don't want it to remain in the possession of the Jew, lest he come to accidentally eat it.

These two halachos lead to a fascinating conundrum as to what should be done nowadays if one finds chametz on Pesach. What's the issue? Common practice is to sell chametz,⁸ and generally, included in the bill of sale is a clause that reads that "I sell all chametz that I own knowingly or unknowingly wherever it may be," and then we specify places where we know there is chametz. When chametz is now found, (not in one of those designated places), who does the chametz belong to? Does it belong to the Jew who initially owned it, or as a result of the bill of sale of the *mechiras chametz*, has this chametz that the

Jew was unaware of also belong to the non-Jew? The implication for what should be done is immense. Which of the two *halachos* mentioned above applies? Must it be burned as is the halacha for the chametz of a Jew discovered on Pesach, or is it forbidden to burn it since it truthfully belongs to the non-Jew?!

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (*Mikraei Kodesh Pesach* Volume 1 siman 74) is troubled by this question and presumes that chametz found by a person who sold his chametz with such a provision should be hidden away, and it is wrong to burn it (Rav Frank even briefly entertains the possibility that burning the chametz would undermine and invalidate the entire sale!).

Rav Shmuel Vosner (*Shu"t Shevet Halevi* Volume 9 siman 116) is not sure that it would, in fact, be problematic to burn this chametz. Why not? Although halachically, the *mechira* is done in a way that is completely valid, the non-Jew has no intention of ever physically benefitting from the chametz he purchased; his intention is to perform a halachically significant act of sale and to sell it back to the Jew after Pesach. Since

this little bit of chametz would not in any way impact the final value of the larger quantity of chametz that was sold, it is as if the non-Jew was *mochel*, forgave that loss. Rav Vosner seems to appreciate the novelty of this approach and its weakness in that it seems to diminish the legitimacy of the sale, and concludes that if one wishes, the chametz that is found can be lifted and brought to the place where the rest of the sold chametz has been stored away for Pesach.

Perhaps if the rabbi selling the chametz would stipulate in advance with the non-Jew, explicitly, that any chametz found on Pesach would be allowed to be burned, that would allow the original halacha cited in *Shulchan Aruch* to remain intact (even though, *me'ikar hadin*, it may not be required), and at the same time not create any perception that the sale is not a completely appropriate, legally sound transaction. Alternatively, perhaps it is worth revisiting the value of including this specific clause in the bill of sale, and whether what is gained outweighs the complications it potentially creates.

Endnotes

1. See *Shulchan Aruch* O"Ch 459:2 for a more detailed discussion.
2. See *Biur Halacha* 462:2 "Memaharim" who discusses another type of possible *chametz nuksha* in a case where fruit juice is mixed with the grains. This issue and the status of that mixture is very relevant to the status of egg matzah on Pesach.
3. *Mishna Berura* 442:2 points out that this is only true if the *chametz* was never fit for human consumption, however, if at one time it was edible then it must reach a higher threshold of not being fit for a dog to eat in order to lose its status as chametz.
4. If, however, there was flavoring or the medicine was chewed in a normal fashion, it could be that the logic of the Rosh would be a concern.
5. One exception would be certain liquid alcohols, because it could be changed into edible liquid fairly easily (this is a *chumra* of Rav Moshe that is more widely accepted).
6. This is because the whole issue is rabbinic in nature, combined with the fact that *achshevei* would only apply when one is actually planning on ingesting it and that most ethyl alcohol is not actual chametz but kitniyos.
7. There's a fascinating machlokes whether or not the *bracha* of "al biur chametz" should be recited. See *M" B* 435:5.
8. Even though no such requirement exists if someone does *bedika* and *bittul* and rids him or herself of all chametz.

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BNEI TORAH REFLECT ON ANTI-SEMITISM

We are living now during very difficult times, times that require our introspection, thinking, understanding, care, and concern.

I would like to divide my talk into two parts. The first consists of reflections on the notion of anti-Semitism, *b'chlal*, and the second consists of *divrei chizuk* to you, *bonei Torah* and *bonei yeshiva*, to help you deal with the difficulties that are confronting us especially now, today, as we begin the new *zman*. I want to help us engage with our Torah studies, and our lives in general, with integrity and with

substance, in spite of everything that we are encountering in the world around us now.

My first point is that, historically, what we are facing is not new. As we begin to reflect on the situation confronting us now, it is important to understand that this is not a reality that we have never encountered before, even in the United States. As a matter of fact, within the first few moments after Jews arrived here for the very first time, in 1654, we encountered anti-Semitism.

Peter Stuyvesant was the representative of the Dutch West India Company here in New Amsterdam,

a settlement that later became New York. On September 22, 1654, shortly after the Jews first arrived here, he sent a letter back home to the *ba'alabatom* in charge of New Amsterdam to inform them that he felt strongly that the Jews do not belong there. He wrote:

The Jews who have arrived would nearly all like to remain here, but learning that they (with their customary usury and deceitful trading with the Christians) were very repugnant . . . to the people having the most affection for you: the Deaconry also fearing that owing to their present indigence they might become a

This article is an edited transcript of a talk I delivered in the Fischel Beis Midrash at Yeshiva University on January 22, 2020. I have maintained the oral nature of the presentation, including the Ashkenazis pronunciation of Hebrew words.

charge in the coming winter, we have, for the benefit of this weak and newly developing place and the land in general, deemed it useful to require them in a friendly way to depart; praying also most seriously in this connection, for ourselves and also for the general community of your worships, that this deceitful race, - such hateful enemies and blasphemers of [Christianity], - not be allowed further to infect this new colony, to the detraction of your worships and the dissatisfaction of your worships' most affectionate subjects.¹

Do you hear such language? This group of “deceitful,” “repugnant,” “hateful enemies” and “blasphemers” cannot be allowed “to infect” this beautiful *olam ha-chadash* called New Amsterdam! Jews show up in this city, are greeted with a *shalom aleichem* and told *be-lashon nekiyah*, “in a friendly way,” to get out of here; we don't want you. The moment we arrive here we are met with derision and with rejection.

There is a history of anti-Semitism in the United States. Now is not the time to go into detail; I'll mention just two other examples. In probably the most blatant official anti-Semitic act in American history, General Ulysses S. Grant implemented “General Order No. 11” in 1862, expelling all Jews from territories under his control.² Later, in the 1930's, there was a Catholic priest by the name of Father Charles Coughlin who spewed vicious anti-Semitism on his radio show that had 20 million listeners.³

And so, what we are experiencing now is not new. This is something that, regretfully, we have had to deal with before, even in this country. Having said that, I would say that what we are facing today is especially disturbing because the situation had been much

better and quieter for the last number of decades, *baruch Hashem*, more or less. And therefore, it behooves us to try to understand how we can react to what is going on now. It is particularly important for us as *bnei Torah* and *bnei yeshiva* to think about what we need to do to maintain our commitments, our learning, our *talmud Torah* and our *yir'as Shamayim*.⁴

Esav Sonei Es Yaakov

Anti-Semitism has been a part of the millennia-old Jewish experience long before Jews arrived in the United States. We annually recite the words in the Hagadah, שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו, in every generation there were those who sought to destroy us. Peter Stuyvesant was not *mechadesh* a new *he'arah*; we already had to deal with this reality from the very dawn of our history. These words in the Hagadah are followed by a discussion of the Yaakov-Lavan encounter. צא ולמד מה בקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב אבינו. In fact, in *She'er Yisrael*, the Netziv's thoughtful essay on the nature of anti-Semitism, he makes a great deal out of the Yaakov-Lavan encounter.⁵ But I want to focus primarily on the Yaakov-Esav encounter.

After having been separated for many years, Yaakov hears that Esav is coming toward him and he prepares himself for this encounter.

וירץ עשו לקראתו ויהבקהו ויפל על צוארו וישקהו ויבכו.
Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept.

Bereishis 33:4

Rashi notes that there are dots on top of the word *vayishakehu* in the Torah, which is meant to indicate that the word is not to be understood

as it simply appears, as what the reader would normally think it means. *Vayishakehu* does not really mean *vayishakehu*, a word generally indicating that Esav expressed warm feelings to Yaakov that would normally be demonstrated by a kiss. In fact, it means something else. And Rashi presents two options.

The first is that, in fact, Esav did not really kiss Yaakov; rather, he just went through the motions. The second opinion is the one relevant to us. Rashi quotes Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who stated a principle, הלכה היא בידוע שעשו שונא את יעקב. It is a halacha. What is more important to us than a halacha? We live our lives by halacha. הלכה היא בידוע. It is well known, everybody knows, it is simply obvious, that Esav hates Yaakov and therefore, it is inconceivable that Esav kissed Yaakov. Of course he did not kiss Yaakov. The *p'shat*, or simple meaning, cannot be that he kissed Yaakov and therefore, says Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the dots on top of the word are meant to indicate that the real meaning is the opposite, that, in this case, Esav *really did* kiss Yaakov. At that moment, Esav's mercy was aroused and he kissed Yaakov with all his heart. This time it really *does mean* literally *vayishakehu*.

הלכה היא בידוע שעשו שונא את יעקב. What does this mean?

First, it is interesting to note that in commenting on this verse, the author of the *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Be-ha'alos'cha* #722) formulates this phrase not as הלכה היא בידוע שעשו שונא את יעקב but בידוע שעשו שונא את יעקב, it is well known that Esav hates Yaakov, without the words *halacha hi*. But most sources do use the phrase *halacha hi* and this raises a question. How is the word *halacha* relevant here? Is the

fact that Esav hates Yaakov a *halacha*, a law? You're not allowed to do it on *Shabbos*? You're not allowed to eat it or drink it? This is not the kind of a language that we would normally associate with this kind of a statement.

Indeed, both R. Zevi Hirsch Chayis and R. Baruch Halevi Epstein point to a number of places in rabbinic literature where, in fact, the word *halacha* is used in a non-legal context, one that we would consider to be *aggadah*:

גם על עניני אגדה נופל שם הלכה.

The word halacha can also refer to matters of Aggadah.

Maharatz Chayis, Berachos 31a

גם עניני ישראל בכלל והדיעות להם יכוננו בשם הלכה.

Matters relating to the Jewish people and information about them can also be called "halacha."

Torah Temimah, Bamidbar

27:21:35

Even something that is a *devar aggadah* can also be referred to as *halacha*.

But, even if it is possible to defend the use of the word *halacha* in such a non-legal or *agaddic* context, why go out of your way to call Esav's hatred for Yaakov a *halacha*? What is the significance of referring to it that way? Most striking in this context is a *teshuvah* by Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe, Choshen Mishpat 2:77*) that addresses this question.

He was responding to Jews in England who claimed that their Jewish schools were not getting the kind of support from the English government that they felt they deserved. They asked Rav Moshe if they could seek support from authorities outside of England to put pressure on the English authorities to do what they, the Jews,

felt was right for their schools.

In response, Rav Moshe counseled against this strategy because he was afraid that it would arouse enmity (*eivah*) among the English authorities against the Jews. And he went on to write that Jew-hatred is high even among those nations who appear to treat Jews favorably. You think they love you? You think they respect you? Not at all. And, in support of this position, he cited the Rashi with which we began, הלכה היא בידוע שעשו, שונא את יעקב *halacha* is immutable, unchanging, constant and permanent, so is Jew-hatred or anti-Semitism:

כמו שהלכה לא משתנית כך שנאת עשו ליעקב לא משתנית.

Just as halacha doesn't change, so too, the hatred of Esav for Yaakov doesn't change.

And so, I think that at the end of the day it's a reality. I was born in America. I have benefitted enormously from America. I have incredible *hakoras ha-tov* for America. Rav Moshe famously called America "the *medinah shel chessed*." But at the end of the day, there is something going on here that transcends my understanding and my comfort level. Of course, we need to be vigilant. We need to be proactive in our battle against anti-Semitism. We need to do whatever we can to defend ourselves. We dare not be complacent or passive. Of course. But it is a fact. There is no explanation or justification for it. There is no rationale. *Azoy iz dos*. It is what it is. It's a given. It's a *metzi'us*.⁶

"These Times"

The reality of anti-Semitism has also found its way into halachic literature. The Gemara (*Yevamos 47a*) discusses

the procedure for conversion. If a prospective *ger* comes to a *beis din* "these times (*bi-zman ha-zeh*)" and announces his or her desire to convert to Judaism, the first response is dissuasion:

מה ראית שבאת להתגייר אי אתה יודע שישראל בזמן הזה דוויים דחופים סחופים ומטורפין ויסורין באין עליהם.

What is wrong with you? Why in the world do you want to convert? Don't you know that the Jewish people are now afflicted, oppressed, downtrodden and harassed? Why would you choose to be part of such a persecuted people?

And what is the reference to "these times (*bi-zman ha-zeh*)"? The times of Chazal? Yes, but not only then. This ruling, and the sentiment it expresses, applies to *any time anyone* learns this Gemara. It applies to *all times, whenever* a *ger* may come with the desire to convert. "These times" are *these* times. And indeed this ruling is cited in the *Mishneh Torah* of the Rambam (*Hilchos Issurei Bi'ah*, 14:1) virtually word for word. "These times" have now been extended some thousand years. And they extend until today.

Looking to the Future

Given this reality, how do we look to the future? Where can we find the strength and the fortitude to proceed, assured not only of survival but even of a glorious and meaningful future? The Rambam continues (14:4) that one tells a *ger* who persists in his or her quest, who, despite it all, still wants to join the Jewish people, that although we may be downtrodden, our existence is assured for all eternity. כל האומות כלין והן עומדין. All the nations will be destroyed but

the Jewish people will remain. We have a *havtachah*, a divine promise, a divine reassurance that, despite all our challenges, we will exist forever. Even though things look difficult and, as a matter of fact *are* difficult, we are here now and will be here forever. We aren't going anywhere. Hashem has whatever Hashem's *cheshbonos* may be, but our current existence — and our ongoing future existence — is absolutely assured. We shouldn't despair and think that our very existence as a nation is in jeopardy. *Chas ve-shalom*. We have a *havtachah* from the *Ribbono Shel Olam* that we will persevere and exist for all time

The Rambam makes this explicitly clear in his *Iggeres Teman*, written to give *chizuk* to the Jews in Yemen at the end of the twelfth century who were beset with terrible challenges and persecution; greater challenges, much greater challenges, than we face right now, in 2020, in America. The Rambam writes:

וכבר הבטיח לנו ה' יתעלה על ידי נביאיו שאנו
לא נכלה ולא נכחד ולא נעדר מהיות אומה
נעלה.

Know, dear Jews of Yemen, that we will not be destroyed, nor forgotten, nor disappear from being an exalted nation; not just from being a nation but from being an exalted nation.

And he continues, in a striking and powerful parallel:

וכשם שלא יתכן לתאר בטול מציאותו יתעלה
כך לא יתכן להכחידנו ולכלותנו מן העולם.

Just like it is inconceivable to imagine that God will cease to exist, so is it inconceivable to imagine that the Jewish people will cease to exist.

Just as God is eternal, so are the Jewish people.⁷

And what sustained the Jews of Yemen in the twelfth century sustains us now,

in the twenty-first century, the divine assurance that our existence is assured for all eternity.

It is true that this assurance is a national one, not an individual one. It is for the *klal*, not the *yachid*, for Klal Yisrael, not “Reb Yisrael.” Indeed, each one of us needs to do whatever we can to merit our *own* personal existence. We need to take responsibility for whatever *we* can do. But we also take comfort in the fact that we are part of a larger nation assured of eternal existence.

Our Miracle of Survival

This notion that, somehow, we Jews survive despite all the enormous challenges and difficulties we face, is recognized also by Gentiles. Let me give you one example. Nicholas Berdayev was a very prominent Russian religious philosopher and dissident who died in exile, in Russia, in 1948. He understood how Jewish survival defied any rational explanation. In his *The Meaning of History*, he wrote:

I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint. And, indeed, according to the materialistic and positivist criterion, this people ought long ago to have perished. Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under

*absolutely peculiar conditions, and the fateful role played by them in history; all these point to the particular and mysterious foundation of their destiny.*⁸

Throughout our long, complex history — from ancient through modern times — we have been forced to confront demographic dispersion, political disintegration, economic dislocation, social alienation, psychological oppression, subtle as well as crude discrimination and, worst of all, brute physical annihilation.⁹ And you know what? *Nisim ve-nifla'os!* Miracle of miracles! We are still here! This non-Jew understood that the existence of the Jew defied any of the rational categories with which he was familiar. He recognized it to be what he described as “a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon.” It is mysterious, it is inexplicable. Something unusual is going on here. But we know exactly what it is. It is the *havtachah*, the assurance, that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* gave us. *This* is what keeps us going as a people and this is what also keeps us going as individuals.

Dry Bones

I want to now move to *divrei chizuk* and want to share with you a thought that I believe can help us confront the challenges that we currently face, and give us confidence that, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, with *siyata d'Shmaya*, we will be able to persevere.

We read in the *haftarah* on *Shabbos Chol ha-Mo'ed Pesach* how Yechezkel takes dry bones and then places sinews, flesh and skin upon them and they come alive (Yechezkel 37). He literally is *mechayeh mesim*.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 92b) picks

up where Yechezkel left off and wonders what happened to those “dry bones” that he brought to life. What happened to the “*mesim she-hechiyeh Yechezkel*?” The Gemara presents three opinions:

ר"א אומר מתים שהחיה יחזקאל עמדו על רגליהם ואמרו שירה ומתו ... ר"א בנו של ר' יוסי הגלילי אומר מתים שהחיה יחזקאל עלו לארץ ישראל ונשאו נשים והולידו בנים ובנות. עמד ר"י בן בתירא על רגליו ואמר אני מבני בניהם והללו תפילין שהניח לי אבי אבא מהם.
R. Eliezer said: The dead that Yechezkel revived stood on their feet, sang praise and died ... R. Eliezer the son of R. Yosi ha-Gelili said: The dead that Yechezkel revived went to Israel, married women and had sons and daughters. R. Yehudah ben Beseira stood up and said, "I am a descendant [of theirs] and here are the tefillin that my grandfather left to me from them."

A number of years ago, I heard a powerful interpretation of this Gemara from my father, Rabbi Herschel Schacter, *zichrono livrachah*. He was a chaplain in the American Army during World War II and was the first American Jewish chaplain to liberate a concentration camp, Buchenwald, on April 11, 1945. He interpreted this Gemara in terms of the survivors of the Shoah.

What happened to the "*mesim shehechiyeh Yechezkel*?" What happened to the survivors of the Shoah, literally dry bones who came to life? My father *z"l* suggested that they constituted three different groups.

The first were those who “stood on their feet, sang praise and died.” They were happy to be alive, they expressed praise, but then “they died.” They left the Jewish people. In terms of *nitzchiyus Yisrael*, they were gone. Please understand. I'm not judging

them. I have no right to judge them. I don't know what I would have done were I to have been there. But they decided to no longer be a part of our people. They could not figure out a way to continue to identify as Jews. They decided not to hitch their wagons to the caravan of Jewish destiny. “They died.”

The second group went to Eretz

The key to our eternal existence are the *tefillin*, the *leichter*, the candlesticks, the *esrog* box that, somehow, my *zaydy* and *bubby* were able to hide and I found it and I'm holding it.

Yisrael and they built a state. One-quarter, 25 percent, of the roughly 600,000 Jews who were living in Israel in May of 1948 when the State of Israel was founded were Holocaust survivors. What an extraordinary achievement.

And then the third group. R. Yehudah ben Beseira gets up and says, “Yes, this is great. Thank God you were not among ‘the dead.’ Thank God you are part of Jewish destiny. You went to Israel, you made sure to create families. You had faith that there would be a future. Great. But that is not enough. Nothing will last unless you are holding your *zaydy's tefillin*,

your *bubby's* Shabbos candles, your parents' Chanukah menorah.”

What is the key for *nitzchiyus Yisrael*? What did we do when we were faced with the Shoah, the most brutal example of anti-Semitism in Jewish history ever? It is a massive understatement to say that it was worse than it is now in the United States. Some of the survivors rejected Jewish identity. Some of them built a State of Israel. Great. But the key to our eternal existence, the sources of the *havtachah* that we have from the *Ribbono shel Olam*, are the *tefillin*, the *leichter*, the candlesticks, the *esrog* box that, somehow, my *zaydy* and *bubby* were able to hide and I found it and I'm holding it. At the end of the day, *this* is what keeps us. *This* is what sustains us when we're faced with difficulty, with challenges.

Yes, we experienced Peter Stuyvesant and Ulysses S. Grant and Father Coughlin. We saw the Rashi, the *Yalkut Shimoni*, the *Maharatz Chayis*, the *Torah Temimah* and especially Rav Moshe underscoring the principle of הלכה היא בידוע שעשו שונא את יעקב. We saw the Rambam how Jewish people are now afflicted, oppressed, downtrodden and harassed. But we also have a *havtachah*, we have *chizuk*. The Rambam himself in the *Mishneh Torah* gave us *chizuk*. In the *Iggeres Teiman*, the Rambam gave us *chizuk*. The greatest *chizuk* is, in spite of all the challenges, “I am a descendant [of theirs] and here are the *tefillin* that my grandfather left to me from them.”

You are heirs to an extraordinary *mesorah*. You are sitting in this *beis medrash* because *talmud Torah* matters to you, because *yiras Shamayim* matters to you. You chose to come to this yeshiva because living a meaningful Jewish life matters to you,

because you have parents and *bubbys* and *zaydys* who are heirs to a great *mesorah*, many of whom know what it means to be *moser nefesh* for *am Yisrael* and *Toras Yisrael*.

You are blessed to live during this time. Yes, there are challenges, but, ultimately, the way to overcome them is to hold on to those *tefillin*, to take your *Gemaras* and hold them up high and dance with them. Be proud of your *mesorah* and devote yourselves to it fully, *be-lev va-nefesh*. Continue the *talmud Torah*, the *yiras Shamayim*, the *mesorah* of your *bubbys* and your *zaydys* and their *bubbys* and *zaydys* and so that, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, together we will put this *parashah* in our history behind us and we will be able to go with full joy and full-throated enthusiasm to the days of *Eliyahu Hanavi*, the harbinger of redemption, *bimherah v'yamenu, amen*.

Endnotes

1. Samuel Oppenheim, "The Early History of the Jews in New York, 1654-1664," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 18 (1909):4-5.
2. Jonathan D. Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* (New York, 2012).
3. Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio* (New York, 1996).
4. For a balanced view of anti-Semitism in America, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "American Anti-Semitism," in David Berger, ed., *History and Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem, 1986), 115-28.
5. *She'er Yisrael* is printed at the end of the *Neziv's* commentary on *Shir ha-Shirim*. See R. Naphtali Zevi Yehudah Berlin, *Megillat Shir ha-Shirim* (Jerusalem, 2008), 263-88.
6. I thank Rabbi Ezra Goldschmiedt for bringing to my attention a powerful passage from R. Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, *Sefer Teshuvot Ibra*, vol. 2 (New York, 1989), 233, that takes

very strong exception to this fatalistic attitude. Rabbi Henkin goes so far as to claim that this approach is *נגד האמת ונגד חז"ל והמקרא*.

For general books on anti-Semitism, see *History and Hate* (above, n. 4); Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews?: The Reason for Antisemitism* (New York, 1983, 2003, 2016). Most recently, see Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (New York, 2019), and Bari Weiss, *How to Fight Anti-Semitism* (New York, 2019).

7. See R. Yosef Kapach, *Iggerot ha-Rambam* (Jerusalem, 1972), 26.

8. I encountered this passage in Isadore Twersky, "Survival, Normalcy, Modernity," in Moshe Davis, ed., *Zionism in Transition* (New York, 1980), 349.

9. See *ibid*.

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WE ARE NOT ALONE: PERSPECTIVES ON JEWISH VICTIMHOOD

Anti-Semitism as an Affront to Hashem

Anti-Semitism has been an integral part of the story of the Jewish people. Throughout the ages, our Sages have sought to provide theological context to the anti-Semitism in their midst as well as to the phenomenon of *sinas Yisrael* in general. One prime example of this appears in a letter penned by the Rambam who was asked by the Jews of Yemen to address a messianic movement that arose in the wake of religious persecution. The Rambam's response, known as "Iggeres Teiman," contains a profound insight into the phenomenon of anti-Semitism:

ומפני שיחד אותנו הבורא במצותיו ובחוקותיו והתבארה מעלתנו על זולתנו בכללותו ובמשפטיו שנאמר (דברים ד, ח) ומי גוי גדול אשר לו חקים ומשפטים צדיקים וגו' קנאונו העכו"ם כלם על דתנו קנאה גדולה וילחצו מלכיהם בשבילה לערער עלינו שטנה ואיבה ורצונם להלחם בה' ולעשות מריבה עמו ואלהים הוא ומי ירב לו ואין לך זמן מאז

שנתנה לנו תורה זו עד זמננו זה שכל מלך עכו"ם גובר או מכריח או מתגבר או אנס שאין תחלת כוונתו ודעתו לסתור תורתנו ולהפך דתנו באונס בנצחון ובחרב.

Since the Creator has distinguished us by His laws and precepts, and our pre-eminence is manifested in His rules and statutes, as Scripture says, "And what great nation is there, that has righteous statutes and ordinances; such as all this law that I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:8), therefore all the nations took great umbrage against us regarding our faith, and their kings have applied themselves because of it to persecute us. Their true agenda was to wage war against God and to challenge Him. However, given that He is omnipotent, no one cannot actually challenge Him. There has been no era since Revelation, that some despot who has attained power, be he violent or ignoble, has not made it his first aim and purpose to destroy our law, and to vitiate our religion, by means of the sword, by violence, or by brute force.

In the Rambam's view, anti-Semitism stems from a conscious

or subconscious desire to challenge Hashem and His Torah. The Jewish people are the targets of this campaign because their *raison d'être* is to act as Hashem's representatives in the world.¹

Shechinta B'galusa

The notion that anti-Semitism represents, at its core, an attempt to wage war against Hashem dovetails with a concept known as *Shechinta b'galusa* — namely, that Hashem's presence accompanies the Jewish people into exile and does not forsake them. Even as we endure the brunt of attacks and harsh decrees at the hands of our enemies, there is a palpable aspect of G-d that suffers along with us, *k'viyachol* (in human terms).

Shechinta b'galusa is a lofty concept whose roots can be traced to pesukim in Tanach, *ma'amarei Chazal*, and kabbalistic sources. This essay will not address the concept in all its complexity and many manifestations. Rather, we will frame the concept

in broad strokes, with an eye toward gleaming insights that can provide a measure of solace and inspiration for times such as these when we are unfortunately witness to a worldwide resurgence of anti-Semitism.

The Divine Assurance Given to Yaakov Avinu

An explicit reference in the Torah to the notion of *Shechinta b'galusa* comes in the form of a divine assurance given to Yaakov Avinu as he prepared to leave Eretz Yisrael in anticipation of the impending *galus* in the land of Egypt.

אֲנֹכִי אֵרָד אִתְּךָ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶיךָ גַם עֹלָה וְיוֹסֵף יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל עֵינֶיךָ.

I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you back; and Joseph shall place his hand on your eyes

Bereishis 46:4

Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachya note that Onkelos, in his translation of the word “ארד” (descend), employs the verb איחות, which implies a physical descent. However, in other instances where the verb “ירד” appears in connection with Hashem, Onkelos renders it “אתגלי” — “I will reveal,” scrupulously avoiding a translation with physical connotations. By opting for a literal translation here, Onkelos implies that Hashem was assuring Yaakov that His physical presence would be with him and his progeny for the duration of the Egyptian exile.²

Inasmuch as *galus Mitzrayim* is a prototype of future exiles, Chazal (*Mechilta*, Parshas Bo) extend this idea to other exiles as well:

גָּלוּ לְמִצְרַיִם שְׂכִינָה עִמָּהֶם .. גָּלוּ לְבָבֶל שְׂכִינָה עִמָּהֶם .. גָּלוּ לְעִלְמַי שְׂכִינָה עִמָּהֶם ... גָּלוּ לְאֲדוּם שְׂכִינָה עִמָּהֶם.

They were exiled to Egypt, the Shechina was with them ... They were exiled to Babylonia, the Shechina was with them ... They were exiled to Ilam, the Shechina

was with them ... They were exiled to Edom, the Shechina was with them ...

Klal Yisrael's Redemption is Synonymous with Hashem's Self-Redemption

The next phrase in the pasuk, וְאֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶיךָ — “And I will also bring you back,” implies that Israel’s redemption from Egypt entailed a redemption for the Shechina as well. This corollary dimension to the concept of *Shechinta b'galusa*, and its paradoxical nature, is noted in the *Mechilta*:

אֲלֵמָלָא מִקְרָא כְּתוּב אִי אִפְשָׁר לְאִמְרוּ כְּבִיכּוֹל אִמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עֲצֻמָּן פְּדִיתָ.

If not for these verses, one could not say this. It is as if the Jewish people said to the Holy One Blessed be He, “You redeemed Yourself.”

Chazal discern the motif of Hashem’s self-redemption in the unique phraseology of a pasuk in Parshas Nitzavim, which foretells Hashem’s restoring the captivity of Bnei Yisrael:

וְשָׁב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצָךָ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפְצִיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה.

Then, Hashem, your G-d, will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you, and He will return and gather you in from all the peoples to which Hashem your G-d has scattered you.

Devarim 30:3

As Rashi notes, the word “*ve'shav*” (as distinct from *ve'heishiv*) connotes a reflexive act of self-return, implying that the return of Israel’s captivity also entails a return of the Shechina itself.³

In light of the above, we might conceptualize the notion of *Shechinta b'galusa* as consisting of three distinct, albeit related, motifs:

1. *Tza'ar haShechina* — the suffering that the Shechina experiences when the Jewish people suffer.

2. *Galus haShechina* — the exile and redemption of the Shechina that parallels the exile and redemption process of the Jewish people.

3. The shared identity and destiny that binds the Shechina with klal Yisrael.⁴

Our focus will be on the first of these motifs: *tza'ar haShechina*.⁵

Two Aspects of Tza'ar haShechina: Individual and Collective

As noted, *tza'ar haShechina* means that when we suffer in exile, Hashem suffers with us. The *Mechilta* (*Bo, Masechta D'Pischa* 14), presents two different applications of *tza'ar haShechina*, based on pesukim in Tanach:

וְכֵן אַתָּה מוֹצֵא כָּל זְמַן שִׁישְׂרָאֵל מִשׁוּעָבְדִּין כְּבִיכּוֹל שְׂכִינָה מִשׁוּעָבְדָת עִמָּהֶם שָׁנָה וִירָאוּ אֶת אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתַחַת רַגְלֵי כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לְבֵנֵת הַסַּפִּיר. וְכִשְׁנִגְאָלוּ מֵהָאָדָם הוּא אוֹמֵר וְכַעֲצָם הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטוֹהָה. וְנֹאמַר בְּכָל צָרָתָם לֹא צָרָה אֵין לִי אֵלָּא צָרָתָם צִיבּוּר צָרָתָם יַחֲדָה מִנִּין ת"ל יִקְרָאֵנִי וְאֶעֱנֶה עִמּוֹ אֲנִי בְּצָרָה ...

We find that whenever the Jewish people are oppressed, the Shechina, as it were, is oppressed with them as it states, “and they saw the God of Israel: under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire (the pavement is a reference to the leveinim, the bricks that the Jewish people used during their slavery in Egypt). When they were redeemed, what does it say, “like the very sky for purity.” And it says, “In all of their suffering, it is His suffering.” We only know this regarding the suffering of the community. How do we know that this also applies to the suffering of individuals? Because it states, “He will call Me and I will answer him, I am with him in suffering ...”

One of the pesukim cited by the *Mechilta* is from Yeshayahu 63:9:

בְּכָל צָרָתָם לֹא [לוֹ] צָרָה וּמִלֵּאף פָּנָיו הוֹשִׁיעֵם בְּאֶהְבָתוֹ וּבְחַמְלָתוֹ הוּא גָּאֵלָם וְיִנְטָלָם וְיִנְשָׂאָם כָּל יְמֵי עוֹלָם.

In all their troubles He was troubled, And the angel of His Presence saved them. In His love and pity He redeemed them; He raised them, and exalted them all the days of old.

The word “lo” can be spelled with an *aleph*, meaning “no” or with a *vav*, meaning “His.” The verse is written with an *aleph*, but is to be read with a *vav*. Ibn Ezra and Radak adopt the latter rendition and explain the pasuk to mean that whenever we suffer, Hashem, *k’viyachol*, experiences distress as well. This accords with the proof text cited in the Mechilta.

The last pasuk cited by the *Mechilta* is from Tehillim (91:15):

יְקַרְאֵנִי וְאֶעֱנֶהוּ עִמּוֹ אֲנֹכִי בְצָרָה אֶחְלֹצֶהוּ
וְאֶכְבְּדֶהוּ.

He will call Me and I will answer him, I am with him in distress; I will release him and I will honor him.

The *Mechilta* interprets this pasuk as a reference to the suffering of an individual. Apparently, *tzaar haShechina* has two manifestations. The first relates to the suffering of the community at large, where the Shechina suffers along with it. This motif is expressed by the pasuk בכל צרתם לו צר — In all their troubles He was troubled. [This aspect of *Shechinta b’galusa* is also implicit in the comments of Chazal (*Megillah* 29b and *Mechilta* *ibid*) that in each period of exile, Hashem is with us.]

Second, when an individual Jew is in distress, Hashem is present in his suffering. This dimension of *tzaar haShechina* is captured in the pasuk עמו אנכי בצרה.

In other words, the Shechina doesn’t merely identify with the plight of the collective community, it also shares in the suffering of each and every individual.

This second manifestation is echoed in a statement of the Mishna in the name of Rabbi Meir (*Sanhedrin* 46a):

אמר רבי מאיר בשעה שאדם מצטער שכינה מה לשון אומרת קלני מראשי קלני מזרועי.
Rabbi Meir said: When a person suffers, what does the Shechina say? Relieve the pain from My head, relieve the pain from My arm.

Tzaar HaShechina in Galus Mitzrayim

We find allusions to both manifestations of *tzaar haShechina* in the context of the Egyptian exile. When appearing to Moshe Rabbeinu at the burning bush, Hashem expresses his empathy for the pain of the Jewish people:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' רְאֵה רָאִיתִי אֶת עַנְי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת צַעֲקָתָם שָׁמַעְתִּי מִפְּנֵי נִגְשֵׁיו כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת מַכְאֲבֵיהֶם וְאָרַד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּלְהַעֲלֹתוֹ מִן הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וּרְחֹבָה אֶל אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ אֶל מְקוֹם הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי.

Hashem said, “I have indeed seen the affliction of My people in Egypt and have heeded their cry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of its suffering. I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Shemos 3:7-8

Hashem is mindful of the suffering of the Jewish people and expresses His intention to rescue them. The singular phrase *machovav* — its suffering — would seem to be a reference to the Jewish people as a single unit. Hashem feels, as it were, the collective suffering of the Jewish people. This corresponds to the first pasuk noted above —

b’chol tzarosam lo tzar — In all their troubles He was troubled — which the Mechilta interpreted as referring to the *tzaras hatzibur*.

In connection with that same revelation, Rashi (*Shemos* 3:2) cites the second of the aforementioned *pesukim* to explain why Hashem appeared in a bush and not a tree.

”מתוך הסנה” - ולא אילן אחר משום עמו
אנכי בצרה.

*Out of a bush and not another tree because “I am with him in suffering.”*⁶

As noted, this verse refers to Hashem suffering along with each and every individual. From this perspective, *Ki yadati es machovav* — I am mindful of its suffering — takes on an additional layer of meaning. Not only does Hashem empathize with the collective distress of the community, He also feels the pain of each individual Jew who was subjected to the cruelty of the Egyptian servitude.

Nosei B’ol: Ethical Imperatives

The *ba’alei hamussar*, the great masters of ethical development, draw a valuable lesson from this concept. If Hashem suffers along with us, then we must try to emulate Him and likewise empathize with the suffering of others. This concept is known as *nosei b’ol im chaveiro* — carrying the burden along with one’s friend (who is suffering).

Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt”l, one of the great *ba’alei hamussar* of our time, considers this quality a “foundation of creation” (*Shiurei Chumash* to *Parshas Shemos*). In his *Alei Shur* (Vol. I, introduction to section 4), he emphasizes that that it is insufficient to merely avoid harming others; we should aspire to carry the load of others by “paying attention to their suffering” — thus emulating Hashem. Rav Wolbe

explains that in practical terms this means that in addition to performing acts of chesed toward others, we should make efforts to communicate empathic feelings and a sense of kinship, allowing them to recognize that are not alone in their pain.

Modeling the two types of *tza'ar haSechinah*, human empathy should be manifest on both a communal and an individual level. The Gemara, *Ta'anis* 11a, states:

תנו רבנן בזמן שישראל שרויין בצער ופירש אחד מהן באין שני מלאכי השרת שמלוין לו לאדם ומניחין לו ידיהן על ראשו ואומרים פלוני זה שפירש מן הצבור אל יראה בנחמת צבור תניא אידך בזמן שהצבור שרוי בצער אל יאמר אדם אלך לביתי ואוכל ואשתה ושלום עליך נפשי ... אלא יצער אדם עם הצבור שכן מצינו במשה רבינו שציער עצמו עם הצבור שנאמר (שמות יז, יב) וידי משה כבדים ויקחו אבן וישימו תחתיו וישב עליה וכי לא היה לו למשה כר אחת או כסת אחת לישב עליה אלא כך אמר משה הואיל וישראל שרויין בצער אף אני אהיה עמהם בצער וכל המצער עצמו עם הצבור זוכה ורואה בנחמת צבור.

Our rabbis taught: when the Jewish people are suffering and an individual separates himself from them, the two accompanying angels place their hands on his head and say, "this individual that separated himself from the community should not see the (eventual) liberation of the community." Another beraita states: when the community is suffering, one should not say, "I will go home, eat and drink and live my life" ... rather, he should suffer with the community, for we find that Moshe Rabbeinu suffered along with the community as it states (Shemos 17:12), "And Moshe's hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it." Did Moshe not have a pillow or a blanket to sit on? Rather, this is what Moshe said, "Since the Jewish people are suffering, I too will be with them in their suffering." Anyone who

suffers along with the community, merits to see the liberation of the community.

This passage is clearly focused on the imperative of being sensitive to the suffering of the larger community.

Additionally, we must also strive to identify with the suffering of specific individuals. One of the qualities enumerated in *Pirkei Avos* chapter 6 for acquiring Torah is the ability to be *nosei b'ol im chaveiro* — with an emphasis on the individual friend.

This quality is highlighted by the Torah in its description of Moshe Rabbeinu's early life, when he emerges from Pharaoh's palace and becomes aware of the suffering of his brethren. Rashi (Shemos 2:11) states:

"וירא בסבלותם" - נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מיצר עליהם.

He saw their suffering — He set his eyes and heart to suffer in their plight.

It was this quality that led Moshe to subsequently stand up to the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Jewish servant. Moshe suffered the plight of a single individual and saved him.⁷

Rejoicing with Others

The idea of *Shechinta b'galusa* and its application for us should not be limited to times of crisis. Just as Hashem is with us when we are suffering, so too does He rejoice with us in times of joy.

As elucidated by Rav Wolbe, this idea can be gleaned from the comments of the *Mechilta*, which highlights two halves of a prophetic vision shown to the elders at the time of Matan Torah:

ויראו את אלקי ישראל ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר וכעצם השמים לטהר. *And they saw the God of Israel: under His feet was the likeness of sapphire brickwork, like the essence of the heaven*

for purity. (Shemos 24:10)

What is the nature of this vision and its significance? Drawing on Chazal, Rashi states:

כמעשה לבנת הספיר - היא היתה לפניו בעת השיעבוד, לזכור צרתן של ישראל שהיו משועבדים במעשה לבנים. וכעצם השמים לטהר - משנגאלו היה אור וחדווה לפניו. *As it were the brickwork of sapphire — This had been before Him during the period of Egyptian slavery as a symbol of Israel's woes — for they were subjected to do brick-work. And as it were as the body of heaven for purity — This implies that as soon as they (the Israelites) were redeemed there was radiance and rejoicing before Him.*

We see that just as Hashem identified with His nation's pain by setting up a constant reminder in the form of a sapphire brick, so did He take pleasure, *k'viyachol*, in the Nation's joy, symbolized by the image of a clear sky to commemorate their redemption.

The ability to share in the joy of others is a hallmark of Aharon HaKohen – an attribute attested to by Hashem Himself. In the wake of Moshe Rabbeinu's reluctance to lead the Jewish people, motivated in part by his deference to his elder brother, Aharon, Hashem declared that not only will Aharon not feel jealous, but — to the contrary — "*v'ra'acha v'samach belibo*" — "he will see you and be joyous" (Shemos 4:14). Aharon's joy for Moshe Rabbeinu was rooted in Aharon's ability to fully embrace the simcha of others.⁸

Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim: Empathy and Simcha

As described in Parshas Tetzaveh, Aharon and all subsequent *kohanim gedolim* wore the names of the *shevatim* on two different garments.

The names were etched upon the *avnei shoham*, which were positioned on the shoulder straps of the *Eifod*. They were also etched upon the *Avnei Miluim*, the stones of the breastplate, which were worn on Aharon's heart. In both instances, the Torah references the word “*zikaron*” — remembrance (Shemos 28:12 and 28:9).

What was the nature of this remembrance? Some commentaries (see Rashi, Sforno) interpret it as referring to Hashem, who recalls the merit of the *shevatim*. Other commentaries, however, suggest that the remembrance refers to the mindfulness that the Kohen Gadol needed to have for the needs of the Jewish people (see *Hakesav Ve'hakabbalah*, *Tzeror Hamor*, *Be'er Yosef*). Taken in this vein, we may suggest that the two locations — on the shoulder and on the heart — allude to the two types of identification with klal Yisrael that a Jewish leader must strive for. Carrying the names of the *shevatim* on Aharon's shoulders symbolizes the imperative to “carry the load” of the people — being *nosei be'ol*. This entails feeling empathy for the suffering of Jewish people, both on a communal and individual level. On the other hand, bearing their names on the *Choshen* symbolizes that Aharon be cognizant of the simcha of the Jewish people. Just as the image of “*ke'etzem HaShamayim latohar*” shown in the prophetic image at Matan Torah alludes to the joy of Israel's redemption, so does the clarity emblematic of the *Urim V'Tumim* represent times that are peaceful and joyous, when doubts and difficult questions are naturally resolved. In such times as well, Aharon remains mindful of the Jewish people, and shares in their simcha — both collectively and individually.

Concluding Thoughts

Anti-Semitism can engender feelings of existential loneliness. On one level, this sense of being alone is a natural reality given that klal Yisrael are, in fact, distinct and separate from all other nations in the world — *hein am levadad yishkon*. The concept of *Shechinta b'galusa* reminds us, however, that to believe we are alone in the sense of being abandoned is to embrace a fallacy. First, Hashem Himself is with us in our suffering and He suffers, as it were, alongside us. Secondly, our fellow Jews, who strive to emulate Hashem, are always there to suffer with those communities and individuals in times of distress.⁹ May we all be cognizant of these truths and find solace in them. And may we merit to see the day of *ke'etzem HaShamayim latohar* — when Hashem can rejoice with us in the simcha of the ultimate redemption.

Endnotes

1. For an elaboration on this idea, see the comments of the Ramban to Parshas Haazinu (Devarim 32, 26).
2. Rabeinu Bachyei proceeds to explain on a kabbalistic level that the letter ה in the words מצרימה and עליה allude to the Shechina. Later commentaries elaborate by associating the letter ה with the sefira of מלכות, which is synonymous with the kabbalistic notion of *kneses Yisrael*.
3. The Hoshana composition beginning “*Ke'hoshata Eilem Belud imach*,” composed by R. Elazar Hakalir, contains repeated references to this motif. For further elaboration, see my article, “Hoshanot: Origins and Perspectives of an Enigmatic Ritual,” in *Mitoch Ha'Ohel, Tefilot Yom Tov*.
4. The idea of the Shechina's stake in our redemption has many sources both in *nigleh* and *nistar*. Ramban, in Parashas Ha'azinu 32:26, writes that the Jewish people will merit redemption even if they are not completely worthy because Hashem's reputation is dependent upon the existence of His people; therefore, the purpose of the world can only be achieved if Hashem rescues His people and brings about the ultimate redemption. On a

Kabbalistic level, Tosafos to *Sukkah* 45a explain that the phrase *Ani VaHo hoshia na*, part of the Hoshanos prayers of Sukkos, refer to two names of Hashem that represent Hashem's being imprisoned along with Klal Yisrael. Additionally, the phrase *Ani VaHo*, “I and Him,” captures the kinship between Hashem and the Jewish people who are bound together as a pair. For a fascinating elaboration on the nature of this bond, see what I have written in *Tzvi Tifara* (on Anim Zemiros) in elucidation of the stanza פארו עלי ופארי עלי וקרוי אלי בקראי אליו pp. 114-118. As noted in the previous footnote, the Hoshanos on Sukkos are replete with references to the notion of *Shechinta b'galusa*.

5. For a discussion on the other areas, please refer to my shiur on this topic, available at: www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/827139/.
6. This motif is highlighted by the name אהיה-ה אשר אהיה, which was revealed to Moshe at the *s'neh*. Rashi (Shemos 3:14) writes that this name conveys that Hashem will be with them during their suffering in Mitzrayim as well as in future exiles.
7. Many Chassidic works and *Sifrei Machshava* extend the concept of *nosei b'ol* to showing empathy for the *tzaar* of the Shechina itself. One who is capable of empathizing with the divine suffering and who infuses his prayers with such a dimension, becomes worthy of heavenly grace, which can alleviate one's personal suffering. See, for example, *Degel Machane Ephraim* (Parshas Beshalach), *Bnei Yisaschar* (Kislev-Teveis, 37). This motif can be traced to a Midrash Tehillim on the pasuk *ya'anacha Hashem b'ynom tzara* cited in *Yalkut Shimoni* (679). See also *Nefesh Hachayim* (2:11).
8. R. Wolbe relates the story of R. Avraham Grodzenski who, while sitting with his family eating dinner, suddenly stood up and began to dance. When asked by his startled family members to explain his strange behavior, he replied that he realized that at that very moment, he was missing his good friend's wedding. When you are truly happy for your friend, you will break out in dance whether you are physically present at the simcha or not.
9. As Rav Soloveitchik notes in *Kol Dodi Dofek*, all Jews, no matter their affiliation, share in the same fate and it is our responsibility to let those who are suffering know that we are suffering with them.



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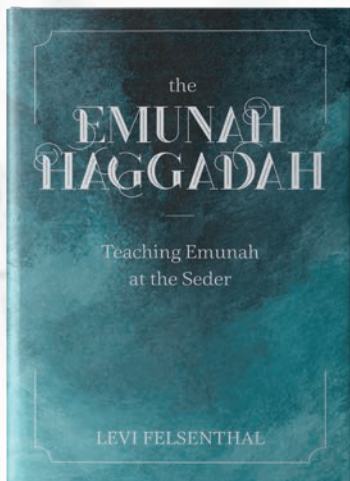
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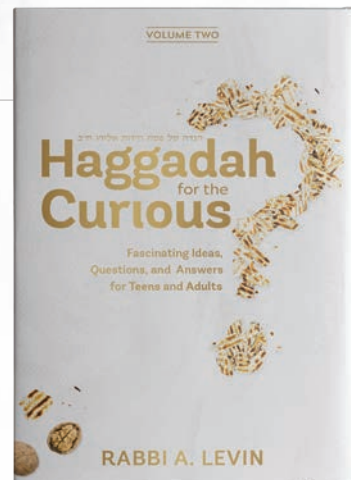
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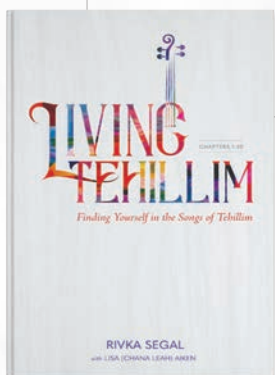
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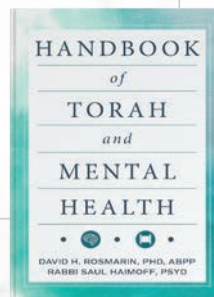
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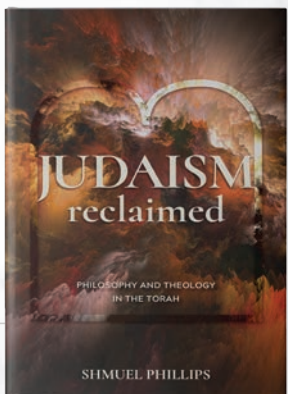
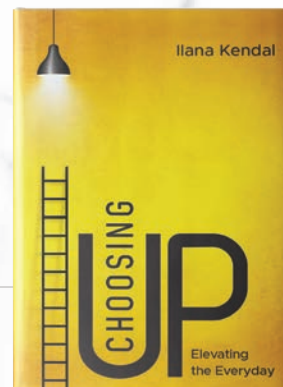
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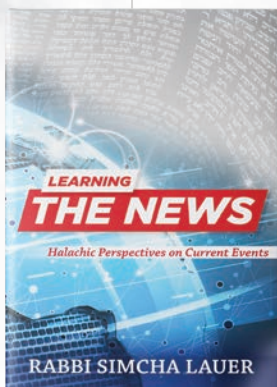
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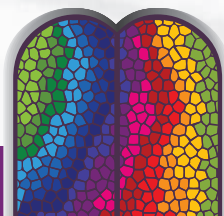
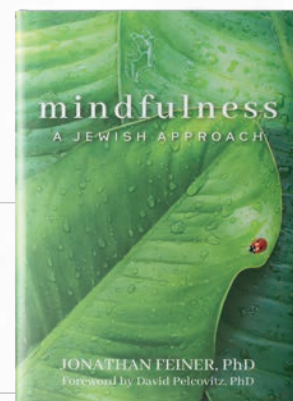


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VOICES OF AMERICAN JEWRY ON ANTI-SEMITISM: A JOURNALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

I am repeatedly asked, "So what does American Jewry have to say?" If there's anything I have learned since we started our *shlichut* here, it is that there is no single perspective called "the perspective of American Jewry." It would be the same as describing "the perspective of Israeli Jewry," which, we all know, comprises many different viewpoints. There are different voices on a range of topics. Here are some of the inspirational voices I have heard here since the wave of anti-Semitism began.

1. H. is an emissary of the World Zionist Organization in one of the large communities on the West Coast. This is how she sees what is happening here from the perspective of an Israeli

on the sidelines:

I am here only two-and-a-half years out of hundreds of years of Jewish existence in America, but you can feel the change. In our first year here everything was normal. It was understandable why "aliyah" was a tough sell. Try to persuade people who have a villa with a pool in Costa Rica and who go skiing in Vermont about the ideals of Zionism. The American dream is about the here and now. Then there was the attack in Pittsburgh, and something fundamentally changed about the sense of security of the American Jew. Suddenly, instead of one guard at the synagogue, there are two. Then after an incident in Chicago, the kids were told not to roam around the synagogue. They have to go immediately to youth groups,

because who knows, God forbid, what would happen if an armed man entered while children are roaming around? Another incident in Brooklyn and the community added another layer of security: a community member greets anyone who enters and screens them. During the preparation for the new school year at the end of the summer, a full two hours were spent on security, with detailed guidance on how to handle a situation where there is an active shooter. This was the first time they had spoken so explicitly about these possible scenarios. And the school shirt? The Hebrew letters and the Star of David that were on the shirt were replaced with English letters. And when you go on a trip? Please wear a hat instead of a kippah, even if only going out to the museum. Perspectives are starting to

shift. A little at a time, but it's noticeable. Just this week, a community leader spoke to me about aliyah.

2. Shana Schochet Lowell is a doula and lactation counselor, a mother of three who lives in Memphis. Her take, like many others, is not to go into hiding, but to do the opposite: to stand out. This is what she wrote on her blog¹ following the Monsey attack:

At 16, I was at the Hadera bus station just 15 minutes before it was bombed on Yom HaZikaron, Memorial Day, 1994.

Some years later, I was in Sbarro for a lunch date about five minutes before it exploded. We left because it was too crowded — the exact reason it was a target ... My mother would call me after each attack, wanting to know that I was safe. What is safe? I came to realize that I was one of the lucky ones. It was my duty to live. As much as I possibly could. Knowing in the back of my head that if something were to happen, I couldn't control it. In the meantime, as one of the lucky ones, I could control my response to the hate and violence.

Want to know what I did each time I had a close call? I went back. The shuk was attacked? The next Friday I would be there. Something at the Jaffa Gate? I stubbornly walked through it. Stifling my inner fear and forcing myself to walk confidently with each step. Because what I was secretly afraid of did not matter. What mattered was my response. That whoever perpetuated that hate would see they hadn't won. That I was not afraid to be a Jew or to show it ...

Hate is everywhere. After eight years of worrying, my mother was relieved when I returned to the United States to go to graduate school in Manhattan. Two weeks later, 9/11 happened, and we both realized there is no way to avoid hate. Only to fight it.

I am only one person. I moved away from the New York area this past summer and I now live in a small Jewish community in the South. It is a wonderful place, but I don't think many people are seeing my menorah in the window in my small subdivision. And yet, you fight the fights that are worth fighting. Yes, someone might drive by and attack us because of those menorahs. The thought occurred to me more than once, as my family lit our candles. And then I opened my plantation shutters wide and put my biggest menorah up front.

3. Now to the media. As expected, we hear a lot of left vs. right arguments about the rise of anti-Semitism, but I have hope that slowly but surely, people will understand that it comes from the extreme right and the extreme left. Jewish journalists have been an important voice in this discussion. Recent events have shaken them. Even some very liberal journalists, who have been critical of Chasidic Jews, have come to defend the Jewish people. Here are some thoughts from writers in the Jewish media. Prof. Liel Leibowitz in *Tablet Magazine* wrote,² “Nothing could be more toxic and counterproductive than this kind of politically motivated redescription of the wave of hate-fueled violence that is turning New York into Kishinev.” Avital Chizik-Goldschmidt wrote³ after a visit to Monsey: “But there is no way to hide. That is the realization dawning on us all. There is no way to hide, for good or for bad. We wear our religion on our sleeves. Is it starting to feel like a yellow star?” Batya Unger-Sargon, editor of *Forward*, described⁴ what many American Jews feel:

There's a poem Jews sing every evening after lighting Hanukkah candles. It's called “Maoz Tzur” — Rock of the Ages

— and was written during the Crusades, one of the many times when Jewish blood ran through the streets; its lines are laced with the tragedy and longing that typifies Jewish liturgy.

One chokes me up every time I sing it — eight nights every year: “Our salvation takes too long, and there is no end to the bad days.”

The words always called to mind Jews practicing their religion during some long-ago horror — the “bad days” of murdering Crusaders and marauding Cossacks, the bad days of pogroms, the bad days spent starving in ghettos and concentration camps. Wherever they were, Jews lit candles and sang this song, waiting, waiting for salvation. How fortunate are we to live in a time without such fear, I would think, tears creeping into my eyes and the words catching in my throat. The bad days are back. Orthodox Jews are living through a new age of pogroms. This week, as we celebrated the Festival of Lights, there were no fewer than 10 anti-Semitic attacks in the New York area alone. She then touches on the elephant in the room. The Chasidic elephant in the room. Over the course of the year, was this story — involving dozens of incidents — suppressed because they involved Chasidim?

It has resulted in a staggering, shameful silence when it comes to speaking out on behalf of the wave of pogroms against the Orthodox. For many people, it seems when they can't blame the other side of the political aisle, they would rather say nothing at all.

This is not acceptable. The Jewish community's most visible, vulnerable members need Americans to stand up and say “no more.” They need us to climb out of our trenches and find common ground to fight this ugly resurgence of anti-Jewish hatred.

We can only fight this fight together,

because it is a pox on all of our houses. It is only by remembering what unites us as Americans that we can help our fellow Jews and, as "Maoz Tzur" suggests, hasten the time of salvation.

4. The World Holocaust Forum recently took place in Jerusalem. Dozens of leaders from across the world came to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. What was so significant about this forum? Many noted the wonderful progress of the Jewish people, who rebounded from the Holocaust and built a proud and flourishing nation that hosted 41 leaders in its capital.

But it is not just us, it is the rest of the world too. The world is making progress in correcting and atoning for what happened 75 years ago. Prof. Deborah Lipstadt again found the right words to describe what was going on: "No, We Aren't Seeing The Return Of Nazi Germany." She writes⁵ that since the murders in Monsey, Jersey City and Pittsburgh, more and more journalists are interviewing her and asking: "Is what we are seeing today akin to Germany in the 1930s?" This is also the discourse she hears on the Jewish street: that history repeats itself.

Her answer is unequivocal: There is no comparison. Fear and confusion cause us to mix up emotions and facts. She writes:

The contrast between the situation of German Jews of the Third Reich and today is best illustrated by a story I heard from a survivor at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He came from a small town in which the local school was no longer a tolerable place for a Jewish child. His parents sent him to a Jewish boarding school in a

large city. On the night of Kristallnacht (November 1938), German government forces burned synagogues and ransacked Jewish shops. They beat up random Jews on the streets, deported thousands to concentration camps, and murdered close to a thousand.

On that night the teachers burst into the dormitory of the boarding school. They told the children to quickly run out of the building because it was being attacked. As the youngsters emerged onto the street, they wondered where to go. Instinctively, they decided to adhere to the advice parents have given their children for generations: when you are in trouble, look for the helpers. They said to one another: "Let's go to the policeman." They ran to the closest officer, fully expecting to be protected. Instead he sternly rebuffed them: "I don't help Jewish children."

Herein, lies the essence of the difference. During the Third Reich, the government was the very source of the antisemitism. Today, the situation is precisely the opposite in the vast majority of countries. When tragedy strikes political leaders are quick to condemn these acts. Leaders from all over the world gathered together to state unequivocally: an attack on the Jews of France is an attack on France, an attack on the Jews of Germany is an attack on Germany etc. It is true that the recent events need to be taken seriously. We can't ignore them and we need to deal with them. However, we also cannot allow our fears to distort history. The Jewish people have progressed and so has the world around it.

5. And what do the rabbis say? Each rabbi deals with anti-Semitism individually based on his community, his style and his perspective. There are avenues to deal with it on a spiritual level. Here is one example from the

field. A letter sent by our neighbor, Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz, to his students and his community. I believe that this letter is relevant even to those who don't live in New York:

The messages I have received today, include:

"Do you think that by staying in the US we are akin to the Jew in Germany during hitler's rise to power?"

"recent events, including the one last night in Monsey, have shaken me... I have no idea what to say"

"How does a Jew respond to what we are living through?"

I don't have any answers, and I have all of the same questions. Only Hashem knows the historical importance of the times we are living in. We don't know if these events are a prelude ך to something much worse and more systemic, or if they will serve to awaken good and decent people who will work harder to educate against anti-semitism, and protect us.

Here are a few things that we all do know, and perhaps are worth reminding ourselves of.

1) *If you are struggling, there is a reasonable chance that your children are as well. Let them talk. Let them share their fears. Tell them that you love them. Tell them stories of good people. Tell them that we trust in Hashem to protect us.*

2) *As believing Jews, we know that while we put in reasonable דשחולות, and work to improve our security, the only security comes from Hashem. It is therefore incumbent upon us to draw closer to Hashem. This means more לימוד התורה, stronger תפלה, increased precision and energy in our fulfillment of mitzvos, greater acts of חסד, and more thinking about our fellow Jews. As everybody knows the daf yomi begins a new cycle*

on Sunday. DON'T WAIT UNTIL SUNDAY TO START! Start right now! Every day and every moment of limud hatorah is valuable.

3) The Jewish people belong in Eretz Yisrael and there is no doubt that our future is in Eretz Yisrael. That was true before any of these attacks and remains true after what ה"ע"ב was the last of these attacks. Please always remember this and realize that we are in galus. Fear should never be the primary motivation to make aliya, just as the terror attacks in Israel should not chase our brothers and sisters out of our land. We should each periodically assess whether it is the right time for our families. Do we have a strategy for success? Where are our children more likely to succeed emotionally and spiritually? Of course, as believing Jews we know that making aliya does not end the galus, and only the arrival of mashiach will accomplish that. We should each assess what is best for the spiritual development of our families and the Jewish people.

4) Daven for all of the families of the victims of anti-semitism. Daven for our own safety. Daven for the wisdom to make the right decisions for our families. There is nothing that we can accomplish without davening, and there is nothing that cannot be accomplished with davening. To this end, make a commitment to enhance tefilah. If you aren't always careful to daven in a Beis HaKnesses, make an extra effort to take advantage of the extra kedusha that comes with tefilah b'tzibur in a designated Beis HaKnesses. If you aren't

always careful to arrive at davening in a timely fashion, make an effort to do so. If you miss a tefilah every now and then, let's try not to miss.

5) The Jewish people, whatever they look like, are our brothers and sisters. We sometimes bicker. We frequently disagree. We ALWAYS love. Let's make an extra effort to avoid all lashon hara about our fellow Jews, all gratuitous insults or hurtful characterizations. Let's use our dinner tables to tell stories of greatness about Jews that are not the same as us. Chazal teach us of the terrible impact of שנאת חנם and the great benefit of אהבת ישראל. Let us shed tears for other Jews and show ourselves and our children that our love for our fellow Jews is stronger than ever.

Wishing everyone a lichtige Zos Chanukah and a time where the light of our torah will chase away all of the darkness that pervades so much of the world.

b'ahava rabba v'ahavas olam,
Aryeh Lebowitz

6. A few weeks ago, I was in Boca Raton, Florida. I met with Rabbi Efreim Goldberg, Senior Rabbi of the Boca Raton Synagogue who told me this:

Perhaps Hashem is not happy with the situation in America. Assimilation rates are alarmingly high. The ignorance, alienation, and disappearance of the Jewish people, all voluntary, without any persecution is our failure. This anti-Semitism is perhaps a wake-up call

for all of us. A reminder that we need to act. Let us not think that it is easy and comfortable here, life is perfect, that we no longer have any missions as Jews because we have reached complete redemption.

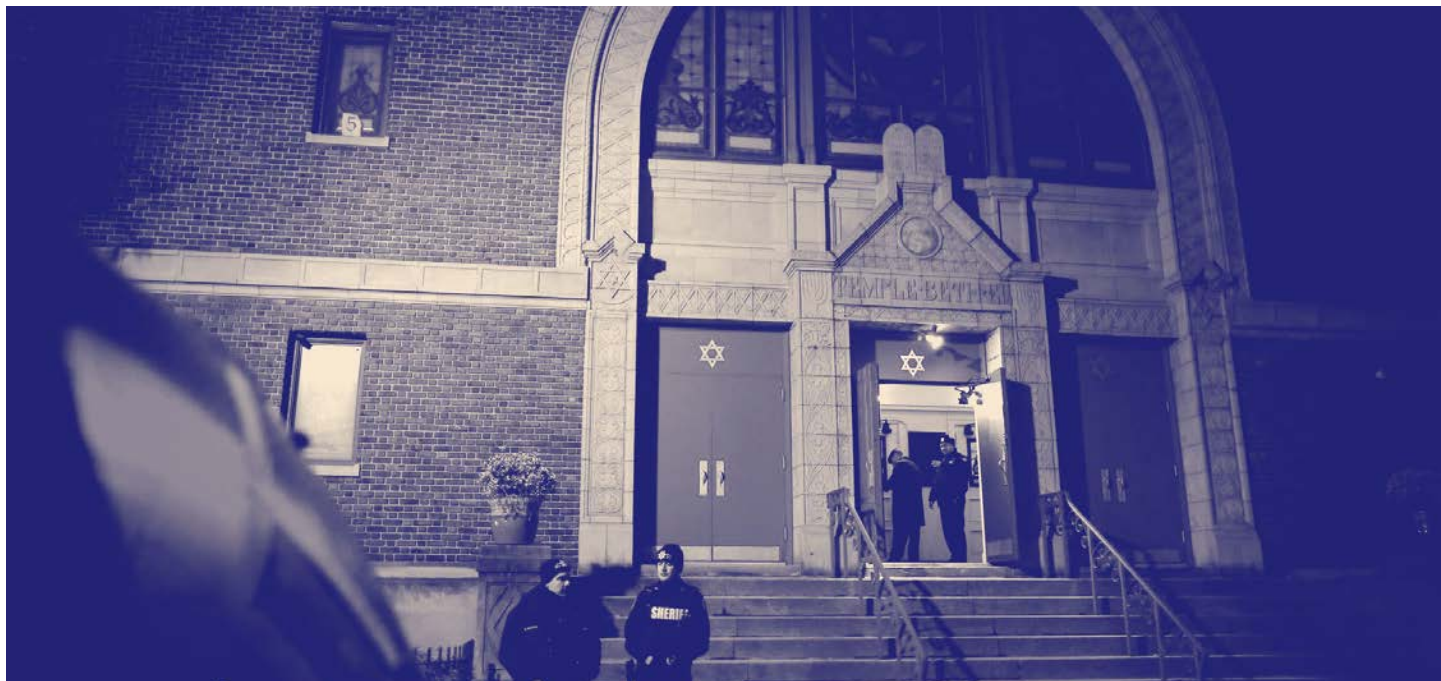
After the recent events, a student approached me and decided to wear a necklace with a Star of David. A student on campus here in Florida first decided to place a mezuzah on his door in the dorm to highlight to his peers that he is Jewish. We do not know why this is happening, but we must use what happens to make improvements in our lives. If there is anything we can take from this anti-Semitism, it is that it is a living reminder that we are Jews, and should be connected to our Judaism.

Endnotes

1. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/we-cannot-avoid-hate-but-we-can-fight-it/>.
2. <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/296292/sitting-ducks>.
3. <https://forward.com/life/437398/when-terror-strikes-in-a-modern-day-shtetl/>.
4. <https://forward.com/opinion/437373/why-no-one-can-talk-about-the-attacks-against-orthodox-jews/>.
5. <https://forward.com/opinion/437485/no-we-arent-seeing-the-return-of-nazi-germany/>.



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SHUL SECURITY: HALACHIC PERSPECTIVES

A few months ago, I was sitting on a *bais din* interviewing a *geirus* candidate. I was very impressed with this woman's energy and drive to join the Jewish nation. I asked her if she had heard of the recent anti-Semitic events in supermarkets, synagogues and on the streets in so many Jewish communities. She replied, "Yes I am well aware." I immediately responded with a question, "Why would you want to subject yourself to such a risk?" She replied, with a statement that truly resonated with me: "I thought about that for a long time and came to the conclusion that the benefits outweigh the risks. Yes, it's true that Jews are not popular among many nations, and that presents

complexities in a Jew's life. But the Jews are the chosen nation and they merit to be the children of G-d, which is worth every threat they face as a people." Every convert, before immersing in the ritual bath, has a similar conversation: seconds before transforming into a full-fledged Jew, the *bais din* asks: "Are you fully aware that as a Jew you will encounter anti-Semitism, which can include physical and verbal abuse from those around you?" The convert accepts that reality and enters *klal Yisrael*, acknowledging that Judaism is not necessarily a smooth ride.

On the night of Pesach, each and every Jew has a similar conversation. The Chasam Sofer suggests that

Pesach is an annual existential conversion and a renewal of *Yiddishkeit* for *am Yisrael*. At the Seder, we reaffirm Judaism as if it were a conversion. This dimension of the conversion process is also included in the Haggada. There, we recite that in every generation our enemies seek to annihilate us, but G-d saves us, and this is why we are here today. This is the topic we raise with the convert that is reiterated to us in our own conversion and rededication to *Yiddishkeit* on the night of Pesach.

On the final day(s) of Pesach, we approach anti-Semitism with a different frame of mind. In the Torah reading for the seventh day of Pesach, we read the Torah's (*Shemos*

13:18) description of how the Jewish nation exited Egypt with weapons prepared for their enemies who would ultimately attack them. Hashem wanted am Yisrael to have a plan to defend themselves against their attackers. Although the Jewish people believed they were vulnerable without G-d's assistance, they were required to implement security efforts to protect themselves. Unfortunately, these realities are ever-present this Pesach more than in recent years.

In this article, I would like to focus on the concept of protecting ourselves and our communities and the halachic implications. We recognize the reality of anti-Semitism and we are therefore responding the way our ancestors did, just as we read about on the seventh day of Pesach, by enhancing security in our shuls. We will address some of the halachic concerns and issues that may arise when implementing security protocols. As a disclaimer, the goal of this article is to provide an educational framework to appreciate the issues. I encourage all security members and councils to consult their local Orthodox rabbi for official guidance.

The Concept of Pikuach Nefesh

Before addressing individual challenges, it is important to categorize and assess the threat level from a halachic standpoint. The Gemara, in *Yuma* 84b, introduces a halachic principle that in a life-threatening situation, all halacha can potentially be suspended if necessary. This principle is known as *pikuach nefesh*. Does the rise in anti-Semitism and recent attacks in synagogues cause us to treat shul security as a situation of *pikuach nefesh*? Is there

a specific number or threat level that we can use to quantify which situations are treated as *pikuach nefesh*? The *Magen Avraham* 316 and *Teshuvos Rabbi Akiva Eiger*, YD 60, both write that when the threat is less than one in a thousand that someone will be harmed, it is too remote to be considered *pikuach nefesh*. Does that translate to mean that if these attacks occur in less than one in a thousand gatherings it is not considered *pikuach nefesh*? One could argue that the number of attacks might not determine the status of *pikuach nefesh*. The poskim who introduced these numbers and percentages were dealing with natural issues and diseases that come and go. However, the threat of anti-Semitism is constant and emanates from ongoing and preexisting hatred. This is different than a natural phenomenon and disease that can be quantified by numbers and cases. Anti-Semitic attacks could arise at any given point due to an escalation of a hatred that is steady and ever-present. The catalyst of these threats is always in play, and quantifying the threat by the number of previous attacks is not reflective of the actual threat.

The risks that shuls face differ from classic *pikuach nefesh* for another reason. The threats that are of concern relate to a future *pikuach nefesh* situation, and there is no imminent threat. Can the principle of *pikuach nefesh* be employed to prevent future *pikuach nefesh* situations? If there is a theoretical possibility of an attack, does that create a *pikuach nefesh* situation today? The *Noda Beyehuda*, *Tinyana*, YD 210, was asked about performing an autopsy that might help introduce medical information and cures for future patients carrying this disease. The *Noda Beyehuda*

responded that one cannot permit any violations of halacha under the guise of *pikuach nefesh* if at the time of violation there is no sick individual who needs a cure. He argues that *pikuach nefesh* requires a sick person to be present. If the entire motivation for the violation is for future predicaments and illnesses, it would not be considered *pikuach nefesh*.

The *Chasam Sofer*, *Teshuvos*, YD 336, concurs with the approach of the *Noda Beyehuda*. According to this approach, if shuls are facing no life-threatening situation at the moment, one can argue that synagogues cannot employ *pikuach nefesh* as the basis for leniencies in determining security protocols. However, the *Chazon Ish*, *Ohalos* 22:32, had a different approach. He writes that a situation of *pikuach nefesh* is not merely a function of a sick individual being present, but whether the threat is reasonable. If the threat is not too far-fetched and is considered reasonable, this qualifies as *pikuach nefesh*. According to this approach, one can argue that the potential threat to Jews around America would be recognized as *pikuach nefesh*, as recent history has demonstrated. Unfortunately, the possibility of an attack is not unreasonable and the large investment of money and time into shul security attests to the gravity of the situation.

Even if one were to assume the *Noda Beyehuda*'s more restrictive approach to *pikuach nefesh*, the situation facing shuls in America may be slightly different. Threats that relate to the public are treated differently than threats to an individual. The Gemara, *Shabbos* 42b, states that one is allowed to extinguish a burning coal in the street on Shabbos because it will otherwise cause public harm. The

Ramban cites the opinion of the Behag, who explains that the Gemara permits a violation of a biblical transgression for the sake of avoiding public harm. The Ramban asks: How can this be permissible if there is no *pikuach nefesh*? Nobody is going to die from stepping on a coal, and the concern is merely public harm. The Ramban explains that Behag is of the opinion that a danger to the public, even if it is non-life threatening, is on par with a life-threatening situation facing an individual. The halachic criteria regarding the public is approached with unique criteria. The Ramban does not accept the Behag's ruling and would only permit a rabbinic violation in a situation of danger to the public. The Ramban's opinion is codified in *Shulchan Aruch*, OC 334:27.

While the opinion of the Behag is not the accepted opinion regarding that particular case, it doesn't mean that we reject his logic. Rav Moshe Shternbach in *Teshuvos Vehanhagos*, 3:105, argues that the criteria for determining *pikuach nefesh* of the public is more lenient than for an individual. He cites Rav Chaim Soloveitchik that hospitals can utilize leniencies that individuals cannot, because their policies relate to the *pikuach nefesh* of the public and the danger is more common. Perhaps one can argue that the current security situation is a public threat and therefore would not require a present danger. Once one assumes that the current situation is *pikuach nefesh*, we don't require a definite threat. The Gemara, *Yuma* 85a, extends *pikuach nefesh* even to cases where there is a doubt as to whether someone's life is in danger.

Nevertheless, even if we treat the

situation as *pikuach nefesh*, it is imperative to analyze all protocols and limit violations to situations where there is no permissible alternative. In many security situations there are methods that are completely permissible, or less severe violations that don't require a compromise in security.

The poskim assume that in situations of *pikuach nefesh*, the rules are not entirely suspended. There are two approaches to understand why one violates prohibitions in the face of *pikuach nefesh*. *Hutra* means that when faced with any possibility of a life-threatening situation, all prohibitions are entirely suspended. We are permitted to violate anything even when it can be avoided. The other approach is that the mitzvos are considered *dechuya* in the face of *pikuach nefesh*. This means that the prohibitions remain in place but are overridden by the concern for *pikuach nefesh*. The override is limited and restricted when necessary. The practical difference between these two approaches is whether one is required to limit and avoid overriding transgressions when there is an alternative that doesn't compromise the effectiveness of mitigating the danger. This *hutra-dechuya* debate is a major debate among the rishonim. The Rama, OC 328:12, rules that *pikuach nefesh* is *dechuya* and therefore, one is required to limit desecrating Shabbos. This would include asking a gentile to perform *melacha* instead of a Jew, as long as this will not slow down the rescue or operation. This is one advantage of having a non-Jewish security guard who can be involved with *melacha* activity on Shabbos.

However, having only a gentile guard

the premises on Shabbos has practical limitations. The gentile doesn't know the members of the shul and is not as adept at screening those who enter. Additionally, hiring professional security guards can be expensive.

Furthermore, there is an additional concern raised by the *Shulchan Aruch* in this very discussion, which also relates to security. The *Shulchan Aruch* quotes from the Rambam that in *pikuach nefesh* situations, the rabbi of the shul (or someone of great stature) should be the one to violate Shabbos because he will do so without hesitation. Others may be reluctant to violate Shabbos out of concern that they are doing something wrong. The rabbi will act swiftly and decisively and as such, he is the most suited to be the first responder. The same concern applies to security personnel. Some security experts have noted that a volunteer security member performs certain tasks with greater alacrity and scrutiny than a paid professional. As such, he or she is more suited for these tasks. If the shul has a non-Jewish paid professional working together with volunteer shul members, the Shabbos and security concerns can be ameliorated.

Muktzah Issues

One question that arises is the issue of carrying a gun on Shabbos. [We are not going to discuss the issue of whether it is prudent from a security perspective to have shul members come to shul armed. This is something that should be discussed with security experts and local police in coordination with the rabbinic and lay leadership of the shul.] Are guns considered *muktzah*? The halacha is that a vessel that is primarily used for an activity that is prohibited

on Shabbos may not be moved on Shabbos. This is referred to as a *kli shemelachto le'issur*. What is the primary use of a gun? Rav Shlomo Goren argued that the primary use of a gun is self-defense. The only time one should discharge a gun is to save a life and as such, it is not designated for a prohibited activity, but for a permissible one — *pikuach nefesh*. Alternatively, one can argue that the gun is primarily used for training or hunting and is a *kli shemelachto le'issur*, since its usage violates two potential *melachos* of Shabbos. The first *melacha* is creating a fire inside the gun, which is the *melacha* of *hav'ara* (kindling). The other *melacha* (if the gun is primarily used for hunting or if one assumes that killing for *pikuach nefesh* doesn't change its *muktzah* status) is causing bleeding or death, which is *netilas neshama*. However, one may move a *kli shemelachto le'issur* under certain circumstances. The Gemara, *Shabbos* 124a, states that if the vessel is being moved *letzorech gufo*, which is for use of the *kli* in a permissible manner, then it is permitted. The classic example of a *kli shemelachto le'issur* moved *letzorech gufo* is using a hammer to crack nuts. The Chazon Ish suggested soldiers employ this idea if they need to carry a gun on Shabbos. He told them to carry nuts in their pockets and use the gun to crack them. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited in *Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa* 20:28) argued that this is not necessary, because the gun is not a *kli shemelachto le'issur*. He contended

that part of the purpose of the gun is not merely to shoot and kill but rather to instill fear among those who are planning to attack. According to the Rashba, *Shabbos*, 123a, a vessel that is used for multiple functions is classified based on majority use. Since the majority use of the gun is for the purpose of instilling fear, a gun should be classified as a *kli shemelachto le'heter* — a vessel designated for a permissible purpose. If a gun is a *kli shemelachto le'heter*, it is not *muktzah* at all. This psak is relevant to our security situation since the gun serves a similar purpose — to act as a deterrent against those who might plan an attack. [Some have argued that guns are completely *muktzah* and they are under the category of *muktzah machmas chisaron kis*.]

A related issue involves carrying radios on Shabbos so that security team members can communicate with one another. The device is categorized as a *kli shemelachto le'issur* because using it for communication is ordinarily prohibited. However, since the device is being carried for a permitted usage to hear any urgent communication when necessary, it is considered *letzorech gufo*, which is permitted. There should be no difference between devices that are carried on a belt, like walkie talkies, or earpieces.

Electricity Issues

The other issue with radios is activating the device prior to use. This

issue touches on a major disagreement among poskim regarding activating electrical appliances on Shabbos. The *Chazon Ish*, OC 50:9, was of the opinion that when activating electrical appliances, one is closing a circuit, which would be classified as the *melacha* of building. His opinion was that making a device functional was similar to building it. This view was contested by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Minchas Shlomo* 1:11), The *Bais Yitzchak* (Hashmatos to YD 2:31) and Rav Hershel Schachter (*Mesorah* vol. 20) as well as many other poskim. They argued that the issue is, at most, only rabbinic in nature. As stated previously, even if a situation doesn't meet the criteria for *pikuach nefesh*, the *Shulchan Aruch* permits violating a rabbinic prohibition to ensure that the public does not get harmed. However, we encourage downgrading the severity of every transgression whenever possible. There are two ways to minimize the prohibition: either by having a gentile turn it on, or when that option is not available, by activating the power button in an abnormal fashion (e.g., with the elbow), which is also rabbinic in nature called *k'l'achar yad*. When a *melacha* is performed in an abnormal manner, it is only considered a rabbinic violation. Couple that with the fact that activating the device is only rabbinic in nature and we are dealing with a double *derabonon*.

Communication through the device usually requires pressing a button to talk. Producing sound waves on



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the device is similar to the question of producing sound waves on a telephone, which Rav Shlomo Zalman considered to be *molid*, a rabbinic violation on Shabbos. Security teams should be aware that unnecessary communication should be avoided.

Recording Information

There are certain situations that require the immediate collection of information to send to the authorities. For instance, a security team member may witness some highly suspicious activity or notice a car circling the shul, and there is a need to quickly record a license plate or take a picture. Writing down the license plate on paper would be a potential biblical violation of *kosaiv* (writing). If the writing is done with the weaker hand, that would lower it to a rabbinic violation, since it is *k'l'achar yad*. One should opt to write with a weaker hand to lower the severity of the transgression.

What about taking a picture with a phone? This might be considered *kosaiv* because a picture appears on the screen, which is a form of writing. It might also be considered *boneh* or *makeh b'patish* (fixing something), since storing this information constitutes a significant improvement to the device it is stored on (See *Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa* 66: note 211). Using one's knuckle to press the button can minimize the severity of the *melacha* to a rabbinic violation because it is being done in an abnormal fashion. Another consideration is the possibility that taking a picture with a phone is only rabbinic in nature because the image on the screen is temporary, and the stored information is not needed once it is submitted to the authorities. As such, taking a picture of a license plate

with a phone in an abnormal manner may be preferable to writing it down in an abnormal manner.

Security Cameras

Many shuls have cameras around the premises on Shabbos. Is there an issue with walking in front of a camera that will now cause the screen to change images? As mentioned earlier, an image on the screen may violate the *melacha* of *kosaiv*. For writing to be a biblical transgression it needs to be permanent. In many situations this picture is temporary (*kesiva she'aino shel kayama*), and therefore is only considered rabbinic in nature. However, what if the shul is saving the information and recording it? Would this be biblical in nature (*koseiv, boneh* or *makeh b'patish*)? Even if the picture is saved and recorded, walking in front of a camera is different than actively taking a photograph. The individual walking in front of the camera has no intention of being photographed. His only intention is to walk into the shul. The *Shevet Halevi*, 10:60, is of the opinion that if an individual is merely walking and a camera catches his movement, this is not considered *melacha*. The operating term when it comes to *melacha* on Shabbos is *melech machsheves* — a *melacha* must include planned and creative work. Walking into a shul and being caught by a monitor or camera would not be *melech machsheves*, and therefore he argues that it is permissible to walk in front of a camera on Shabbos. Rav Hershel Schachter disagrees and compares this issue to a discussion between the Ran and the Rashba in *Maseches Shabbos* daf 94. The Rashba rules that an individual can close the door to his house knowing that a deer is inside and need not be concerned for the *melacha* of

tzad (trapping) on Shabbos. The Ran disagrees with the Rashba and argues since it is inevitable that the deer will be trapped when closing the door to the house, this would be prohibited. The question is, how did the Rashba permit such an activity? Isn't the Rashba aware of the fundamental principle that when doing activity "A" that will inevitably cause *melacha* "B" that is a transgression on Shabbos? Don't all rishonim subscribe to the halachic principle of *psik reisha* (an unintended but inevitable consequence of one's activity is prohibited)? Many achronim including the *Avnei Nezer*, OC 194, as well as the *Oneg Yom Tov* OC 22, suggest that the Rashba is of the opinion that *psik reisha* is only applicable when the inevitable consequence was the result of a direct activity on that same item. For instance, when dragging a bench on soft ground, it is inevitable that there will be a ditch created in that same spot. However, closing the door indirectly creates a trap for the deer and is not a classic *psik reisha*. The act of closing the door only inhibits the exit of the deer in an indirect manner. According to the Rashba, an indirect *psik reisha* (or *psik reisha al yedei grama*) is not a *psik reisha* and therefore, walking in front of a camera, where the activity and the inevitable consequence are in two different places, would be permissible. Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his *Commentary to Shulchan Aruch, Magen Avraham* 316:11, writes that the Rama, OC 316:3, follows the opinion of the Ran. For this reason, Rav Schachter suggests avoiding cameras on Shabbos when possible, since this would only be permissible according to the opinion of the Rashba but prohibited according to the Ran.

It is important to note that the above dispute about security cameras is about cameras placed in areas where there is no concern for *pikuach nefesh* or public harm. In a shul security setting there is more room to be lenient, because at most it involves an indirect *melacha*, which is known as *grama*. *Grama* is at most a rabbinic issue and would be permissible in a case of *pikuach nefesh* or even to avoid public harm (*hezek rabim*).

Tefillah Issues

The security dilemma raises halachic issues beyond Shabbos as well. Is it permissible to bring a weapon to shul and daven while holding or carrying a weapon? The *Shulchan Aruch*, OC 151:6, quotes from the Maharam Mirutenberg that one should not carry a sword to shul. This is based on the Torah's prohibition against using a sword to construct the Mizbe'ach. Chazal teach us that the Mizbe'ach is a symbol of peace and there is no place for a sword, which is a symbol of violence. Similarly, our shuls today represent the same idea, and it is inappropriate to bring a weapon into shul.

One may bring weapons into shul for the purpose of *pikuach nefesh*, and that is common practice in Israel. Furthermore, even if one were to argue that carrying a weapon is not *pikuach nefesh*, many poskim are lenient if the weapon is concealed. If a person was off-duty inside the shul and wanted to daven, according to many poskim he can conceal his weapon and the issue is resolved.

Often security volunteers can join the tefilla at certain points. Security personnel should discuss with their rabbanim which parts of tefilla they

should try to attend, especially if multiple minyanim are available to coordinate shifts. Certain tefilos can only be recited with a minyan, and for others a minyan is preferred. These include the silent Amidah, Kaddish, Kedusha and Kerias Hatorah. It is important to emphasize that security members who are needed outside of the shul are exempt from *tefilla betzibur* (prayer with a minyan) under the halachic principle of *osaik bemitzvah pattur min hamitzvah* — an individual involved in one mitzvah is exempt from performing another

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mitzvah. The security personnel are involved in the mitzvah of protecting the community and are therefore exempt from other mitzvos. There is a disagreement among the rishonim whether one is obligated to perform both mitzvos if it is possible to perform both. The Baalei Hatosfos, *Sukkah* 25a, argue that if one is capable of accomplishing both mitzvos one is not exempt but rather is required to do so. The Ran, *Sukkah* 11a, disagrees and argues that even if one can figure a way to accomplish both one is not obligated to do so if it will require effort. The *Mishna*

Brura, Biur Halacha 38:8, follows the opinion of the Ran and is lenient on this matter. Therefore, security guards should not feel that they are not fulfilling their obligations and missing out on their mitzvos. They are exempt from the services that they are unable to attend. I think that it is not advisable to try to accomplish both because it may jeopardize security, which necessitates a clear and present mind focusing only on security. If they have an opportunity to attend services before or after their shift, they should certainly do so because at those times they are not “*osek bemitzvah*.”

It is important for rabbonim to be involved with security teams and security protocols that are being implemented in the shuls. The rabbonim should provide guidance to ensure that security protocols are within the confines of halacha. This should be in consultation with security experts and lay leadership so that solutions can be found that address the sensitivities of halacha, security and practicality.

It is a rapidly changing world with many new issues that the Jewish nation faces on a day-to-day basis. A few years ago, the Jew in America would never imagine having to address these issues or have such emotions when reciting *Bechol dor vador* at the Seder. The most important measure and takeaway from the chag of Pesach in a world with growing anti-Semitism is the need to strengthen one's *emunah* and dependency on the Lord above. It is important to recognize that beyond the security protocols and other human efforts, we exist today because of the hand of God and we live into tomorrow depending on the hand of God.



DRESSING LIKE A JEW IN PUBLIC

Beyond historical narrative, the Pesach Seder also looks toward the ultimate Geula and the coming of Moshiach.¹ It is no surprise that just after we open the Haggada to “*Ha Lachma Ania*,” we already look forward to “Next year in Eretz Yisrael.” Therefore, to create a portrait of how the Jews survived in Egypt and were then redeemed is to describe how the Jew of today can also help bring the future *yeshua*. To play on the words of the prophet Micha (7:15): *kimei tzeitcha Me’Eretz Mitzrayim arenu nijlaot* — Hashem will perform miracles for us in the future, when we emulate the actions of our ancestors on the eve of the very first Pesach.

Our tradition teaches that one of the key merits leading to *yetziat Mitzrayim* was, “*lo shinu et levusham*” — the fact that Jews maintained a distinct form of dress throughout the exile in Egypt.²

Perhaps the most prominent and common form of Jewish apparel today is the yarmulke. Not long ago, many — perhaps most — Orthodox men in America, did not wear a yarmulke outside of the home or shul and certainly not at work, fearing discrimination or worse. In recent decades, trends have changed dramatically and the yarmulke is a common site in academic, corporate and commercial settings. However,

in an age of increased anti-Semitism, Jews around the world are more wary of risks involved in visibly identifying as religious Jews. Indeed, there is merit to this sentiment, especially in more hostile surroundings. Choosing to display or not to display one’s Jewish identity is a question that must be evaluated based on individualized circumstances. Using the yarmulke as our framework, we will attempt to present Torah attitudes and practical perspectives that are pertinent to such an assessment.

The notion of a Jewish male head covering, such as a yarmulke, can be found in several Talmudic sources.³ However, the nature and extent of the

obligation to cover the head is unclear. Indeed, wearing a yarmulke has been the accepted hallmark of a Jewish male for generations. However, some of these sources suggest that the practice was originally mandated or reserved only for married men or only for distinguished scholars. Some sources indicate that a head covering is only absolutely needed when pronouncing words of Torah, prayer or the like. Still other sources suggest that in a shul, a covered head is enforceable across the board.⁴

Regardless, the purpose is clear. A head covering is meant to evoke a variety of pious behaviors and emotions required of a Jew at all times. Rav Huna Brei D'Rav Yehoshua (*Shabbos* 118b) states that primarily, it serves as a constant reminder that Hashem's presence is always above one's head. Indeed, many associate the word "yarmulke" with the Aramaic term "*yirah D'Malka*" (fear of the King; though the etymology of the word is likely Polish). *Chatam Sofer* adds that a head covering engenders humility,⁵ another dimension of the cognizance of Hashem's presence.⁶ The Rambam also mentions a head covering as an expression of modesty, similar to the *tzniut* inherent in covering other parts of the body.⁷

The common thread linking these explanations provides the ethical value, but not an ironclad halachic obligation, to wear a yarmulke. Indeed, the Vilna Gaon and other poskim explain that all references in Chazal and *Shulchan Aruch* to the notion of a head covering should categorically be understood as *midat chassidut* (a pious practice).⁸

Nonetheless, various Achronim present arguments that deem the yarmulke as mandated by halacha,

at least in the current era of Jewish history. Most notably, *Taz* observes that a head covering became an actual requirement as it became standard practice for non-Jewish men to appear bareheaded. In other words, covering one's head is a function of the prohibition of *chukot hagoyim*, to avoid patently non-Jewish or idolatrous practices.⁹ Conversely, others note that the widespread custom — across the board in Ashkenazic communities and beyond — to cover the head at all times becomes normative by force of the concept of *minhag Yisrael*.¹⁰ Either of these approaches give rise to the notion that the yarmulke is the "*levusham*" of today; a patently Jewish mode of dress, akin to those adhered to by those who merited the Exodus from Egypt. Rav Ovadia Yosef adds that one who fails to cover his head may also be suspected of non-observance. This is a violation of the command, *v'hiyitem nikiim* (*Bamidbar*, 32:1), requiring all Jews to remain above suspicion of any wrongdoing.¹¹

In several responsa, Rav Moshe Feinstein surveys the earlier opinions on this matter, and concludes that the Vilna Gaon's assessment is authoritative; in particular, he questions the applicability of the *Taz*'s statement in 20th-century America. Rav Moshe describes the yarmulke as a "good and holy custom." As such, he rules that one need not sacrifice his job prospects or livelihood if an employer will perhaps object to his head covering and dismiss him from work.¹² Such a sacrifice would be even greater than one must make to fulfill an actual positive Torah commandment.¹³ It is important to consider that Rav Moshe's decision is almost 40 years old. Presumably, the job market is much more

open and accessible today to the observant, yarmulke-wearing man, and employment opportunities will be reasonably available, even if one argues that discrimination still exists to some extent.

Nevertheless, here we find a paradigm for practical limitations to the obligation to wear a yarmulke. But what if an individual would not lose his job, but might be subject to derision or anti-Semitic reactions if he appears in public wearing a yarmulke? In one *teshuva*, Rav Moshe adds the following caveat to the above leniency:

אבל ודאי רק במקום עבודתו שעל זה הוא מקפידין יהיה רשאי, אבל כשיצא לחדר אחר וכל שכן כשיצא לשוק יהיה אסור אף אם ילעיגו עליו כיון שלא יפסיד משרתו ועבודתו בשביל זה.

*Certainly, it is only in his place of work that he is permitted [to uncover his head], for it is to this [his employer] objects. However, when he goes to a separate room and certainly when he is walking in the street, it is prohibited, even if they will ridicule him, for he will still not lose his position and his job as a result.*¹⁴

Rav Moshe's words echo Rema's opening remarks to *Shulchan Aruch* where he exhorts the reader never to be ashamed of his performance of mitzvot, even in the face of ridicule.¹⁵ Indeed, Rav Moshe's words are likely instructive for very common settings that one encounters in today's corporate America. Of course, in a scenario or environment where legitimate concerns for risk of life or significant injury exist, the obligation would not apply.¹⁶

However, under consideration in the broader Jewish community today is the question of whether one should avoid religious identification

purely for the sake of “not standing out.” Perhaps assuming a more homogenous role in our general surroundings would allow the flames of bias against Jews to more quickly subside.

Beyond yarmulkes *per se*, extensive Halachic literature exists surrounding the general permissibility of disguising one’s Jewish identity. *Shulchan Aruch*¹⁷ clearly states that one may not state that he is a non-Jew, even if his life is otherwise endangered.¹⁸ However, one may in fact alter his mode of dress so that he does not appear to be Jewish in order to save his life.

However, lesser considerations, such as financial, would not give one the right to hide his Judaism. Rosh states that dressing like a non-Jew to hide one’s religious identity is prohibited even if one is doing so merely to avoid excessive taxes levied specifically upon Jews.¹⁹ Walking bareheaded would certainly fall in this category, as it is a distinctly non-Jewish mode of appearance. Moreover, Ridvaz is concerned that an individual who appears as a non-Jew may ultimately be recognized as a Jew at some later point. This would constitute a *chilul Hashem* (desecration of G-d’s name), for onlookers may perceive the non-Jewish style of dress as a laxity in Torah observance for the sake of some material gain, for example.²⁰ The notion of adopting a secular style of dress, such as removing one’s head covering, will not necessarily violate *chukot hagoyim*, but would still risk a *chilul Hashem*.

Essentially, this approach underlies Rav Moshe Feinstein’s opinion quoted above. Permission to remove one’s head covering at work is not predicated on creating circumstances whereby the Jewish employee is no

different than his non-Jewish fellow and his identity is hidden. Rather, it is in response to the particular “*hakpada*” of the employer or the work environment.

As such, other forms of reasonable Jewish identification, besides wearing a yarmulke, are appropriate and required in a work environment so as not to disguise one’s religion unnecessarily. For example, employer-excused absences from the office due to prayer or holiday observance should not be “covered up” with alibis to prevent coworkers from discovering one’s Jewish identity.

R. Yonah of Gerona exhorts that one should never alter his style of speech in order to go undetected among non-Jews.²¹ Furthermore, if he is mistaken as a non-Jew, he should be careful to correct the error by identifying as a Jew. *Sefer Chasidim* identifies a midrash as a source for this. Chazal explain that Yosef’s remains were ultimately brought to Israel because he allowed his Jewish identity to be known, even in the hostile environment of Egypt. Moshe, on the other hand, was described as an Egyptian by the daughters of Yitro, yet he did not correct their mistake. As a result, his bones were not allowed to enter Israel after his death.²²

In a public address in honor of Yom Ha’atzmaut (5718/1958), Rav Soloveitchik zt”l extolled the privileges gained through the establishment of the State of Israel. In particular, he noted a shift among Jews worldwide to feel more comfortable identifying publicly as Jews with loyalty to Eretz Yisrael, our national homeland. It marked a trend toward returning to the characteristic Jewish visibility that was unfortunately abandoned by many during the Age

of Enlightenment.²³ He personally lamented encountering individuals — otherwise observant and learned — who nonetheless failed to display their Judaism in an outward and recognizable fashion.²⁴ Echoing *drashot* of R. Yitzchak Yaakov Reiness and R. Meir Shapiro, he explained that the “*havdala*,” the distinction between Jew and non-Jew, must be as stark and self-evident as the difference, “*bein or l’chosech*,” between light and dark.²⁵ This imperative was communicated to us through Hashem’s choice of giving the Torah initially in an obvious and ostentatious display of Klal Yisrael’s unique selection as His people. Though the second Luchot — given without fanfare — ultimately endured, overt identification of the Jews was necessary first and foremost.²⁶

Besides the ideological implications of minimizing Jewish visibility, there are also practical considerations. To communicate this lesson, Chazal relate a story about an individual who was mistaken for a non-Jew because he did not wash his hands for bread in a public setting. Though he was otherwise kashrut observant, he was served *neveila* (unslaughtered meat) by the proprietor of a restaurant who assumed, because he did not identify with patently Jewish practices, that he was in fact a gentile.²⁷ When one upholds his religious standards to the utmost, those in his environs are signaled and perhaps encouraged to support his behavior. If his identity is obscured, others will neither be aware nor enabled to facilitate. Many people find themselves in work environments commonly graced by inappropriate speech or immoral discussion. Anecdotes abound of individuals who distinguish themselves by their scrupulous religious standards and inspire coworkers to keep

negative influences away from their Orthodox peers. Not only is this a *kiddush Hashem*, it also assists Jewish employees in further preserving their observance.²⁸

Furthermore, the aforementioned responsum of Ridvaz cautions the individual himself against disguising as a gentile. He cites popularly familiar experiences that demonstrate the deleterious religious effects of eliminating one's Jewish appearance when among non-Jews (contemporary poskim attest to this danger as well²⁹). Distinct Jewish practices and dress remind one of his values and morals, should he otherwise be tempted to sin.³⁰ If one decides to remove symbols that help maintain religious standards, the challenge of being swayed by one's surroundings is greatly amplified. On the other hand, if one comports himself from the beginning as an observant Jew, he may not have to navigate halachic obstacles later. Employer expectations appropriate to his beliefs and practices will have already been established. Indeed, Rashbam comments that the Jews' style of dress in Egypt remained unique precisely to assure that the Jews themselves would *not* blend in with their neighbors.³¹

Additionally, in the absence of danger, wearing a yarmulke presents an opportunity for educating the non-Jews we interact with. In a classic *teshuva*, R. Yaakov Reicher³² addresses a community that was to be visited by a nobleman at the local shul. The expectation, given gentile cultural norms of etiquette, was for all present to bare their heads when greeting the nobleman — particularly problematic in the Beit HaKnesset. Ultimately, R. Reicher concludes that it is permissible for

men to remove their yarmulkes for the sake of “*shlom malchut*,” to maintain favorable rapport with the officials. Nonetheless, he suggests that it is an opportunity to educate the gentiles of the gravity of the tradition; this endeavor might breed greater understanding and respect for Jews and Judaism.³³

The question at hand potentially carries implications beyond Jewish law and thought. Less than a year ago, in response to increased anti-Semitic attacks in Europe, Felix Klein, Germany's ombudsman in the country's effort against anti-Semitism, publicly discouraged the Jewish population from wearing yarmulkes by stating, “I cannot recommend to Jews that they wear the skullcap at all times everywhere in Germany.” Klein was censured by political figures around the world, including Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, who responded, “We will never submit, will never lower our gaze and will never react to anti-Semitism with defeatism — and expect and demand our allies act in the same way.” The German public took action, with many cities holding marches and rallies where individuals of all faiths wore yarmulkes in solidarity with the Jews. Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann urged Jews to ignore Klein's statement; the alternative would be giving in to the far-right political influence. “If we cave in to hatred towards Jews, we are doing nothing other than handing the playing field to rightwing ideology,” Herrmann said.³⁴ “Everyone can and should wear his skullcap wherever and whenever he wants.”³⁵

As we have seen, there are circumstances that force a Jew to remove his yarmulke or replace it with

another form of head covering. Even when the safety and welfare of Jews is at stake, individual situations require a balanced approach to evaluate if these risks justify abandoning this time-honored tradition and its meaning.

In the 1986 United States Supreme Court case *Goldman v. Weinberger*, the majority opinion ruled that Air Force Capt. Rabbi Simcha Goldman could not wear a yarmulke inside the military hospital in which he served as a psychologist. On the other hand, Justice William Brennan argued in favor of Rabbi Goldman's right to wear a yarmulke as part of the minority. The religious and socio-political considerations that have informed our discussion are largely paraphrased in the words of his dissent:

*Simcha Goldman invokes this Court's protection of his First Amendment right to fulfill one of the traditional religious obligations of a male Orthodox Jew — to cover his head before an omnipresent G-d... In addition to its religious significance for the wearer, the yarmulke may evoke the deepest respect and admiration — the symbol of a distinguished tradition and an eloquent rebuke to the ugliness of antisemitism.*³⁶

Endnotes

1. See Rav Saadia Gaon, *Emunot V'Deot* 8; *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*, Mitzva 1, *Ba'al HaTurim*, Shemot 12:42 (Torah Temima, *ibid.*).
2. See *Psikta Zutreta (Lekach Tov)* Vaera 6:6. (See also *Ki Tavo* 46a). See also *Ha'amek Davar*, Shemot 2:19. Netziv explains that Chazal derived this from the fact that Yitro's daughters identified Moshe as an Egyptian. He spoke and dressed as a member of the royal family, while all other Jews spoke *Lashon HaKodesh* and dressed in their traditional garb.
3. See *Brachot* 60b, *Shabbat* 118a and 156b, *Kiddushin* 31a.
4. See *Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 91:3.

5. *Shut Chatam Sofer* vol. 6, Likutim 2.
6. *Sefer Hamanhig*, Tefilla 87.
7. *Mishna Torah*, *Hilchot Deot* 5:6.
8. *Beur HaGra*, O.C. 8:2.
9. *Vayikra* 18:3.
10. *Shut Yabia Omer* vol. 9 (1:7). See *Nefesh HaRav*, pg. 150. See also *Chafetz Chaim Al HaTorah*, pg. 197.
11. *Shut Afarsika D'Ania*, vol. 4, 362.
12. See *Igrot Moshe*, O.C. 4:2 and Y.D. 4:11 where he suggests that wearing a hat, if possible, is preferable. Cf. *Beit Yitzchak* vol. 36, pg. 320.
13. On the other hand, negative mitzvot must be observed even if all of one's assets must be sacrificed to avoid the prohibition. See *Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 651:1.
14. *Igrot Moshe*, C.M. 1:93.
15. O.C. 1:1.
16. For a discussion of the use of a hairpiece by a man in place of a yarmulke, see *Otzar HaKippa* vol. 1, pg. 426.
17. Y.D. 157:2.
18. See *Chashukei Chemed*, *Avoda Zara* 19a.
19. *Avoda Zara* 2:4.
20. *Shut Ridvaz*, 4:65.
21. *Sefer HaYirah*, 82.
22. *Sefer Chasidim* 117, based on *Bereishit Rabba* 2:8.
23. See *MiPinei HaRav*, pp. 386-388.
24. Personal conversation with Rav Hershel Schachter Shlit"a.
25. See *Divrei HaRav* pg. 143 regarding asking a non-Jewish teacher in a Jewish school to wear a yarmulke when teaching. Rav Moshe Feinstein ruled that the teacher should be asked to do so. Rav Soloveitchik held it was not necessary, while Rav Aharon Kotler felt that he should specifically not be asked to wear a yarmulke so that a clear delineation would be made between the Jewish and non-Jewish faculty.
26. See *Imrei Da'at* vol. 1, pg. 179.
27. See *Chulin* 106a and Rashi *ibid.*, s.v. *He'achilo*.
28. See *Shmirat HaLashon*, vol. 1 *Sha'ar* *HaZechira* chap. 12.
29. See, for example, *Shut Be'er Moshe*, vol. 8, 44.
30. See *Menachot* 54a.
31. Rashbam, commentary to the Haggada, *Vayehi Sham L'Goy*.
32. *Shut Shvut Yaakov*, vol. 3, 5.
33. See also *Shut Terumat Hadeshen*, Siman 197.
34. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/31/germans-urged-wear-kippah-protest-antisemitism>.
35. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/german-official-advises-jews-avoid-wearing-traditional-yarmulkes-amid-rising-n1010381>.
36. <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep475503/>.

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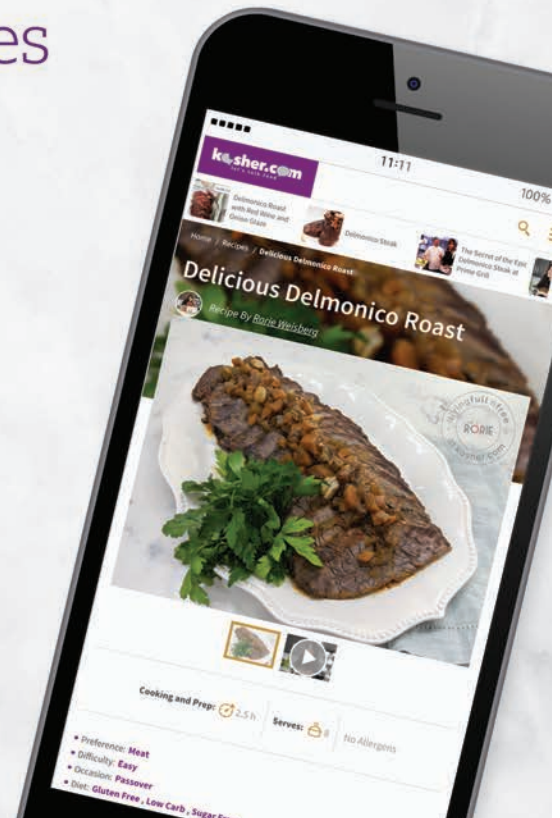
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THE TORAH OF REDEMPTION

As the Jewish people grow and evolve throughout history, the Torah follows a similar pattern. Just as new attributes of our national character are realized and developed over time, so too Torah study grows, and new facets of Torah are revealed with each day. And so, alongside the dramatic changes that our people undergo as we return to our homeland, the Torah, too, is evolving with us. The flowering of the Torah in the time of redemption is termed “*Toras hageula*,” and it has a unique character that is directly tied to the times during which it is being revealed. In the upcoming essay, we will both attempt to define *Toras hageulah* as well as understand some of its impact on klal Yisrael.

Toras hageulah can be described with three main pillars, and though they all flow from the same source, it helps to

divide them up. The first pillar is the increased focus on the hidden side of Torah, known as *penimiyus Hatorah*. The main feature of *penimiyus Hatorah* is its fixation on Hashem’s presence. Instead of speaking about the halacha itself for example, it focuses on Hashem’s divine wisdom that went into commanding the law. Whereas the halachic side of Torah may focus on practical behaviors in the workplace, *penimiyus Hatorah* focuses on looking deeper and seeing Hashem in every business deal. In the past, such study was limited to only a few unique people, but the soil of Eretz Yisrael is rich with the right nutrients to foster its spread to the masses. The Land of Israel is the land of prophecy, the land of interaction with Hashem, and that is what makes it spiritually ripe for Torah study that is entirely focused on seeing and interacting with Him.¹

Rav Kook explains:

מתי הוא טוב ללמוד סתרי תורה, כשהתשוקה הפנימית של קרבת ד' היא חזקה, מתעלה ומתגברת, עד שלא תתן מנוח לנפש, ואינה משביעה את חפצה בשום תכן רוחני וקדוש שבעולם, כי אם עם ההגיון הפנימי המדבר ברזי עולם.

When is it good to learn the secrets of the Torah? When the inner desire for closeness to Hashem is strong, ascending and increasing until it does not give rest to the soul and does not satiate its desire except through the most spiritual and holiest content in the world, except through the inner logic that speaks of the secrets of the world.²

Oros Hatorah 10:1

The return to the land of prophecy has sparked this desire in our people to be close to Hashem,³ and thus not only is the soil ripe for *penimiyus Hatorah*, the people, too, are primed to engage in it in a real and broad way.⁴ [The

unity of the people is also a major theme in *penimiyus Hatorah*, and klal Yisrael is seen as one body, with each individual acting as a unique cell with a unique purpose. In this way, *klal Yisrael* acts as single chariot for materializing Hashem's presence in this world.]

The second pillar of *Toras hageulah* flows directly from the first, and that is the expansiveness of the Torah. *Toras hageulah* is not limited to any sphere, and in fact covers all bases of life. Whereas in the past, the enemy of the Jewish people may have been the Greeks, and their evil activities included influencing the Jewish people to be involved in sports, art and music (the Yefes of the universe), in the days of *geulah*, those activities play a big part in *avodas Hashem*. Exile has forced our people to put up walls from the beauty of the material world and separate from it in the safety of *batei medrash* and shuls, but on the soil of Eretz Yisrael, the mundane can be holy and need not be shunned. Art, music and athletics all have a place in the Torah, and there can be healthy engagement in the holiest of contexts without fear of being dirtied by ulterior un-Jewish motives. Hashem is everywhere and is the life force of everything, and therefore He can be accessed in all corners of existence. In fact, this was an ideal since the earliest days of mankind when the Torah tells us:

יְפֹת אֲלֹהִים לְיִפְתַּן וַיִּשְׁכֵּן בְּאֶהֱלֵי שֵׁם...
May Hashem grant beauty to Yefes, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem.
Bereishis 9:27

This means that the kingdom of Yefes, the glory of Greece, will one day find its place in the tents of Shem, the ancestor of the Jewish people. Due to the spreading of awareness of Hashem

in all places, Hashem can be accessed and appreciated in what was once off limits because it was deemed unholy.

The third pillar is the expansion of *avoda shebilev*, the service of the heart. Tefila has extended beyond the borders of the synagogue and has become a mode of existence. Tefila does not occur only in three specific meetings of the day, but rather is a yearning for connection with Hashem that is constant. As Rav Dov Singer terms man the “*homo mispalelus*” (*Tikon Tefilati*, intro), we are naturally pray-ers and tefila is our frame of life. Thus tefila has grown to more of

The return to the Land of Israel provides an opportunity to heal pain that we have experienced throughout the exilic distance.

a natural state of *dveykus*, no matter what activity is going on.

This also includes a deepening of the Torah's view on the human experience, which encapsulates both the emotional and psychological realms of ideas and activities. The Jewish heart is developing and our relationship with Hashem is deepening. The return to the Land of Israel means a return to the place where Hashem's presence is most potent, and it provides an opportunity to heal pain that we have experienced

throughout the exilic distance. *Toras hageulah* speaks to the Jewish heart and enhances that relationship with Hashem.

The evolution of Torah study in the times of redemption is just getting off the ground. Already, its impact has dramatically affected the experience of Jews in the Land of Israel and it is beginning to spread its influence in the Diaspora. The outcome of these developments include greater connection to Hashem, greater connection to each other, and a tangible march toward the days of prophecy. *Toras hageulah* is deep and exhilarating, and is worth engaging with on a deeper level no matter where it is studied. The more *Toras hageulah* spreads to the Diaspora, the more those in the Diaspora will realize the importance of returning home — the place where these ideas are most relevant and most potent — and the more unified our people will be.

Endnotes

1. This is not a coincidental phenomenon. Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai wrote in the Zohar, *Ra'aya Mehemna*, Naso 124b, the foundational text of *penimiyus Hatorah*, that the study of his sefer will bring the Jewish people out of exile.
2. Translation by R' Yosef Bronstein *shlita*.
3. This thirst is a direct fulfillment of a prophecy in Amos:

הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם ה' א-לֵקִים וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי רָעֵב בְּאֶרֶץ
לֹא רָעֵב לֶלֶחֶם וְלֹא צָמָא לַמַּיִם כִּי אִם לְשִׁמְעַת אֶת דְּבָרֵי
ה'.

A time is coming — declares my Lord Hashem — when I will send a famine upon the land: not a hunger for bread or a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of Hashem. (Amos 8:11)

4. See “*Ma'amar Hador*” from Rav Kook for his understanding that the core of the nation — both observant and not yet observant Jews — have this same yearning for *penimiyus Hatorah*.



CONTEMPORARY KORBANOS: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Imagine it is right after Purim. The pile of *mishloach manos* has begun to shrink to a manageable size, the costumes have returned to the box in the basement, and you start to come to grips with the fact that Pesach cleaning is on the horizon. Then, someone posts in your neighborhood WhatsApp group: “Looking for a family of 4-6 to join our KP. Anyone interested?” You read it again; are they really looking for someone to join their korban Pesach? Was the Beis HaMikdash rebuilt, and you just somehow missed it? You reply privately to your neighbor, and she explains that this year, they’re planning on bringing a korban Pesach even though the Beis HaMikdash hasn’t been rebuilt yet. You send a question in to your “Shailos U’Teshuvos” group chat, asking if that’s at all allowed. And the answer, surprisingly, isn’t as clear as you might expect.

Kedushas Har HaBayis

Does Har HaBayis (The Temple Mount) retain its *kedusha* even after the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed? The Gemara in *Megilla* (9b-10a) compares the period of the Mishkan at Shilo and the Mikdash in Yerushalayim. One difference, it writes, is that there was a period of *heter bamos*, personal altars, that were allowed after the destruction of Mishkan Shilo. However, after King Shlomo built the Mikdash in Yerushalayim, that was the end of the “*Bamos era*”; personal altars were no longer allowed. What is the law after the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed? The Gemara quotes a dispute about the status of Har HaBayis after the *churban*: one opinion holds that it retains its *kedusha*, while the other holds that the *kedusha* left when the building was burned. Tosfos holds,

though, that everyone agrees *bamos* are no longer an option. Our only chance at offering korbanos nowadays would be on Har HaBayis, and only according to the opinion that Har Habayis retains its *kedusha*.

Which opinion do we follow? The Rambam (*Beis HaBechira* 6:14-16) holds that it does retain *kedusha*. He explains that the *kedusha* of Yerushalayim and Har HaBayis comes from the presence of the Shechina, which descended when King Shlomo built the first Beis HaMikdash. Nothing, not even total destruction, can remove the presence of the Shechina; Har HaBayis remains holy. R’ Ishtori HaParchi, author of the *Kaftor VaFerach*, brings a number of other sources that also indicate that Har HaBayis still has *kedusha*, even though the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed (Chapter 6). Therefore, we can bring korbanos even without the

Beis HaMikdash being rebuilt.

The Raavad stridently disagrees. He brings a number of sources indicating that Yerushalayim and Har HaBayis no longer have *kedusha*. In fact, he suggests that this was by design: when Ezra returned to Israel and rebuilt the Beis HaMikdash, he knew that the third Mikdash would be drastically different, as described at the end of Sefer Yechezkel. Therefore, he only planned on infusing temporary *kedusha*.

Korbanos Without a Beis HaMikdash

Assuming Har HaBayis retains *kedusha*, are we allowed to bring *korbanos* without a Beis HaMikdash?

While the Gemara seems to say that if there is *kedusha*, a Beis HaMikdash is not necessary to offer *korbanos* (*makrivin af al pi she'ain bayis*), the Chofetz Chaim, *Likutei Halachos*, *Zevachim* 66b, raised a technical issue. One of the requirements for most *korbanos* is that they need to be brought *lifnei pesach Ohel Moed* — at the entrance to the Ohel Moed, a phrase that shows up a number of times in the *pesukim*. Even if Har HaBayis retains its *kedusha*, is the lack of a *pesach Ohel Moed* a problem? Rav Moshe Shternbuch (*Moadim U'Zemanim* 4:351) suggests several answers. For example, that may only apply as long as the structure exists. While we have a Beis HaMikdash, *korbanos* need to be brought at the entrance of the Beis HaMikdash, as opposed to anywhere else. However, once the structure has been destroyed, that requirement is no longer relevant.

Placement of the Altar

Do we need to build our Mizbei'ach in the exact same place as the original

Altar for the service to be valid? The Gemara in *Zevachim* 62a, records that Chagai, Zecharia, and Malachi returned with the Jews from exile in Bavel. One testified as to the proper placement of the Mizbei'ach, another testified as to its measurements, and the third testified that *korbanos* can be brought even before the Beis HaMikdash was rebuilt. This implies that there was a need to identify exactly where the Mizbei'ach was meant to stand; it wouldn't have sufficed to guess or choose a new place for bringing *korbanos*. What could we do now that we don't have a prophet showing us the proper place and measurements for the Mizbei'ach?

While we could try to measure using descriptions found in various sources, another problem becomes immediately clear: we don't know how long an *amah* is! How can we use measurements to determine the location of the Mizbei'ach? Furthermore, the Mizbei'ach is supposed to 32 X 32 X 10 *amos*. If we don't know the exact measurement of an *amah*, how can we build the Mizbei'ach? Fortunately, the Rambam in the same perek (halacha 17) provides a solution. The Rambam writes that the exact size of the Mizbei'ach is not critical. In fact, it can be as small as 1 X 1 X 3! As long as we can figure out the approximate area where the Altar used to stand, we can build a tiny replica anywhere in that original square and the Mizbei'ach will be valid.

Inauguration in a State of Purity

Even if we manage to build a Mizbei'ach, we have another problem. Every vessel in the Beis HaMikdash needs to be initiated before use. When it comes to *using* the vessel, *tuma*

(ritual impurity) is not a problem; when most of the nation is *tamei*, we can ignore the problems that *tuma* causes for offering *korbanos*. However, many (including the *Chasam Sofer*, *Shu't Yoreh Deah* 236) suggest that the *chinuch*, the initiation of a new vessel, requires complete holiness. Is that attainable to initiate our Mizbei'ach? Everyone is assumed to be *tamei meis* nowadays, and we don't have ashes of a *parah aduma* to purify ourselves. Rav Shternbuch suggests that this may not be an issue. According to the opinion that the original *kedusha* of Har HaBayis is everlasting, that means that the *chinuch* of the first Mizbei'ach is still extant. Even though that original structure is no longer standing, a new Mizbei'ach would be considered a "*tikkun*," a rebuilding or fixing, rather than a new vessel, obviating the need for initiation with complete purity.

Let us assume that we can resolve these issues: Har HaBayis still has *kedusha*, there's no need for *pesach Ohel Moed*, and we can at least approximate the place of the Mizbei'ach. Who will perform the service? We need two things: 1) a Kohen, who is 2) *tahor* from all different strains of *tuma*. Do we have either of these?

Status of the Kohanim

While we have many Kohanim, it's not clear how confident we are in their *yichus* (lineage). A Kohen is entitled to *teruma* from produce grown in Israel, charged with *nesias kapayim* and delivering *Birkas Kohanim* (*duchening*), and instructed to carry out the service in the Beis HaMikdash. Of those, serving in the Mikdash carries the most severe punishment if done improperly. Chazal were willing to settle on lower standards

for *teruma d'rabanan* (*terumah* that is only rabbinic in nature) and Birkas Kohanim. Anyone who has a *chazaka* that he is a Kohen — born to a father who was a Kohen — can eat *teruma d'rabanan* and do Birkas Kohanim. However, they insisted that only verified Kohanim serve in the Mikdash. A Kohen needs more than just *chazaka* to serve; he needs to prove his lineage. The Rambam (*Isurei Biah* 20:1-2) writes that he needs two witnesses who can verify that his lineage goes back to a Kohen who actually served on the Mizbei'ach. No one has such a strong *yichus* nowadays; this would seem to be a major problem. However, *Chasam Sofer* argues that the issue is not as overwhelming as we might have thought. The only concern of a Kohen without *yichus* is that at some point, someone in the family married a *chalalah*, a woman who isn't allowed to marry a Kohen. Her children no longer have the status of Kohanim. However, the Gemara, *Kiddushin* 66b, says that the service of *chalal* (the son of a *chalalah*) who serves and then finds out that he is a *chalal* is still valid after the fact. Rav Shternbuch dismisses this rationalization, pointing out that being a *chalal* is not the only concern. The fourth perek of *Kiddushin* relates that the family of the Chashmonaim lost their *yichus* when women from that family had relations with non-Jewish servants. Those children are not simply *chalalim* — they have no connection to the Kehuna! The lack of verified Kohanim is a significant problem.

Dealing with Impurity

Tuma is less of a problem. The only *tuma* we can't fix nowadays is *tumas meis*, *tuma* incurred from contact with or proximity to a dead body. That requires ashes from a *parah aduma*,

which we don't have. Other forms of *tuma* need only immersion in a mikveh or flowing spring.

Of course, *avoda* can't be done in a context of *tuma*. However, when most of the *tzibbur* is *tamei*, *tuma* is temporarily ignored (*tuma dechuya b'tzibur*). This leniency applies only to *tumas meis*. Therefore, the *tuma* issue can be avoided: the Kohen would immerse in a flowing spring.

Bigdei Kehuna

Assuming we have a Kohen who is able to serve, he also needs to be wearing the uniform. Every regular Kohen had to wear four special pieces of white linen clothing while he was serving in the Mikdash: pants, a tunic, a hat or turban, and a belt or sash (Rambam, *Klei HaMikdash* 8:1). Without this uniform, a Kohen is like a non-Kohen and is not allowed to do the *avoda*. Unfortunately, we have many questions about how to make these special clothing; for example, we don't even know what the regular Kohen's headwear is meant to look like (See Tosfos, *Sukka* 5a-b and Rambam/Raavad *Klei HaMikdash* 8:2). There is also a *sha'atnez* issue to deal with: the belt was interwoven with wool and linen. As long as the clothing is made properly, we can apply the rule of *asei doche lo saasei* — a positive commandment can override a negative commandment. However, if anything was made improperly, the mitzva is not fulfilled by wearing the priestly garments, in which case there is no permissibility to wear the *sha'atnez*.

Need for Public Funds

Every aspect of the Beis HaMikdash needs to come from public funds

(Rambam *Klei HaMikdash* 8:7). When we had the Beis HaMikdash, every member of the nation donated a half shekel each year. This money was used for korbanos of the nation, as well as for the clothing of the Kohanim and upkeep of the vessels. There is only one korban that is an exception to this rule: the korban Pesach. (While each family or group pays for their own korban, it is still treated as a public offering, and is still subject to the leniency of *tuma dechuya b'tzibur*.) The Rambam (*ibid*) suggests a workaround that will solve the problem for other korbanos: an individual can donate something to the Mikdash on behalf of the *tzibbur*. As long as he really has in mind to give the donation on behalf of the entire nation, it would be considered public funds and usable.

Conclusion

This only scratches the surface of the issues to be dealt with. There are more that we didn't even mention, and each one we did mention could be significantly expanded. Even if we solved all the halachic issues, there are obvious practical impediments to building a Mizbei'ach and offering korbanos on the Har HaBayis. Nevertheless, learning the sources and working through each potential issue gives practical expression to our desire for the Beis HaMikdash to be rebuilt. Across the generations, different personalities have tried to find ways to bring back the service of korbanos. We look forward to the opportunity to present ourselves to Hashem and dedicate everything we have to His service, and to bring that Mikdash-infused perspective back into our everyday lives (see Rav SR Hirsch's commentary on the beginning of Sefer Vayikra).



STORIES OF RETURN

In July 2014, during Operation Protective Edge, Max Steinberg, an American-born IDF lone soldier, was killed in Gaza. He, like many others, was inspired by a Birthright trip to make aliyah and join Israel's army. The night before his funeral, however, a disturbing article was published. Allison Benedikt, the current executive editor of *Slate*, wrote an article on the online magazine partly blaming Birthright for his death. Needless to say, the brash statement crossed many lines. But one of her questions remains valid: "What makes an American kid with shaky Hebrew and no ties to the state of Israel suddenly decide he is ready to make this sacrifice?"¹ And Max is not alone; hundreds, even thousands like him have made the courageous move

to leave their homes and families behind to support their Jewish state. But how exactly do we explain this phenomenon?

In his commentary to *Pirkei Avos*, R' Chaim of Volozhin, the foremost student of the Vilna Gaon, provides us with an answer. The Mishnah in *Avos* (5:3) praises Avraham for withstanding the ten trials posed to him. But whereas the preceding mishnah refers to him simply as Avraham, our mishnah refers to him as Avraham Avinu, Avraham our forefather. Noting the subtle lingual difference, R' Chaim remarks:

כי כמה מדות שהצדיק טרח ויגע להשיגם,
לבניו אחריו המה כטבע מוטבע ובקצת יגיעה
יגיעו לזה כמו שנראה בחוש שרבים מעמי
ארץ מהיהודים מוסרים את עצמם על קידוש
השם והוא מוטבע בנו מאבינו אברהם ... וכן

ההתעוררות לאדם פתאום לילך לארץ הקודש
הוא מנסיון לך לך.

There are many great levels that a tzaddik works and toils to achieve, to whose descendants after him they are naturally inborn. And with only a little effort, he (the descendant) will reach [this high level], as we see with our own senses that many simple Jews give their lives for the sanctification of God's name. And this is our nature from Avraham our forefather... And so too the sudden inspiration to travel to Eretz Yisrael, this is from the test of "lech lecha."

Every *nisayon*, every trial that Avraham Avinu withstood, was not merely a personal spiritual achievement by the individual Avraham; it was an experience and essential quality that Avraham Avinu, the father of a nation, would bequeath

to all of his descendants. The spiritual and mental courage that Avraham (then Avram) displayed in response to the call of “*lech lecha*” would be built into the fabric of the Jewish soul for all time.

We can understand this idea further based on a comment by Rabbeinu Nissim (the Ran), the great Spanish Talmudist. In his philosophical work, *Derashos HaRan* (8th *derasha*), the Ran notes:

שהענין כאשר קבל צורה אחת, גם כי תסתלק הצורה ההיא מן הדבר ההוא, שיקבל הדבר ההוא הצורה ההיא שנית יותר בקלות במעט פעולה.

*When something once acquired a certain form, even if the form subsequently departed from it, it will be easier for that thing to acquire that form once again.*²

Once Avraham Avinu made the sacrifice and carried out the charge of “*lech lecha*,” it subsequently became easier for every Jew after him to follow suit.

And so it was throughout Jewish history that Jews around the world left everything behind and responded to this inner calling with an almost absurd passion. Absurd in the sense that it was not because of greater financial opportunity or stronger familial ties — historically, it was usually the opposite — but by an inner yearning ingrained in our spiritual DNA from the time of Avraham Avinu.

Although, as the Rambam tells us in his *Sefer Hamitzvos* (Positive Commandment, 153), the Jews will always maintain *some* presence in our homeland, this did not preclude the historical reality that after the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash (70 CE) most Jews were living in the Diaspora. Be that as it

may, the call of “*lech lecha*” never left the Jewish consciousness. And so there were always those great individuals, those courageous sons of Avraham Avinu, who left behind “their land, their birthplace and their father’s house” headed for “the land that I will show you.”

One of the first “stories of return” we have on record of belongs to R’ Achai Gaon, the author of the halachic-aggadic work the *Sheiltot*, one of the first post-Talmudic works published. In around the year 750 C.E. he left Babylonia, the center of Jewish learning at the time, and settled in Israel, where he remained until his last day.³

Most famous, however, was the aliyah of the Ramban. The great Talmudic scholar and Kabbalist famously disagreed with the Rambam (Mitzvos omitted by the Rambam, positive, no. 4) and argued forcefully that living in Eretz Yisrael is one of the 613 mitzvos. Moreover, this one mitzvah is equal to all the mitzvos in the Torah and one about which Chazal expanded greatly. The Ramban, however, didn’t just talk the talk; he, quite literally, walked the walk. In the year 1267, at the age of 72(!) the Ramban left his family and the world he knew behind, set out for the land of Israel, and on the 9th of Elul arrived home at last in the port of Acco. Shortly thereafter, he traveled to Jerusalem where he found poverty, ruins, and hardly any Jews at all. Though he found destruction, he saw hope:

ומה אני לך כי רבה העזובה וגדל השממון וכללו של דבר כל המקודש מחבירו חרב יותר מחבירו ירושלים יותר הרבה מן הכל ... ועם כל חרבנה היא טובה מאד.

What can I tell you about the land, greatly forsaken and significantly

desolate? But the principal of the matter is: the more sacred, the greater the destruction. And Jerusalem is more destroyed than all... but despite its destruction, it is very good.

Kitvei Ramban, Vol. 1, pg. 368

He turned a dilapidated old house into the city shul, taught Torah, composed his classic commentary on Chumash and helped rebuild and restore a Jewish community in the Jewish city. And ever since, Jerusalem has been home to a community of Jews.

Skip forward about 200 years. In 1488, R’ Ovadiah of Bartenura, the author of the famous commentary on the Mishnah, set out for Jerusalem and quickly became the spiritual leader of a community in need. The famed Kabbalist, R’ Yeshaya HaLevi Horowitz (the Shelah), left the post of Chief Rabbi of Prague and moved to Israel in 1621. Some seventy years later, R’ Yehuda Hachassid (not to be confused with the medieval scholar) took with him a small following and settled in Jerusalem at the turn of the 18th century. The Ohr Hachaim too followed suit in 1740, settling in the Holy Land. And in 1789, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, almost impulsively, set out for the Holy Land. Although he remained there for six months, upon walking *daled amot* on the holy ground, he remarked that he could return. And there were many, many more who risked everything to return home.

One aliyah trip, however, taken by an unparalleled scholar, was especially mysterious:

הנה אנשים נוסעים על כמה שנים בשביל ממון מניחים נשותיהם ... ואני תודה לא-ל נוסע לארץ הקדושה שהכל מצפים לראותה חמדת כל ישראל.

It is common for men to leave their wives for years traveling for business... But

I, thank God, am traveling to the Holy Land, about which everyone longs to see, our people's most Beloved

Iggeres HaGra, Alim L'terufah

It is unclear what year exactly the Vilna Gaon set out for Eretz Yisrael, but it is clear that he never made it. For reasons unknown to us, he turned back in the middle. When pressed by his sons as to his motives for returning, his response was: "Heaven did not grant me permission" (Introduction to *Biur HaGra; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*). Though the Vilna Gaon himself did not complete the journey, his students did for him. In 1808 a close disciple of the Vilna Gaon, R' Menachem Mendel of Shklov, headed for Eretz Yisrael only to begin what would later be known as the aliyah of the Perushim, the community founded by students of the Vilna Gaon. Soon after, R' Yisrael of Shklov, another close student of the Vilna Gaon's, followed. In 1816, R' Menachem Mendel moved to Jerusalem and established the Ashkenazi community of Jerusalem. The "Shklovs," along with fellow students of the Gra and their families, were responsible for setting in motion a revival of the Holy Land. Their impact is felt to this very day.

Any student of the Talmud knows that when encountering a halacha two questions must be asked: What is the *makor*, the source for the law, and what is the *sevara*, the logical reasoning behind the law? If R' Chaim of Volozhin has provided us with the *makor* for the "aliyah phenomenon," it is the Maharal who provides us with the *sevara*. In the first chapter of his philosophical work, *Netzach Yisrael*, he writes the following:

... וזה כי אין ספק כי הגלות הוא שינוי ויציאה מן הסדר, שהשם יתברך סדר כל אומה

במקומה הראוי לה, וסדר את ישראל במקום הראוי להם, שהוא ארץ ישראל. והגלות מן מקומם הוא שינוי ויציאה לגמרי. וכל הדברים כאשר הם יוצאים ממקום הטבעי, והם חוץ למקומם, אין להם עמידה במקום הבלתי טבעי להם, רק הם חוזרים למקומם הטבעי... שאין עומד בתמידות רק הדברים הטבעיים...

It is clear that exile is a divergence from the natural order. For God, Blessed be He delineated each nation in its proper place and the Jewish people in their proper place, namely, Eretz Yisrael. And exile from their place is a total divergence. And all things that are moved from their natural place cannot persist in a place that is unnatural for them; rather they must return to their natural place... Only things that are natural persist... "

When a Jew speaks of "return" he can refer to either the return to his Creator (*teshuvah*) or the return to his Land. As the *Sefer Chareidim* (chapter 59) writes, "Just as Hashem chose the Jewish people, so did He choose Eretz Yisrael." The natural state for a Jew is in the Presence of God and the natural place for a Jew is in the land of God. A lacking of either is unnatural and, says the Maharal, bound to end. Hence the Rambam writes in his *Hilchos Teshuva* (7:5):

וכבר הבטיחה תורה שסוף ישראל לעשות תשובה בסוף גלותו ומיד הן נגאלין.

The Torah already promised that ultimately, Israel will repent at the end of her exile and, immediately, she will be redeemed.

Whether it is a return to his Creator or to his homeland, the Jew will return, almost compulsively, as if steered by an inner, constant voice, whispering "lech lecha, go, go to yourself, to your Creator, to your homeland." So when we hear of a seemingly unaffiliated Jew suddenly seek out his Creator or abruptly decide to give his life for his people and we are asked, "What makes an American kid with shaky Hebrew and no ties to the state of Israel suddenly decide he is ready to make this sacrifice?," we know very well. Because it comes naturally.

Endnotes

1. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2014/07/max-steinberg-death-how-birthright-convince-american-jews-to-embrace-israel.html>.
2. Translation from Sefaria.org.
3. See R' Zechariah Fendel's Legacy of Sinai pg. 248.





GISHMEI BRACHA

Umbrellas and raincoats have been a necessity for those fortunate to have spent this year in the Holy Land. Over the winter, Israel was blessed with the most rainfall in over 50 years! The seasons are now transitioning from *choref* to *aviv*, from winter to spring. And while the contrast in the Diaspora may be limited to a difference in temperature, the Jews of Israel experience a dramatic change in weather patterns, where stormy rain clouds are replaced by bountiful sunshine. This transition is most poignantly expressed in the change of our *nusach hatfillot*, removing *mashiv haruach* and altering the *vten tal u'matar* in our Shmone Esrei. By reading our texts carefully, we will notice that these are not the only references to the rain of Israel in our prayers and literature. We embrace the winter with Shimini Atzeret's *Tefilat*

Geshem, we welcome the summer with Pesach's *Tefilat Tal*, and signifying their importance, the chazzan dons a *kittel*. Inside the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur*, the Kohen Gadol would pray for the upcoming year's rainfall (*Seder Ha'Avodah, Nusach Sefard*). A large portion of *Mesechet Ta'anit* is involved with the additional prayers and fasts established in order to supplicate G-d for rain, and the Amoraim (*Ta'anit* 7a,7b) make statements as remarkable as:

אמר רב יהודה גדול יום הגשמים כיום שניתנה בו תורה.

R. Yehuda said: the day that it rains is as great as the day that the Torah was given.

אמר רבי חמא בר' חנינא גדול יום הגשמים כיום שנבראו שמים וארץ.

R. Chama b. R. Chanina said: the day that it rains is as great as the day that the heavens and the earth were created.

The list goes on... Why does the rain of Israel play such a central role?

We could ask a more fundamental question: For a nation of farmers who have an entire order of Mishna, *Seder Zeraim*, dedicated to their agricultural endeavors, a desert land with little access to water seems to be a poor choice of location. Why in fact did G-d choose Israel? The answer to this question might be hidden in the *pesukim* of Parshat Eikev (Deut. 11:11-12):

וְהָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ--
אֶרֶץ הָרִים, וּבְקָעוֹת; לְמִטֵּר הַשָּׁמַיִם, תִּשְׁתֶּה-
מֵיָם. אֶרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר-ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ: תִּמְיֵד,
עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בָּהּ--מִרְשֵׁית הַשָּׁנָה, וְעַד אַחֲרֵית
שָׁנָה.

But the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, soaks up its water from the rains of heaven. It is a land which the Lord your God looks after, on which the Lord your

God always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end.

We see that it was no unfortunate coincidence that the Jewish people landed in the desert land of Israel. G-d tells us that is specifically because He cherishes Bnei Yisrael that He puts them in a desert land. People with an unlimited water source will never turn to G-d for help, will never look to the skies for rain; their life resources are streaming by their feet. In contrast, says G-d, settling Bnei Yisrael in a desert region will allow them to turn to the One above for its sustenance, pray to G-d for rain, and always know from where their livelihood stems.

In these few *pesukim*, G-d reveals an important message. Our dependency on Him is not an inadvertent arrangement, nor a happenstance coincidence. Rather it is a conduit that affords us the opportunity to turn, beseech, and ultimately connect with G-d. Behind every challenge is a blessing. A blessing from the One above, reminding us that He is present and readily available. Earlier in Parshat Eikev, G-d cautions about the challenges of wealth. All too often does the wealthy man forget Who provided his wealth, while the destitute fellow is in constant connection with G-d, always requesting His basic needs.

G-d's settling His agricultural nation in a desert land was the best way to guarantee the nation's constant beseeching of His heavens for rain. Rain does not merely sustain our physical survival in Israel, it is at the core of our spiritual existence. The rain of Israel is hand-delivered by G-d in response to the *tefillot* of *klal Yisrael*, and each drop penetrates the soil and imbues the land with *kedushah*. The Land of Israel is no desert — it is a flowing oasis of prayer.

Although for thousands of years Jews in the Diaspora prayed for rain in Israel, the true feeling of dependency on Israel's rain had not been on the Jews' consciousness until the recent resettlement of the Land in the past hundred years. The Jews of Israel are once again blessed to live with an active feeling of dependency on G-d's rain. The special *nuschaot* in the *tefillot* of Eretz Yisrael that address the need for

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rain, such as the addition of “*g'shamim b'itam*” (rains in their proper time) in Birkas Hachodesh and the distinct “*Aneinu*” in Shmone Esrei, highlight the unique connection with G-d only the Jew living in Israel can experience.

Today in 2020, the advent of modern technologies and desalination plants has seemingly reduced Israel's reliance on G-d's rain. An endless water tap

in every Israeli household, multiple swimming pools per hotel, and drip irrigation across every farm in Israel — the Land of Israel is more hydrated today than many western countries. What reason is there to continue praying for rain?

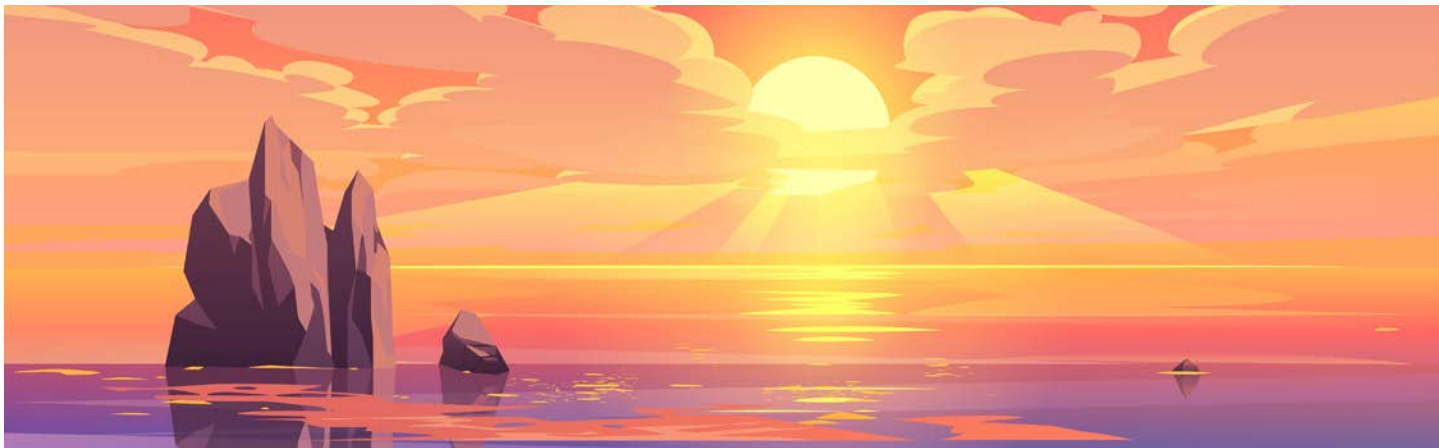
While this may seem true, and our dependency on rainfall has diminished, the Land of Israel does not allow its inhabitants to merely sit back and enjoy the Land. She challenges her people. She challenges them so they turn to G-d. Whether this challenge is manifest in rain, security concerns, or the difficulty of making a living, the Land will forever force its people to look to G-d for help. The very fabric of the Land of Israel is imbued with a connection to its Creator, and she expects no less of her people.

אשא עיני אל ההרים מאין יבוא עזרי עזרי
מעם ה' עושה שמיים וארץ.

*I will lift up my eyes to the mountains.
From where does my help come? My help
comes from the Lord, who made heaven
and earth.*

Psalm 121:1-2

The Jews of Israel endure struggles and challenges, but it is for this exact reason that Jews choose to live there. The flip side of every challenge is a blessing — the opportunity to look to G-d for assistance. While the Land of Israel may not have an elaborate highway system nor many rushing rivers, her humble roads whisper to G-d as they traverse the Jerusalem hills, and her rivers rush not with water but with the heartfelt prayers of every Jew in Israel. May we all be *zoche* to internalize that the greatest blessing in life is not to receive rain, but to need rain — *gishmei bracha*.



ACTUALIZING PROPHECY: MAN'S OBLIGATION OR GOD'S?

Any attentive member of a Religious Zionist youth group will immediately smile upon seeing an elderly couple sit on a Jerusalem park bench or children run around Gan Sacher. These seemingly insignificant occurrences in truth carry with them an over 2,000 year promise:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת עַד יֵשְׁבוּ זְקֵנִים וְזָקֵנוֹת
בְּרַחְבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאִישׁ מִשְׁעֲנֵתוֹ בְּיָדוֹ מִרְבֵּי
יָמִים. וְרַחְבוֹת הָעִיר יִמְלֵאוּ יְלָדִים וְיִלְדוֹת
מִשְׁחָקִים בְּרַחְבוֹתֶיהָ.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age.

And the broad places of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the broad places thereof.

Zekharyah 8:4-5

Tanakh is saturated with prophecies that ostensibly foreshadow the Jewish People's rise from the ashes of the Holocaust, its return to the Land of Israel, and its creation of a sovereign state.¹ Any Religious Zionist recognizes that the State of Israel does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it plays a critical, metahistorical role in the fulfillment of the Jewish People's destiny, expressed and outlined in the words of our ancient prophets.

Aside from perhaps putting a smile on our faces, what function do these prophetic visions play in a halakhic life? Are eschatological prophecies merely descriptive in nature, telling us of hopeful times, where we may find comfort amidst terrible years of exile and persecution, yet not demanding anything from us in addition to a life committed to mitzvot? Moreover, perhaps prophecies and their fulfillments are "the secrets of the Holy One,"² apathetic to or even discouraging of human involvement. Or, on the other hand, are prophecies proscriptive, charging the Jewish People to *actively*

I would like to thank Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein whose shiurim on "The Rav, the Rebbe, and Rav Kook," and more specifically on this topic, inspired me to write this article. His and his family's Aliyah to Israel greatly inspired and continues to inspire many of his students who are passionate about doing the same.

pursue the messianic vision and bring about its fulfillment? Is a Jew obligated to actualize prophecy and take part in the realization of the Jewish People's destiny, even in the absence of or in a perceived conflict with halakhic obligations? This article will explore the different approaches to this question, specifically in relation to fulfilling the vision of *Berit Bein HaBetarim*, the dreams of Yosef, and eschatological prophecies of the ultimate redemption.

I. *Berit Bein HaBetarim*: Egypt's Role in Fulfilling God's Decree

If the descendants of Avraham were destined to undergo persecution in a foreign land for 400 years,³ how could Egypt have deserved punishment for bringing this prophecy to fruition? In a discussion about free will, Rambam⁴ asks this very question and answers:

המצריים, כל אחד ואחד מאותן המצרים והמריעים לישראל, אילו לא רצה להרע להם הרשות בידו, שלא גזר על איש ידוע אלא הודיעו שסוף זרוע עתיד להשתעבד בארץ לא להם, וכבר אמרנו שאין כח באדם לידע היאך ידע הקב"ה דברים העתידין להיות

In regard to the Egyptians, each and every one of the Egyptians who caused hardship and difficulty for Israel had the choice to refrain from harming them, if he so desired, for there was no decree on a particular person. Rather, [God merely] informed [Abraham] that, in the future, his descendants would be enslaved in a land which did not belong to them.

Rambam asserts that Pharaoh and the Egyptians had no place in determining how prophecy was to be manifest, especially when it entailed persecuting another people. A human is not meant to intervene with the secrets of the supernal worlds. Egypt should have

waited until God's decree was fulfilled through another nation enslaving Israel.

Ramban⁵ rejects Rambam's view and offers his own:

והרב נתן טעם בספר המדע . . . ולא נתכנו דבריו אצלי, שאפילו גזר שאחד מכל האומות יריע להם בכך וכך, וקדם זה ועשה גזרתו של הקב"ה זכה בדבר מצוה . . .

The [Rambam] gave an answer in Sefer Madda . . . but his words have not settled with me, for even if God decreed that one of the nations cause hardship for [Israel] through any means, and a certain nation arose and fulfilled that decree, that nation has merited performing a mitzvah.

Had they not taken things too far, Egyptians could have performed a *mitzvah* by running to enslave the Israelites before anyone else did. Prophecy or Divine decrees are analogous to the decrees of any human king—the ruler wants his constituents to actively fulfill his command and not tarry in bringing it to fruition. Ramban, unlike Rambam, understands there to be a value or perhaps obligation in fulfilling prophecy, even in face of sinning⁶ by persecuting another nation⁷. Aligning one's destiny with God's promises has real *halakhic* consequences.

II. Yosef and his Dreams

Commentators struggle with determining Yosef's course of action as the viceroy of Egypt in relation to his brothers. Accusing the brothers of espionage, not contacting his father for years, as well as Yosef's other erratic behavior motivate commentators to explain Yosef as slyly encouraging repentance, testing his brothers, or even taking revenge.⁸ Ramban,⁹ however, understands that

Yosef had a different goal in mind:

ולפי דעתי . . . כי בראות יוסף את אחיו משתחוים לו זכר כל החלומות אשר חלם להם וידע שלא נתקיים אחד מהם בפעם הזאת . . . וכיון שלא ראה בנימין עמהם חשב זאת התחבולה שיעליל עליהם כדי שיביאו גם בנימין אחיו אליו לקיים החלום הראשון תחילה.

It seems to me . . . when Yosef saw his brothers bowing to him, he remembered his dreams that he dreamt about them and understood that at present one of them was not fulfilled (because not all of the brothers had bowed down) . . . when he saw Binyamin was not with the brothers, Yosef conjured up this plan to accuse the brothers so they would bring Binyamin to him to fulfill his dream.

Yosef actively pushes to fulfill his dreams, which he realizes have foretold his ascent to power in Egypt. Only once *all* the brothers bow down to him will Yosef be able to reveal his identity and contact his father. For the moment, however, Yosef can continue neglecting his responsibility to contact his father.¹⁰

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama¹¹ strongly objects to Ramban's assumption that human action should be directed to fulfill divine prophecy:

ותמהני ממה שכתב הרמב"ן ז"ל שעשה כדי שיתקיימו חלומותיו כי מה תועלת לו בשיתקיימו ואף כי יהיה תועלת לא היה לו לחטוא כנגד אביו. אבל היה לחשוך עצמו מחטוא לו והחלומות העושה יגש פתרונו גם שתראה שכלות עצומה שישתדל האדם לקיים חלומותיו שהרי הם הדברים אשר יעשו שלא מדעת הבעלים:

I am bewildered at Ramban's explanation that Yosef did what he did in order to make his dreams come true. What did this benefit him? And even if it profited him, he should not have sinned against his father. As for the dreams, leave it to Him Who sends them to make

them come true. It seems infinitely foolish for a man to strive to fulfill his dreams which are matters beyond his control.

Like Rambam above, Rabbi Arama understands dreams and prophecy to exist outside of the realm of human decision making. Furthermore, were there even some value in actualizing prophecies, Yosef could not have bypassed real halakhic obligations such as honoring his father to achieve this secondary goal.

III. Actualizing Eschatological Visions: The State of Israel

This debate presented above has continued to pervade the discussion about our relationship with the State of Israel today. When asked whether prophecies or Kabbalistic ideas that foretold of redemption's secular, anti-religious beginnings provided any legitimacy to the Zionist project, Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik¹² (the Brisker Rav) called upon *Berachot* 10a, which discusses King Chizkiyah's sudden illness and subsequent conversation with Yeshayah:

אָמַר לַיהוָה: מֵאֵי כּוֹלֵי הָאֵי? אָמַר לַיהוָה: מִשּׁוּם דְּלֹא עָסַקְתָּ בְּבְרִיָּה וּבְרֵבָהּ. אָמַר לַיהוָה: מִשּׁוּם דְּחֻזְאֵי לִי בְּרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ דְּנִפְקֵי מִינְאֵי בְּנֵי דְלֵא מְעַלּוּ. אָמַר לַיהוָה: בְּהַדֵּי כְּבָשִׁי דְרַחֲמֵנָא לְמַה לָּךְ? מֵאֵי דְמַפְקֵדְתָּ אֵיבְעֵי לָךְ לְמַעֲבָדָהּ, וּמַה דְנִיחָא קַמִּיָּהּ, קוֹדֶשׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא לְעַבְדֵּי.

Hezekiah said to him: For what transgression am I being punished? Isaiah said to him: Because you did not marry and engage in procreation. Hezekiah said: I had no children because I envisaged through divine inspiration that the children that emerge from me will not be virtuous!? Isaiah said to him: Why do you involve yourself with the secrets of the Holy One, Blessed be He? That which you have been commanded,

the mitzva of procreation, you are required to perform, and that which is acceptable in the eyes of the Holy One, Blessed be He, let Him perform, as He has so decided.

According to Rav Kook, a Jew acts in tandem with God's Hand rather than passively wait for the Redemption to come.

The Brisker Rav's proof comes from Chizkiyah's original plan: by neglecting to fulfill the vision of having kids and instead opting to avoid something halakhically reprehensible (i.e. raising unvirtuous children), Chizkiyah clearly displayed that prophecy cannot overrule halakhically problematic actions. Similarly, prophecies hinting at secular Zionism being the harbinger of Messianic times do not sanction an individual to act in support of secular Zionists who clearly expressed their opposition to Torah values (something the Brisker Rav considered a formal halakhic prohibition).¹³ Metahistorical values emerging from Tanakh and Kabbalah cannot compete with the technical laws laid out in the *Shulkhan Arukh*.

The consistent opinion of the Ramban¹⁴ reflects the attitude of many Religious Zionist leaders at the movement's founding until today. For example, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak

Kook writes¹⁵ that upon witnessing the beginnings of prophetic fulfillment one must contribute to achieving full realization:

ועתה מי הוא העור שלא יראה בזה יד הנוהגת אותנו, ומי לא יחוש חובה לעצמו להיות פועל עם אל ועתידה בת קול להיות מפוצצת בראשי ההרים ואומרת: כל מי שפעל עם אל יבא ויטול שכרו.¹⁶ מי יוכל להפטר מלסבב מצדו תוספת ברכה ומהירות ישועה, לעורר לבות רבות לשוב אל אדמת הקודש, לנחלת ד', להאחז בה, לישיבה בעסקים, ובבנינים, בקניית קרקעות, בנטיעות ובוזריעה, ובכל דבר שהוא מקור חיי ישוב נכון ומסודר

And now, who is so blind that he does not see the Lord's hand guiding us in this, and does not feel obligated to work along with God? A heavenly voice in the future will cry aloud from the top of the mountains and say, 'Whoever has wrought with G-d, let him come and receive his reward.'¹⁷ Who can exempt himself from doing his part in bringing additional blessing and swifter salvation; from awakening many hearts to return to the Holy Land, to the Lord's legacy, that they may become a part of it, to settle it with enterprises and buildings, to purchase property, to plant and sow, to do everything necessary for the foundation of life of a stable and organized settlement.

According to Rav Kook, a Jew is obligated to react to historical shifts on the world stage and recognize their significance for Jewish destiny.¹⁸ A Jew acts in tandem with God's hand rather than passively wait for the redemption to come.

Even Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik—who articulated his own hesitancy of an over-fervent Messianic Zionism¹⁹—expresses a similar perspective on fulfilling prophecies:

Halakhic man discerns in every divine pledge man's obligation to bring about its fulfillment, in every promise a specific norm, in every eschatological vision an everlasting commandment.²⁰

According to the Rav, one does not live halakhically if messianic visions do not translate to commands by which one lives his/her life. Active building and working the Land, as well as perhaps playing or sitting in the streets of Jerusalem, fulfill obligations as they realize the visions of old.

IV. Conclusion: But How do we Know?

Ramban and Rav Kook have won out in the Religious Zionist world against those who argue that metahistorical sensitivity and the realization of dreams are not essential in living a proper halakhic life. Nonetheless, one glaring question remains: how can anyone be audacious enough to postulate that the visions of the prophets specifically refer to our generation and *this* State of Israel? Can we really know with certainty? The Gemara²¹ relates:

אמר רבי אלכסנדר רבי יהושע בן לוי
רמי כתיב (ישעיהו ס:כב) "בעתה" וכתיב
"אחישנה" זכו אחישנה, לא זכו בעתה.

Rabbi Alexandri said: Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi posed a contradiction: The verse (Isaiah 60:22) says God will bring the redemption in "its fixed time," and then the verse states God will "hasten the redemption?" If Israel merits the redemption, God will "hasten it." If they do not merit it, God will bring it "in its affixed time."

There is a fixed time in history that redemption is destined to come; at that point, the visions of old will be realized. Nevertheless, R. Yehoshua Ben Levi tells us that prophecy and redemption are flexible, and each can fit into different periods of history; while eschatological visions will describe a redemption fixed for, say, the year 6000, the Jewish People

have the capabilities of reeling the redemption closer to the present day and have those very same prophecies realized in the present.

In our days, the ancient visions do perhaps foreshadow our current situation; the history of Zionism and the modern State of Israel may very well have the potential to fit into the prophetic narrative. Only we can decide whether to actualize them.

Endnotes

1 See for example: Yeshayah 11:11-12, Yechezkel 37, Michah 4:8 and Malbim there.

2 See *Berakhot* 10a.

3 Bereishit 15:13-14.

4 *Mishneh Torah: Hilkhos Teshuvah* 6:5.

5 Bereishit ad loc. Interestingly, Ramban also disagrees with another assumption Ramban makes. Ramban, as we saw above, understands the decree to be open for any nation to fulfill. Ramban (Bereishit 12:10) asserts that the decree was destined to be fulfilled through the Egyptians alone.

6 *Meshekh Chokhmah* (Bereishit 15:13) asserts that the by persecuting Israel, Egyptians formally violated the Noahide command of setting up courts and a justice system (*dinim*).

7 Ramban ad loc. also extends this principle to the actions of Sanheriv and Nebuchadnezzar who were both called upon by prophets to persecute *Malkhut Yehudah*. Both rulers were punished since they did not act to fulfill the divine decrees but rather to glorify their names and kingdoms. I thank Rabbi Mayer Twersky for pointing this out to me.

8 Radak Bereishit 42:1, *Seforno* 44:2, *Keli Yekar* 42:7 for different explanations.

9 Ramban Bereishit 42:9. See also *Aderet Eliyahu* of the Gra and Netziv ad loc. who say similarly to Ramban. Netziv writes that Yosef only had to fulfill the prophecy because he was the prophet. A prophet cannot "give up" on his prophecies (See *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 11:5).

10 For Ramban, this answer directly

addresses how Yosef neglected his father : "How is it that Yosef, after living many years in Egypt, having attained a high and influential position in the house of an important Egyptian official, did not send his father even one message to inform him (that he was alive) and comfort him? Egypt is only six days' travel from Chevron, and respect for his father would have justified even a year's journey! ... [It would] have been a grave sin to torment his father by leaving him in mourning and bereavement for himself and for Shimon; even if he wanted to hurt his brothers a little, how could he not feel pity for his aged father?" (Ramban Bereishit 42:9)

11 *Akedat Yitzchak Sha'ar* 29:9.

12 Quoted in *Shu"t Teshuvot V'hanhagot* 2:140.

13 It is unclear how exactly the Brisker Rav understands the end of the Gemara where Yeshayah clearly disapproves of Chizkiyah's tactics.

14 Ramban remains consistent in yet another example of fulfilling prophecies. According to Ramban (Bereishit 49:10), the prophecy of *lo yasur shevet M'Yehuda* (Bereishit ad loc.), which confirms that the kingship is reserved for the tribe of Judah, halakhically binds all of Israel to not ascend to the throne if they do not come from Judah. The Hasmoneans (2nd century B.C.E), who were kohanim, were ineligible to be kings and violated this prophecy. This set up their ultimate downfall. I thank Efraim Wagner for pointing this out to me.

15 Kook, *The Great Call*, (הקריאה הגדולה), 1907.

16 Rav Kook is referencing *Vayikra Rabbah* 27:2.

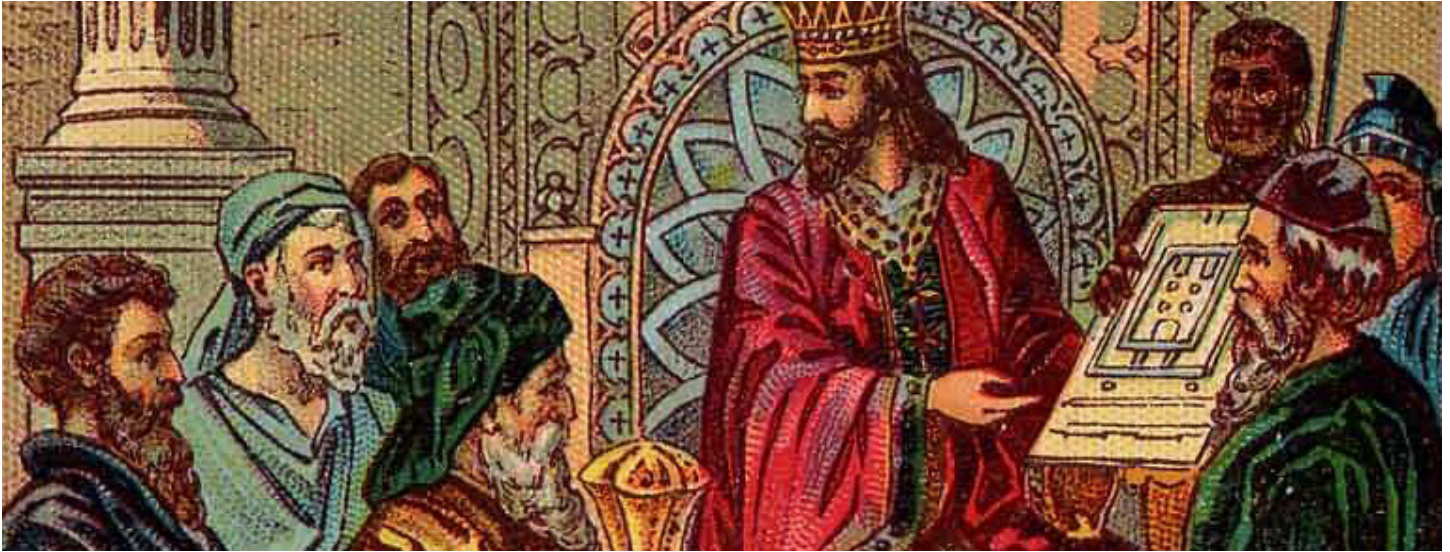
17 See previous footnote.

18 See, for example, *Orot HaMilhama* where Rav Kook writes about World War I and its implications for ushering in the Messianic Era.

19 See Community, Commitment, and Conversation, 163-164, for an articulation of the Rav's stance towards the religious significance of the State of Israel. See also *Kol Dodi Dofek* (also known as *Fate and Destiny*).

20 *Halakhic Man*, 100.

21 *Sanhedrin* 98a.



THE POWERS OF A JEWISH KING

Jewish history certainly seems to be on a positive trajectory. After 2,000 years, millions of Jews have returned home to a burgeoning and bustling country. Israel is growing, making strides geopolitically, economically and spiritually. However, with all the developments, advancements and religious progress, we must remind ourselves of a critical missing link in the actualization of the ideal Jewish society. Contrary to the appreciation of democracy no doubt embedded in our DNA, we are still waiting for the reestablishment of *Malchus Beis David* (the Davidic Kingdom); we are waiting for our king.

We may wonder what positive role the Jewish king plays. After all, the separation of powers enjoyed by

virtually all modern democracies seems almost axiomatic. Monarchy seems outdated, inefficient and unideal. But this is a flawed perspective that stems from a misunderstanding of the role played by the Jewish king. In reality, Jewish monarchy is part of a greater system with its own separation of powers. The Ran, in his *Derashos* no. 11, explains that while the role of the rabbis and judges of the Sanhedrin is to institute and apply halacha, the king's responsibility and authority lies in maintaining and developing the nation in areas outside the realm of what halacha directly relates to, what halachic literature has deemed "*tikkun medina*," or modifications of the state. Anything necessary for societal function, not explicitly addressed by halacha, falls under the purview

of the king. What follows is a brief discussion of sources suggesting that aspects of *malchus* in various forms have, in fact, traveled alongside us throughout our exile, to this very day.

The first extension of Jewish monarchy outside of the prototypical king on the throne in Israel was the office of *Reish Galusa*, or Exilarch. The *Reish Galusa* was the leader of the Jewish community in Babylonia. This institution was established concurrent with the exile of King Yechonia and his court at the end of the First Temple, and was more or less an active position in Jewish exile for over 1,000 years. Tracing his lineage to the royal Davidic line, the *Reish Galusa* exercised political power over his constituents with tax collecting and judicial authority. This

power was recognized by Chazal. As the Rambam, *Hilchos Sanhedrin* 4:13 explains:

ראשי גליות שבבבל במקום מלך הן עומדים,
ויש להן לרדות את ישראל בכל מקום ולדון
עליהן בין רצו בין לא רצו שנאמר לא יסור
שבט מיהודה אלו ראשי גליות שבבבל.

The exilarchs in Bavel stand in place of the king, and they have the authority to impose their will on the nation at any time and to judge them whether or not they consent, as the verse states "the staff shall not leave Judah," these are the exilarchs in Bavel.

Note that the Rambam brings the verse "lo yasur shevet M'Yehuda" in sourcing the authority of the *Reish Galusa*. This is based on the Gemara, *Sanhedrin* 5a. This verse is the source that the Jewish king is generally supposed to be from Shevet Yehuda. Here we see the first departure of the classic application of Jewish monarchy. Apparently, this authority can be manifested in a king in exile of sorts, outside the Land of Israel. It is striking that with the onset of *galus* efforts were made to establish and maintain a seat of rule for the Jewish community. However, today, without a *Reish Galusa*, are we fully devoid of any semblance of monarchy? The *Avnei Nezer*, *Yoreh Deah* no. 312, in a broader discussion about whether a position of town rabbi should pass through inheritance to the deceased's son, maintains that modern rabbis, lacking the authentic *semicha* originating from Moshe, do not hold the position of the *shoftim*, the judges of old. Rather, they are acting as "kings":

רק באמת אין כוונת התורה לדון כשאין
סמוכין. רק שההכרה לדון במידי דשכיח
ואית ביה חסרון כיס שלא יחרב העולם. והוא
דומיא דמלך ממש שבמשפט יעמיד ארץ וא"כ
הרי הוא בירושה כמו מלך ממש.

The truth is, the Torah did not intend for people to judge without semicha. Only in extenuating circumstances, in common enough situations which would cause financial loss, to maintain order. In this regard, he (the rabbi) is comparable to a king, literally, maintaining order in the land, in which case the position should pass through inheritance.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly for the time we live in, some argue the modern government of Israel with the prime minister at its helm has the status of the kingdom of the Jewish people. This is based on an oft quoted comment of the Radvaz, *Melachim* 3:8, where he maintains that the king of Israel is crowned by a prophet, or with the consent of all of Israel:

והאי מלך היינו שהומלך על פי נביא או
שהסכימו עליו כל ישראל.

The king is crowned by a prophet or with the consent of all of Israel.

This second tract, consent of the people, is novel, and its implications are profound. Rav Kook, *Mishpat Kohen* no. 144, based on this comment, maintains that any leader recognized by the Jewish nation takes on the role of king, with all the stringencies and honor afforded to him:

שבזמן שאין מלך, כיון שמשפטי המלוכה
הם ג"כ מה שנוגע למצב הכללי של האומה,
חוזרים אלה הזכויות של המשפטים ליד
האומה בכללה... אבל למה שנוגע להנהגת
הכלל, כל שמנהיג את האומה דן הוא
במשפטי המלוכה, שהם כלל צרכי האומה
הדרושים לשעתם ולמעמד העולם.

In a time without a king, since the rules of the monarchy are relevant to the general national condition, these rights return to the nation as a whole... However, in regard to leading the nation, any (modern) leader governs with the rules of the monarchy that includes the

short-term and long-term needs of the nation.

We cannot overstate the significance of this approach. Every election (even three in a year!) takes on the significance of a coronation ceremony. What a privilege for those living in Israel, that they can participate actively in the crowning of the chief representative of the Jewish state, himself (to a certain extent) the embodiment of royalty.

We have seen that the position of king was historically not limited to a monarch in Israel. In addition, throughout this long and often dark exile our rabbinic leaders may well have taken on regal roles. Finally, perhaps the office can be assumed by one who has no royal or prophetic or religious claim to the throne, but rather by a consensus of the people.

Ultimately though, until the full realization of *Malchus Beis David*, with the coming of Mashiach, we should remind ourselves of the kingly portion within all of us. We are all the children of the ultimate King, Hashem. As Chazal, *Bava Metzia* 113b, state, "kol Yisrael bnei melachim," the entire nation are the children of kings. The *Sefer HaChinuch*, no. 16, commenting on the prohibition of breaking the bones of the *korban Pesach*, explains that such behavior is unbecoming of royalty. Every year, on Seder night we remind ourselves of our monarchical ties by assuming kingly behavior. In anticipation of the ultimate fulfillment of the geulah unfolding before our very eyes, it would do us well to remember that, in addition to our religious and political leaders, we are all members of the *mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh* — a kingdom of priests and holy nation.



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