



Yeshiva University High Schools  
THE MARSHA STERN TALMUDICAL ACADEMY/  
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS

# The Polis

Volume Three

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The Centennial Series:  
Volume Three

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## ***Introduction: A Brief Thought on the Study of History***

Rabbi Michael Taubes

Towards the very end of the Chumash, in *Parashas Ha'azinu*, the *pasuk* states, “*Zechor yemos olam, binu shenos dor va-dor*”—Remember the bygone days, understand the years of generation after generation (*Devarim 32:7*). With these words, the Torah seems to be telling us that it is appropriate to be aware of what has transpired before us, to ponder what has happened in history, to consider the experiences of those who lived in generations gone by. While one might study history out of a sense of curiosity, out of an appreciation of an exciting story, or out of a quest for general knowledge, the Torah here indicates that there is a more profound goal, namely, to assimilate the message that the past is relevant to us in the present.

This point is clearly and more readily understood if the assumption is that what is being spoken about is specifically “Jewish” history. After all, the *Tanach* itself, while certainly not a history text *per se*, contains much historical information—it is noteworthy that according to the *Targum Yonasan* there, that very *pasuk* is actually instructing us to study *Tanach*! Moreover, at least a general knowledge of the eras of the great Talmudic figures, the *Tannaim* and the *Amoraim*, can sometimes yield a greater understanding of certain passages in the *Gemara*, while an awareness of the context in which the *Rishonim* and even the *Acharonim* wrote can bring one to a greater appreciation of some of their works. Finally, a careful reading of Jewish history can actually strengthen one’s *emunah*, as one can see through it the evidence of the *Yad Hashem* as the guiding force behind all that happened to our people

throughout the millennia and behind the remarkable survival of *Am Yisrael* against all odds.

Indeed, there is a discussion amongst the *Poskim* as to whether it is permissible to read Jewish history texts on *Shabbos*, when the study of non-religious material is generally forbidden, as engaging in such study is inconsistent with the special sanctity of *Shabbos*. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 307:16) gives examples of the type of literature to be avoided (both on *Shabbos* and in general), but the *Mishnah Berurah* (No. 58) specifically allows a number of historical works, indicating that they are not included in this prohibition. The reason he provides is telling: one can learn lessons of *mussar and yiras Shamayim* from these works and they are therefore perfectly suitable for *Shabbos*; he adds that these kinds of books may be read on *Shabbos* even in a language other than Hebrew.

The question is why the *pasuk* appears to endorse remembering the past in general, and not necessarily only the “Jewish” past. In the addenda to *Teshuvos Beis Yitzchak* (*Cheilek Choshen Mishpat, Derush LeChag Ha-Shavuot*), the author’s son-in-law speaks at some length about the importance of memory and about how active memory impacts so many different areas of our day to day activities. It stands to reason that a proper understanding of the past, which can be achieved through reading about it and analyzing the significant people and events that shaped it, can activate and animate the memory such that the past actually comes alive and one can thereby see plainly how everything which we experience in the present was indeed molded by the past. In as much as Jewish history does not exist in a vacuum, and in as much as we today do not live in a bubble, but are rather part of the world around us, it would seem worthwhile to recognize the importance of obtaining at least a basic knowledge of general history as well. Although we would not necessarily go so far as to allow the study of general history on *Shabbos*, we can whole-heartedly endorse this study during the week, and it is in this spirit that we take pride in our *talmidim* for producing works such as this journal which evidence interest, thought, and scholarship at the highest level in disciplines which provide a deeper understanding of our world, past and present.

## ***Ideological Indoctrination and the Social Media Solution***

Noam Mayerfeld ('19)

*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”*

**—Nelson Mandela**

The power of education is without bounds. Teachers are given a child with a blank slate, few preconceived notions, and no original ideas, and have years to turn that child into a product that they appreciate. In the education systems that Americans know of, this power is far from abused. An established curriculum, licensed textbooks, and teachers subject to evaluations ensure that American youth is well educated. Outside of the strict structured environment of school, the children's ideas and values are influenced by parents and the environments that those children are exposed to. However effective the system may be, the youth are not only given the ability, but also encouraged, to think for themselves in the classroom, as well as out. But what happens when the education system isn't well regulated, or even worse, it is regulated by people trying to indoctrinate the youth? What happens if from a young age, that blank slate is bombarded with messages through propaganda in the classroom setting and beyond? What happens if the youth are taught one perspective, and not taught, or even forbidden, to think for themselves or expose themselves to other ideas? The result can be quite dangerous.

Nazi Germany provides a perfect example of what could happen when the government alters that education system for the purpose of indoctrinating

the youth. Hitler attempted to turn the German population into his ideal “Volk”—a perfect blond-haired blue-eyed Aryan race free of the disabled, the homosexuals, and the Jews—through the “brainwashing” of the youth. From the education systems to the extensive extracurricular programs like the Hitler Youth, and even to small examples like the board game *Juden Raus* where the objective was to expel the Jew,<sup>1</sup> Nazi Germany effectively bombarded the minds of children with ideas of Aryan superiority, while limiting independent thinking.<sup>2</sup>

In the classroom itself, Hitler carefully selected the textbooks and shaped the curriculum to “brainwash” the students. The textbooks taught the children “love for Hitler, obedience to state authority, militarism, racism, and antisemitism.”<sup>3</sup> More specifically, the standard school syllabus also reflected Hitler’s aims. In history, German youth learned of the glory of Germany and the “stab in the back” theory of its defeat in World War One, with a constant emphasis on nationalism that was omnipresent throughout the course; in biology, they learned of the “racial superiority” of the Aryan race and need for the extermination of the disabled and non-Aryans; geography taught the importance of *lebensraum*, the need for German expansion; and in science the youth were educated in the art of war, learning the fundamentals of shooting, the uses and effects of poison gas, and the study of wartime aviation. The education of the girls was geared more towards a raising a home and family, at the time the German stance on the position of women.<sup>4</sup> Not only were the curriculums themselves altered to promote Hitler’s ideals, teachers continued to send these messages in more subtle ways too, expanding the scope and effect of the system of classroom indoctrination, not only through comments, but even through “innocent” exam questions. For example, the following was a question on a math test:

A bomber aircraft on take-off carries 12 dozen bombs, each weighing 10 kilos. The aircraft takes off for Warsaw, the international centre for Jewry. It bombs the town. On take-off with all bombs on board and a fuel tank containing 100 kilos of fuel, the aircraft weighed about 8 tons. When it returns from the crusade, there are still 230 kilos left. What is the weight of the aircraft when empty?

Another math question emphasizes the indirect methods used to create the all-pervasive atmosphere, by subtly hinting at the promoted values out of context. It reads “To keep a mentally ill person costs approximately 4 marks a day. There are 300,000 mentally ill people in care. How much do these people cost to keep in total? How many marriage loans of 1000 marks could be granted with this money?” subtly promoting euthanasia in the context of math.<sup>5</sup>

The Hitler Youth, the arm of Hitler’s program that extended beyond the classroom, was the most sophisticated, and perhaps the most important facet of Hitler’s system. Creating a national community of children with a sense of belonging, the mandatory Hitler Youth established a sort of cult based on loyalty to the Reich and its ideologies, constantly bombarding the children with the ideals of racial purity, German Nationalism, and destruction of the Non-Aryans, in the guise of “normal” activities. Through programming after school and over the weekends, they were conditioned to extol Nazi ideology. They learned of the “barbaric” acts of the Non-Aryans against the Germans and trained for war.<sup>6</sup> Most importantly, they were not educated in independent thinking, and were removed from the influences of their parents by Hitler Youth, both of which led to the success of indoctrination attempt. Due to the fact that the children were constantly exposed to and bombarded with one set of ideals throughout their childhood *without their parents or their own independent thinking to tell them otherwise*, these values quickly took hold in the youth. The power of the indoctrination was so great, that when American soldiers exposed the youth to another perspective on the issues, their views substantially changed. They were horrified at what they had done; a certain Alfons Heck even wished he had committed suicide before exposed to the other views, so disgusted was he by his actions and the actions of those around him.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, in Stalin’s USSR, the people were successfully indoctrinated. Stalin created a history textbook and curriculum that exaggerated his greatness and that of the socialists. Beyond the classroom, children were counted upon and strongly “encouraged” to join the socialist youth groups—the Young Octobrists, Pioneers, and Komsomols. Secret police arrested anyone who thought differently than the system, striking fear in the hearts of the people, leading

to nation with a one track mind and no opinions of their own, a nation successfully indoctrinated.<sup>8</sup>

In more recent times, this same phenomenon has emerged in the Middle East. Groups of jihadists, Muslims who aim to destroy non-believers through hate and violence, throughout the region, specifically those leading some of the war-focused regimes, have attempted to indoctrinate their youth, and done so successfully, with messages of said hate and violence. The youth in these countries are hounded with the messages that the leaders want to spread, and aren't exposed to any other ideas including their own, because they are denied the opportunity to think for themselves. This leads to a culture of people who follow everything that they have been taught and quickly turn the promoted ideals into beliefs, because these messages are their only perspectives on the issues since they are forbidden to think for themselves. As Nonie Darwish, a former jihadist whose father was an Egyptian general, put it: "the reason jihad has developed into the epidemic of suicide bombers is because of the deterioration of [their] Arab educational system that has based its curriculum on hate, vengeance, and retaliation against non-Muslims," and their youth aren't taught to think for themselves.<sup>9</sup>

These jihadist leaders build up a population of conditioned youth by besieging them with ideas in a variety of ways, to the point where it becomes all-pervasive and they can't live a normal life without constantly seeing the messages that the leaders want to send. One of the methods, the use of textbooks, exposes children to these ideas in a classroom setting. In Palestinian schools, the textbooks encourage jihad by describing it as religious duty and describing the honor that it brings.<sup>10</sup> As a result of these textbooks, children are instilled with a passion for jihad from a young age.

In Iran under the Mullahs, the syllabus was no different. As an Iranian student named Nezam described it, the curriculum focused solely on the ideas that the Mullahs wanted to advance. A journalist who travelled through Iran agrees, stating that "the history books [were] distorted, and the curriculum [was] subjectively infiltrated with ideological prescriptions."<sup>11</sup>

Not only are the children indoctrinated through textbooks, it has reached the point where even just turning on the TV in these countries exposes one to constant messages promoting violence and jihad that the leaders want to send. In Syria the youth are somewhat impacted by what they see in the media.<sup>12</sup> In Palestinian areas though, the use of the media by jihadist groups like Hamas is much more prevalent. Hamas publishes an online children's magazine called Al-Fateh (the conqueror), which places children's stories next to articles promoting suicide bombing. On PATV, pictures of blood and dead children are juxtaposed to children playing, which is shown often, bearing the slogan "seek death, life will be given to you." In addition, many videos are played repeatedly, including a young child composing a farewell letter to his parents in which he writes "do not be sad, my dear, and do not cry over my parting, my dear father. For my country, I shall sacrifice myself," after which he goes out onto the streets and joins a riot, where he runs up to the soldiers and is subsequently shot. The clip then plays a song with the words "how sweet is martyrdom when I embrace you, my land," as the child lays dying. The camera shifts back to the mother crying, and then again to the child finishing the last line of his letter which reads "my beloved, my mother, my most dear, be joyous over my blood and do not cry for me." Another moving clip shows a famous child martyr experiencing paradise in heaven, asking people to follow in his footsteps.<sup>13</sup> These powerful videos are seen by Palestinian children in these areas, day in and day out, contributing to indoctrination. Summer camps run by organizations like Hamas continue to promote these ideas outside of the school or home setting.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes, even in the homes themselves, parents continue to ingrain these ideas in the children.<sup>15</sup>

The in school experience, TV, camps, posters, and sometimes even parents, all create a childhood where one set of ideals is broadcasted from every side, and having any thoughts otherwise is forbidden, creating a youth with the one track mind that their leaders desire. The extent and effects of these education systems can be seen clearly from firsthand experience. Jared Cohen, a journalist who traveled through Iran, Lebanon, and Syria constantly interviewing people sometimes even illegally, even sneaking into a Palestinian refugee camp to interview its members, wrote a book entitled the *Children of Jihad* about the children in these countries, influenced by many of his conversations

with the youth there. When Cohen discusses his findings, he describes many of his encounters and experiences relating to ingraining of ideas in the minds of the youth through education. When he was in Tehran, he discussed the education with a student there. That student described the system very vividly explaining that as a young child confused about the world, it is easy for the government to step in and shape his opinions. The government steps in and shapes the opinion of its youth, inciting them towards violence and hate.<sup>16</sup>

Cohen was also shocked when his experiences revealed to him that not only does the government try to indoctrinate the youth, but some of the inculcation even happens at home from the parents. He was once taken to the home of his bodyguard where the children were paraded around before his very eyes, holding weapons in their hands. The baby cried when they gave him a gun, they just gave him more “as though it was some sort of medicine.”<sup>17</sup> After all of his experiences, Cohen reflects on the success of the conditioning of the youth to one set of ideals and beliefs, stating that the “Iranian State history books and large scale propaganda teach the youth bumper sticker slogans and...the children will hold onto them.” These children are brought up to hate non-Muslims, and love violence and martyrdom.

Nonie Darwish echoes these thoughts from the perspective of a Jihadist growing up in the system. In regards to the extent of the indoctrination, she discloses that “[it] was not just in schools but also in songs, poetry, movies, cartoon and every facet of life.” She describes that “in Gaza elementary schools [she] learned of hate, vengeance and retaliation. Peace was never an option....The Glory of battle was the ultimate honor. They...taught [her] to solve disputes through violence. Girls were in tears reciting jihadist poetry daily and pledging to give up their lives as martyrs.” The effect of all of this was that “after several generations brought up under this severe indoctrination, many Arab children were brainwashed like robots to value suicide bombers as someone to look up to in the hope of going to heaven. This unprecedented and extreme form of jihad produced the current generation of suicide bombers who kill non-Muslims with no mercy.”<sup>18</sup>

These indoctrination techniques that are obsequious throughout the child-

hood of the youth only succeed in indoctrinating this violence-oriented line of reasoning while the youth aren't exposed to other ideas, as Hitler discovered with the success of the Hitler Youth. It is only when they are bombarded with one line of reasoning and don't see another way of thinking, that the indoctrination has such an outcome.

With the advent and rapid spread of social media, it becomes much harder for the leadership to censor the information the children are receiving, and the youth are exposed to public think tanks where they can express their own ideas, and social media where they can see other opinions and ideals. The internet exposes the youth to many other ideals and beliefs, opening up their minds. Cohen witnessed the importance of social media to the Iranian youth. He discovered that the youth in these countries have indeed tried their best to access social media, which exposes them to other perspectives than that of the indoctrination. Cohen even witnessed this phenomenon. Some university students had seen the portrayal of the 9/11 attacks on social media and felt badly,<sup>19</sup> which was definitely not the message that the leaders were trying to instill.

After all his journeys, legal and illegal, and all of the people he met and interviewed in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestinian refugee camps, Cohen believes that social media and internet access is the solution to the indoctrination problem. With social media, the youth are exposed to other ideals, and allowed to think for themselves and express their own ideas freely. Similar to the American soldiers' actions that changed the views of members of the Hitler Youth, social media can serve the same purpose, exposing youth to other ideals and perspectives, undermining the process of indoctrination.<sup>20</sup>

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**END NOTES**

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## ***Israel's History: A Catalyst for Innovation***

Ariel Retter ('19)

### **I. Introduction**

The Israel we know and cherish today is a country of great prosperity and innovation. Among many other impressive qualities, Israel is known as a technological leader in the international world, ranking fifth on the Bloomberg Innovation Index in 2015.<sup>1</sup> However, the land of Israel wasn't always like that. In fact, less than two hundred years ago, Palestine, the land that became Israel today, contained little more than desolate, uncivilized wasteland. One historian wrote,

In the twelve and a half centuries between the Arab conquest in the seventh century and the beginnings of the Jewish return in the 1880's, Palestine was laid waste. Its ancient canal and irrigation systems were destroyed and the wondrous fertility of which the Bible spoke vanished into desert and desolation.<sup>2</sup>

Upon his visit to Palestine in 1867, Mark Twain reported similar findings: "...A desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds....a silent mournful expanse....we never saw a human being on the whole route....hardly a tree or shrub anywhere."<sup>3</sup>

So where are we today? What caused this dramatic turnaround in the course of history? By analyzing the unique history of Israel and the Jews, particularly

the Zionist movement of the late nineteenth hundreds, we find many of the catalysts for Israel's innovations and achievements.

## II. The First Aliyah and Agricultural Innovation

The first Aliyah was a major wave of Zionist immigrants between 1882 and 1903. They were driven to come by a combination of reasons, ranging from the Zionist desire to establish a Jewish homeland, to the need to escape persecution and anti-Semitism. At the time, pogroms were rampant in Russia and Romania, and when Tsar Alexander was assassinated in 1881, authorities blamed the Jews. Due to these factors, between 25,000 and 35,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine, which was under Ottoman rule at the time. These Jews purchased a combined total of 350,000 dunams of land (a dunam is the Ottoman equivalent of a quarter acre).

Needless to say, the choice to immigrate specifically to Palestine was motivated by ideology and/or convenience, not because of the desirability of the landscape. As described by the previously quoted historians, the land at the time was almost unusable from years of erosion,<sup>4</sup> devastation, and neglect. There were also major water shortages. Israel's arid landscape and dry climate presented a great challenge for early settlers.

The early years of Israeli *yishuvim* were filled with great hunger and strict rationing. An international expert in arid climate agriculture as well as an Israeli immigrant in the 1970's, Elaine Solowey<sup>5</sup> recalls: "On Kibbutz Matsuva during the fifties, the choice for a protein course during a meal was between ten olives and one egg."<sup>6</sup> This chapter of Israeli history led to a determination to always be agriculturally self-sufficient.

The farming methods of the Arab dwellers at the time were highly crude and inefficient. What enabled the success of the Zionist settlers was a conscious decision to pursue more modern and effective methods. They were successful at raising funds through organizations such as the United Israel Appeal and put aside most of the money for agricultural development.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the

World Zionist Organization set up research stations during the 1920s, utilizing many ideas of the famous agronomist Yizhak Volcani. His methods focused on effective irrigation, European plows, and diversifying crops.

One key investment by Jewish farmers was in synthetic fertilizers. Between 1922 and 1937, fertilizer imports rose from 1,077 to 14,696 tons. However, they were very careful to always keep the soil balanced and healthy. World renowned soil scientist Walter Clay Lowdermilk collected soil samples all over the Middle East just before World War Two. His reports of soil conditions in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Morocco were very negative: His report read, "Almost everywhere we saw repugnant evidences of deadly soil erosion superseding the results of skilled land use during previous centuries." However, about Jewish farmland, which at the time was only about 6 percent of the land, he said

We were astonished to find about three hundred colonies defying great hardships and applying the principles of co-operation and soil conservation to the old Land of Israel....Here in one corner of the vast Near East, thoroughgoing work is in progress to rebuild the fertility of land instead of condemning it by neglect to further destruction and decay....The country is emerging from a backward low-yield agricultural economy, dependent chiefly on grains and olives, and is evolving towards a modern, scientifically directed and richly diversified economy with fruits, vegetables, poultry and dairy products playing an ever greater role. The wooden plow is yielding to the tractor, the flail to the threshing machine. Rural Palestine is becoming less and less like Trans-Jordan, Syria and Iraq, and more like Denmark, Holland and parts of the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout later decades, the agricultural advancements that had stemmed from a need to survive continued and developed into a major industry filled with groundbreaking innovation. An example of such an advancement is drip irrigation. The inspiration for the idea occurred when Simcha Blass, a Polish immigrant, discovered a leaking pipe dripping water into the roots of a tree, enabling it to grow with minimal watering. Motivated by a Zionist desire for the success of Israel, he developed and patented an irrigation system which,

instead of spraying water over plants, which allows for runoff and evaporation, applies the water in controlled intervals directly to the roots.<sup>9</sup> In 1965, Blass and his son signed a contract with Kibbutz Hazerim, where his system was implemented, while also establishing Netafim Irrigation Company, which distributes irrigation equipment across the world. Today, Netafim holds over 30% of the entire global drip irrigation market.<sup>10</sup>

### **III. Technion and Technology**

In 1923, Albert Einstein, the first president of the Technion society, said that “Israel can win the battle for survival only by developing expert knowledge in technology.” However, many European countries at the time banned Jews from the field of technical studies.<sup>11</sup> This prompted Zionists to advocate for a Jewish University, where Jews could acquire the skills they needed to build up their homeland with strong infrastructure and thriving industry.

In 1903, 60,000 Jews in Palestine gathered and held elections for the first national democratic assembly. Known as the Knessiah Rishonah, this was the first grassroots movement to try to set up a Jewish government for Palestine. Dr Menahem Ussishkin used this forum as an opportunity to give a riveting speech pleading for a Jewish academic institution in Palestine. The convention supported his resolution, and the Technion—Israel Institute of Technology was born.

Technion started small, with seventeen students and only two tracks: civil engineering and architecture. Resources became so limited in the 1930s that the staff agreed to work temporarily without pay so that the institution would not close down. During the tense years before the State of Israel was established, Technion served as a meeting center for underground defense movements, and a brainstorm area for technological defense strategies.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1940s, several factors allowed the university to thrive. Brilliant scientists and scholars fled from Nazi territories, where they were banned from working, and came to Israel, contributing greatly to the institute. After the

1948 War of Independence, the State of Israel demanded many ideas and solutions to structural and technical issues, and Technion rose to the occasion. In the 1950s, they moved to a larger campus, and began expanding their course options for a growing student body.

At this point, Technion's reputation began drawing students from countries in Africa and Asia. The Soviet Jewish immigration of the 1990s after the Iron Curtain fell, in addition to providing skilled and educated workers for the workforce, added 1000 students to Technion.

Technion has grown into an enormous institution, with about 12,800 students choosing from fifty five areas of undergraduate study and eighty graduate programs. One of its buildings, the Henry and Marilyn Taub and Family Science and Technology Center, has the biggest computer science faculty in the Western World. It is difficult to fully explain the role Technion has played in making Israel into a technological superpower; its achievements go on and on. In 1998, Technion students were one of only five universities in all of history to design and launch their own microsatellite. The first Israeli Nobel prizes in the field of science were won by faculty at Technion. Additionally, the 2004, 2010, and 2013 Nobel Prizes in chemistry were all awarded to faculty in Technion. Rewalk, a robotic suit which allows paraplegics the ability to walk and do other activities, the USB flash drive, non-invasive ultrasound as an alternative to surgery knives, the first cultivated human embryonic stem cells, a system for replacing cardiac tissue lost by heart disease, quantum teleportation, and finally, genetic proof that all Kohanim are descended from Aaron, the biblical priestly father, are only a few examples of the innovations contributed by students, alumni, and professors of Technion institute.<sup>13</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In nearly all innovations in Israeli history, whether agricultural, technological, medical, or otherwise, a common theme can be seen throughout: a distinctly unique Israeli determination and spirit. Israel is a country which persevered through countless troubles and dangers. But when all the odds were stacked

against it, the Israelis did not give up. They searched for a solution. They thought outside the box. Through their will to survive and passion for their land, the early Zionists achieved their dreams, and so much more. If only they knew what their land has become, they would be very proud.

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END NOTES

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## ***Jews and Booze: A Look at Jewish Responses to Prohibition***

Murray Sragow

On January 16, 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution became law.<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> The Amendment states:

The manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all the territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

The particulars of the Amendment, including defining “intoxicating liquors” and “beverage purposes” as well as enforcement, were left to the Volstead Act, which had passed Congress in late 1919.<sup>3</sup> Of particular interest to the Jewish community at that time was the fact that wine was among the “intoxicating liquors” that the Volstead Act defined as being prohibited. Wine is, of course, central to many Jewish practices, from weekly Kiddush and Havdalah to special occasions such as marriage and circumcision ceremonies. This did not mean, however, that Jewish practice would be a violation of the Volstead Act. In Section 6 it also gave the Jews (and Christians) an exemption to its prohibitions for “wine for sacramental purposes or like religious rites.” This meant that, in the words of the Act, a “rabbi, minister of the gospel, priest, or an officer duly authorized for the purpose by any church or congregation” could obtain from the government a permit entitling him to buy wine legally for distribution to his group.<sup>4</sup> Thus wine could be obtained through the proper channels for Jewish practices, and therefore Prohibition did not need to cause

a problem for Jewish religious wine consumption.

The problem was that Section 6 was designed with the structure and needs of the Catholic Church in mind, not Judaism. There were two critical ways in which this was so. First, Christians required the use of wine during church services only, as opposed to Jews, who recite Kiddush in the home. This meant that making wine available for Kiddush use would be far more complicated. Rather than simply having wine in the church, supervised by a church official, every Jewish home would need to maintain its own stock of sacramental wine. Second, while Christian denominations, especially Catholic, were extremely hierarchical, Jewish groups were far less well defined. So while it was quite clear who the clergy were that needed to be in charge of wine for communion, it was much less clear who the rabbis were that should control the flow of Kiddush wine. These two issues combined to be an invitation to corruption. Rabbis, or those acting in their place, could claim to be “duly authorized for the purpose” without much proof, and because it was impossible to police every Jewish home it was also impossible to make sure that private stocks of wine were being used exclusively for sacramental purposes.

Jewish response to all this was not uniform. The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the primary organization of Reform rabbis, immediately recommended that its members waive their rights to wine and make do with grape juice.<sup>5</sup> The Orthodox rabbis, however, led by the Agudas HaRabbonim, were much more interested in controlling the process and obtaining wine than in doing without. The Orthodox were quite successful in this effort, as can be seen from the official regulations governing the enforcement of the Volstead Act. The executive agency created to enforce the Volstead Act was the “Prohibition Unit,” and this unit was assigned to the Bureau of Internal Revenue, itself part of the Treasury Department.<sup>6</sup> The Treasury Department’s regulations for enforcing Section 6 of the Volstead Act specifically identified the Agudas HaRabbonim and its president, Rabbi Moshe Zevulun Margolies,<sup>7</sup> as officials enabled to grant wine privileges.<sup>8</sup>

Why the difference in attitudes? A look at the motivation behind Prohibition might prove instructive. Prohibition was an extension of a nativist attitude

that prevailed in the 1920s, which found expression most significantly in the harsh restrictions on immigration that were part of the National Origins Act of 1924.<sup>9</sup> Nativists wanted to return to the country's Puritan roots, which included seeing alcohol as sinful. While Jews tended not to have alcoholism problems as did other immigrant communities, any use of alcohol, even for sacramental purposes, was seen as un-American. For Reform Jews, who were interested in assimilation and in being as indistinct as possible,<sup>10</sup> their goal was to be seen as totally American and in no way unable to comply with the law. They didn't want an exemption. Therefore they preferred to avoid the problem altogether, by using grape juice. Orthodox Jews, on the other hand, did not see assimilation as a virtue. Mostly immigrant and Yiddish speaking, they held little hope for assimilation and were used to existing in an unfriendly environment, skirting the law when necessary to survive. Therefore their focus was on how to continue their lifestyle despite Prohibition, rather than change to accommodate it.

Orthodox rabbis had an additional problem, which was based on their adherence to Halacha. As opposed to Reform rabbis, who were free to adjust their practice as they saw fit, Orthodox rabbis needed to maintain adherence to Halachic precedents. Although ancient sources indicated that grape juice was permissible to use for Kiddush,<sup>11</sup> for technical reasons it never became popular<sup>12</sup> and a highly respected commentary on the Shulchan Aruch, the Magen Avraham, had specifically stated that fermented (alcoholic) wine was preferable.<sup>13</sup> This opinion was shared by the Catholic Church, which was also unwilling to use grape juice for communion because of a lack of precedent for it.<sup>14</sup>

The Conservative movement straddled the middle on this issue, as was often the case. On the one hand, a guiding principle among Conservative rabbis was the desire to allow their laity to be fully American, as was the case among the Reform. But like the Orthodox, the Conservative rabbinate was constrained by Halachic precedent. So the matter was referred to the person widely considered the greatest Torah scholar of the time in America, Rabbi Louis Ginzberg, head of the Talmud department of the Jewish Theological Seminary.<sup>15</sup> On January 24, 1922, Rabbi Ginzberg published his response, a 71 page Hebrew volume that painstakingly covered all aspects of wine use in Judaism, and

concluded that grape juice was in every way the equal of wine. As for the ruling of the Magen Avraham, Ginzberg asserted that it was based on a misunderstanding of the Maharil<sup>16</sup> and therefore irrelevant.

The Orthodox response to Rabbi Ginzberg was deafening silence. Unlike other Conservative halachic changes, where there were quick and strong Orthodox counterarguments, in the case of grape juice there was no move whatsoever to consider either the permissibility of grape juice or the Ginzberg analysis until a number of years afterward.<sup>17</sup> Some have argued that the main concern of the Orthodox rabbinate in forgoing wine would be a failure to uphold their first amendment rights.<sup>18</sup> The risk, they felt, was that if the Jews allowed their religious rights to be infringed upon, the next thing might be ritual slaughter or circumcision, which indeed had been under attack in other places. As one Jewish writer commented, “one need not be more stringent than the government itself, for why should we be more Catholic than the Pope?”<sup>19</sup>

Others have argued that the rabbis were making money in the wine business, and didn't want to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.<sup>20</sup> There was indeed significant money to be made, as is always the case when a contraband item is desirable. Those who are able to provide it can command significant profit from a population starving for it. That is the story of speakeasies and bootlegging and moonshine during Prohibition in the “Roaring ‘20s” generally. In the case of sacramental wine, in many cases the lure of large profits proved too much for rabbis to resist. Wine producers were desperate for access to the market,<sup>21</sup> which rabbis could provide, and alcoholics looking for wine could access it through a rabbi claiming it would be used for sacramental use.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, abuse of the Volstead Act's license to rabbis would be hugely profitable.

This issue came to a head with a series of expose articles written in the New York Times in 1921 and 1922, in which it was shown that unauthorized permits were being used by the Menorah Wine Company in New York City, and as a result federal officials seized \$250,000 worth of the wine.<sup>23</sup> Exposés of white collar crime by Jews were no less embarrassing in 1921 than they are today. Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, principal of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, writing

shortly afterward in a popular Yiddish newspaper, pointed out the “Chilul Hashem” inherent in all this, and demanded that the Jewish community find a way to deal with the problem. He wrote:

How much shame, how much degradation, how much desecration of the honor of the Torah lies therein! Rabbis who ought to be the ones to ensure that the laws of the land are upheld are instead the direct or indirect cause of their violation.<sup>24</sup>

Mendlowitz saw the Volstead Act as being an irresistible cause of Chilul Hashem, and therefore the only way out was for Jews to find a way out of using wine altogether. Only by forgoing the sacramental wine privilege would rabbis extricate themselves from this mess. He argued that Kiddush on wine is only a Rabbinic Mitzvah anyway, and therefore should be eliminated altogether if it causes Chilul Hashem, and besides, it was possible to use raisin wine (or, presumably, grape juice) instead.

Was Mendlowitz admitting to rabbinic inability to resist the temptation of illicit profits? Certainly someone thought so, because he was forced to retract his statement in the following issue, saying that he did not mean to imply that actual rabbis were guilty, only people falsely claiming to be rabbis.<sup>25</sup>

Regardless, Mendlowitz’s accusations and the *New York Times*’ reports demonstrated the wisdom of the Reform and Conservative push to find a way around using the Volstead Act’s sacramental wine exemption. So why were the Orthodox rabbis so resistant?

Perhaps the answer may be found in the positions and policies of the RaMaZ, the president of Agudas HaRabonim. Rabbi Margolies, known during his life as the “dean of orthodox rabbis in North America,”<sup>26</sup> took a number of significant progressive steps to alter Jewish life. One which surely did not endear him to many of his rabbinic colleagues was his effort to organize the kosher meat business in New York. A significant source of income for rabbis came from kosher supervision, and by cleaning up that business he may well have

put some rabbis out of work. By supporting the Volstead Act's rabbinic exemption to sell kosher wine, he gave these rabbis a way to support themselves.

It is also possible that his stance on wine was designed to balance two of his most important and controversial stands, his strong advocacy of Zionism and his support of secular college studies at Yeshiva Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, eventually to become Yeshiva University.<sup>27</sup> Neither of these positions was obvious, and surely many Orthodox Jews disagreed with them, as many still do today. It could be that he realized that his support for these two causes might erode his standing as leader of the Orthodox, and he felt that he must take a strong stand in support of wine for Kiddush to firm up his base. By refusing to even discuss the possibility of using grape juice, he clearly differentiated himself from the Reform and Conservative Jews. Even though he was comfortable sharing a platform with the Reform Rabbi Stephen S. Wise when it came to their mutual support for Zionism, politics was one thing, Halacha quite another. Additionally, by standing firm in this area it demonstrated that he was willing to innovate only where he considered it necessary, but otherwise remained firm in Jewish practice wherever possible.

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**END NOTES**

- 1 This paper was originally presented at a pair of adult education events in 2017 at Congregation Rinat Yisrael in Teaneck, NJ. The author wishes to express his thanks to Rinat Yisrael's Rabbi Yosef Adler and Adult Education Committee Chair Bernie Stahl for their encouragement in developing this study. The high standards at this synagogue demanded a level of research that the author truly enjoyed and looks forward to applying to further studies in the future.  
The title of this article is borrowed from a much larger look at the role of alcoholic beverages in the life of the Jewish community in the early 1900s, written by Marni Davis.
- 2 The Amendment was ratified when  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the states voted in favor of ratification, which had happened exactly one year earlier, when Nebraska became the 36th of the 48 states to ratify. But the Amendment stated that it would not become law until a year

from ratification, presumably so that the country would have a chance to get used to its restrictions.

- 3 Over the veto of President Wilson. The act was officially known as the National Prohibition Act, but it was named for Andrew Volstead, a Representative from Minnesota who was chairman of the Judiciary Committee in the House, who was a primary sponsor of the bill.
- 4 This exemption was designed to avoid a conflict between the 18th Amendment and the 1st Amendment's guarantee against government interference in religion. Without the exemption, Catholics and other Christian sects who use wine for communion, as well as Jews, could claim that their religious rights (and rites) were being violated.
- 5 CCAR Yearbook 30 (1920): 22.
- 6 Like many federal agencies, it took on a life of its own and failed to close at the end of Prohibition in 1933. Instead it became part of the FBI and eventually morphed into today's ATF, or Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.
- 7 Rabbi Margolies, whose initials were RaMaZ, is the rabbi for whom the Upper East Side school is named. Its current dean, Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, is the great-grandson of the RaMaZ.
- 8 Hannah Sprecher, "Orthodox Rabbis React to Prohibition," *American Jewish Archives*, 43:2 (1991), 135-179.
- 9 The Act was deliberately designed to both severely limit immigration altogether as well as to discriminate against immigrants from countries that Jews were coming from, such as Russia. While the Act was not anti-Semitic per se, there is no doubt that Eastern European Jews were among the "undesirables" that the Act was designed to keep out of the United States.
- 10 Reform's attitude was codified in the "Pittsburgh Platform" back in 1885, in which Reform Judaism rejected the notion of Jews as a distinct nation, rather that they were Americans of the Mosaic persuasion.
- 11 Bava Batra 97a specifically permits for Kiddush "wine from the press," which means fresh grape juice prior to fermentation. The Gemara quotes Rava as saying "a man may squeeze a cluster of grapes and recite Kiddush on it."
- 12 The science of preventing fermentation was relatively new at the time. Thomas Welch, the founder of Welch's Grape Juice (and a strong advocate of Prohibition), invented in 1869 the process of pasteurization whereby the fermentation process was stopped. But he did not found his company to make grape juice commercially until 1893, and even then it was not commonly available. Pretty much the only way to get grape juice was

- squeezing it from fresh grapes as Rava described. Since grapes grew in the summer-time and were therefore only available fresh in the summer and fall, grape juice was unavailable in the winter and spring. This is why there was no discussion of the permissibility of grape juice for the Pesach Seder, as there was no grape juice to speak of at that time of year.
- 13 Although the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 272:2 and 500:2) quotes the Gemara above (note 11) without stating a preference for wine over grape juice, the Magen Avraham (published in 1692) in both places specifically states that aged wine is preferable.
  - 14 Catholic practice has modified somewhat since then. Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, who for many years directed the Gateways alcohol rehab facility in Pittsburgh, reports that he once had a Catholic priest as a patient. The priest was unwilling to go completely dry in fear that he would never be able to take communion. Rabbi Twerski, who had connection to a cardinal in Rome, arranged for the Pope to grant the priest a dispensation to use grape juice, arguing that since today grape juice is universally accepted by Jews for the Passover seder and since the communion is a reenactment of the last supper, which was a seder, the same rules ought to apply. The Pope agreed, and it has since become standard practice in the Catholic church to permit alcoholics to use grape juice. Rabbi Twerski claims that he told the Pope that he had “done a Mitzvah.”
  - 15 The great influx of Eastern European scholars such as Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky did not occur until the mid-1930s. In the 1920s, scholarship in America among the Orthodox had not hit its stride.
  - 16 The Maharil (published in 1556) in his section on the laws of Rosh Hashanah argued that one should say Kiddush on old wine on the second night, even though one is using new wine for the blessing of “Shehechyanu”. The Magen Avraham believed that this was an indication that old (fermented) wine is superior. Ginzberg believed this an incorrect reading, instead explaining that the issue was that the blessing on new wine (“haGafen”) can be covered by the one said on old wine, but not the reverse.
  - 17 The first known rabbinic response appears in an edition of Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvot with a commentary called Yad HaLevi, by Rabbi Simcha Hurewitz. In a note there to the Mitzvah of Kiddush he responds to Ginzberg in a very forceful manner. But this is a fairly obscure location, and it was not published until 1926.
  - 18 Shlomit Yahalom in “Jewish Existence in the Shadow of American Legislation: A Study of Prohibition,” *Tarbiz* 53 (October-December 1983): 117-137.
  - 19 Judah David Eisenstein, “Otzar Zichronotai,” (New York, 1929), p. 142.

- 20 This is Sprecher's basic thesis. See pp. 163-168.
- 21 For an interesting example of this see Adam Teeter's "How wine bricks saved the U.S. wine industry during Prohibition" in <https://vinepair.com/wine-blog/how-wine-bricks-saved-the-u-s-wine-industry-during-prohibition/>.
- 22 Many synagogues attracted non-Jewish members because each member was entitled to ten gallons of wine per year. See <https://blogs.yu.edu/library/2016/04/18/pesach-prohibition-and-the-grape-juice-wars-of-the-1920s/>.
- 23 *New York Times*, March 30, 1921.
- 24 *Dos Yiddishe Licht* 1 (1923): 3-4, quoted and translated by Sprecher in n. 63.
- 25 *Dos Yiddishe Licht* 1 (1923): 7, p. 13.
- 26 This is how the *New York Times* described him in its obituary following his death in August, 1936. See <https://s3.amazonaws.com/images.shulcloud.com/727/uploads/bulletins/1996/Summer%201996%20-%20Memorial%20Tribute%20to%20Rabbi%20Moses%20Zevulun%20Margolies.pdf>.
- 27 <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/margolies-moses-zevulun>.

## ***The Flux of Values***

Nadav Heller ('19)

WHEN in the Course of human Events it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth the separate & equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.<sup>1</sup>

These words have been cemented into the annals of history as the apex of a victorious revolution. When the Second Continental Congress unanimously declared their independence from Britain, it was a triumph of “inalienable Rights” and “Safety and Happiness” over “absolute Despotism.”<sup>2</sup> From time immemorial, any class that believed their rights were being squelched believed so because of the values they purported.

When a society enshrines values and places them on a pedestal, anyone who would dare venture to touch them is immediately ostracized...sometimes. People cling to the things they find important, as exemplified in the Babylonian Talmud regarding the Kittites and the people of Kedar, two pagan island nations. The Kittites worshipped fire gods, and the people of Kedar worshipped water gods, and although the Kittites *knew* logically that the water gods of Kedar can destroy their gods, they still didn't abandon their beliefs.<sup>3</sup> They clung to their values. Yet somehow the first thing that every politician

promises when running for office is change.

**“This Administration Won’t Resemble the Previous, Horrible Administration”**

Human beings are full of contradictions, like sticking to beliefs versus perpetually desiring change. Dan Ariely, Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics at Duke University and well-known author, speaks extensively on this topic, particularly in his book *Predictably Irrational*, writing that information alone doesn’t motivate behavior. Ariely packages this concept, claiming that “individuals are honest only to the extent that suits them,” often attributing value to things that don’t deserve it. Ariely left cans of soda, each with a market value of a dollar, in various refrigerators across the MIT campus and all of them were stolen. He then left plates of one dollar bills in refrigerators across the MIT campus and they were left untouched, even after extended periods of time.<sup>4</sup> It is socially acceptable to take a soda that isn’t yours, but completely unacceptable to take money, despite the fact that they actually have the same value.

Social actions can lead to beliefs, as shown in Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer*. Tom, the main character, is tasked with the arduous travail of whitewashing a fence. When the other boys in the neighborhood come by on their way to go on adventures, swim, and have fun, Tom plays on this irrationality. He acts as if it’s a great privilege and a good deal of fun to whitewash a fence. After all, “I reckon there ain’t one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it’s got to be done.” This embodies Ariely’s claim “that in order to make a man covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain.” Soon boys were paying Tom for the opportunity to do his chore, all because he made them feel like they were supposed to think that it’s fun.<sup>5</sup>

Without solidified values and obvious priorities, it becomes very easy to get swept up in the emotion of society and abandon the values we never bothered to make matter. Humans need objectivity, or else they’ll give in to peer pressure. Tom’s friends would never have been suckered into doing his chore,

the Kittites would abandon their fire gods, Ariely's sodas wouldn't have been stolen, and, most pertinent to this article, America wouldn't have strayed from its initial values if it had bothered to commit to certain truths irrelevant of social pressure.

### **Defining Our “Values”**

To appreciate the gravity of this concept, it's necessary to understand the true meaning of a value. According to Merriam-Webster, “value” comes from the Latin “valere,” to have strength, which developed into the Anglo-French “valeur,” to be worth; which finally became in Middle English “value,” meaning “something intrinsically valuable or desirable”.<sup>6</sup> Thus something that easily falls out of favor or isn't prioritized cannot be considered a value. Since it is only valuable in the appropriate context. However, key tenets of American ideology are freedom of expression and diversity of thought. America was founded on opposition, on the aforementioned necessity of “one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another” and are urged to exercise “a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind.”<sup>7</sup> How can this idea be contrasted with the seemingly stagnant canon of unchangeable core values?

Woodrow Wilson openly advocated for the “recognition of the fact that a nation is a living thing and not a machine,”<sup>8</sup> and Thurgood Marshall delivered a rousing speech, claiming “that the Constitution was a product of its times”<sup>9</sup> and thus must be adjusted. Marshall went on to describe the intentional exclusionary nature of the Constitution, showing that the famous “We The People” represented there didn't extend to incorporate slaves, people of color, women, or Native Americans; in fact, it often specified just the opposite. Clearly today's societal climate of inclusivity and diversity isn't represented in that point of view, and so the Constitution should be changed.

The problem becomes that not only does nothing get solidified that way, but it often ends violently. In the Civil War, the Baltimore uprisings of today, the Battle of Blair Mountain, and even the birth of our country itself, to name a

few, the fair treatment and representation of peoples were challenged. In each scenario, different sets of values butted heads. Every time society changes its mind about something, the entire legal system and culture has to bend around it, and countless people have died trying to make their voices heard and fighting for what they believed in. This would seem to poke a big hole in the argument for changing societal values and altering our legal system due to that perpetual flux...if not for the fact that it is a misdiagnosis of the situation!

To say that the shift is the problem must be a mistake! Societies are expected to develop and change over time, and always have. Greek philosopher Heraclitus has famously said “Everything changes and nothing stands still.”<sup>10</sup> Rabbeinu Moshe Chaim Luzzato wrote a similar idea in *The Path of The Just*, illustrating the importance of vigilance and introspection. “He who walks in his world without contemplating whether his path is good or not is like a blind man who is walking along a riverbank—he is in grave danger and more likely to come to harm than to be saved.”<sup>11</sup> The predictable irrationality of people to dig their heels in and resist change simply because they’re cemented in their habits is what prevents our society from advancing. Society is imperfect, as are its members, and the problem is in the treatment of other opinions, in the one-sidedness of society, in the overcorrecting reaction to old ideals, and finally in the hatred between one American and another.

This opposition of previous (and possibly outdated) ideals is how we define progress. Look at our society today! We are compelled to say that current politicians embody American values, and yet the Founding Fathers would be bewildered and horrified if they saw the way that modern politics has developed. They warned us of the dangers of a two party system; John Adams said

there is nothing which I dread so much as a division of the republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concerting measures in opposition to each other,<sup>12</sup>

and that assertion has been echoed by many others including George Washington and Alexander Hamilton.<sup>13</sup> Even in the developing years of our governmental system, party politics were vicious, the Whigs being branded

thus because the term means spoiled milk, and the Tories being branded thus because the term means highway robber. “So deep went the fear that post-Revolutionary party politics would again degenerate into civil warfare that the Founding Fathers understandably shunned the word party, much less the idea,” according to Willard Sterne Randall, a Distinguished Scholar in History and a professor of history at Champlain College.<sup>14</sup> The polarized radicalization of warring parties that our forefathers feared is precisely what modern politics has become. And yet the banners of equality and granting more freedoms have been the theme of politics for the past 150 years.

Seemingly, we should be closer to the American Dream, the dream of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” for all Americans than we have ever been! But the modern American Dream hardly even resembles the initial intentions or ideal utopias of our forefathers. In any free society there is a voice of opposition, a voice demanding change. The voice of the fringe can be extreme and discomfiting, but not necessarily wrong. And that is why it’s so essential for America to prioritize and enshrine reason, debate, civility, and decency. In his Commonwealth Club Address, Franklin D Roosevelt quoted Meredith Nicholson as saying that “democracy is a quest, a never-ending seeking for better things.” Those are the core values of America that shouldn’t change.

In 1632, Pope Urban VII brought Galileo Galilei to trial for holding the forbidden Copernican view of heliocentrism. They didn’t listen to his math, science, or reasoning because it contradicted their preconceived beliefs. In fact, the sin of having an opinion was so great that he was convicted for heresy and imprisoned (he was later released but kept under house arrest for the rest of his life). Dogma is very opposable; attacking a claim is easy when the logic behind it is unclear, or the attacker hasn’t bothered to entertain a different perspective. That problem of the authority argument dissipates if we understand *why* different denominations believe what they believe, and how they validate their worldview, proceeding to discuss it like human beings. This was exactly the driving idea behind the enlightenment and blooming of science. Francis Bacon relentlessly crusaded for the deconstruction of conventional wisdom, and tried to discredit misconceptions about how the world functioned. In Bacon’s time, the world at large still believed that there were

only four elements, none of which what we would call elements today. Bacon campaigned for the global skepticism, which was shared and popularized by René Descartes. Only by tearing down that crooked foundation and starting anew could the path toward progress be illuminated.

In my math classes, my teacher doesn't teach me equations. He says that memorizing the equation to solve a problem is very different from understanding how to solve the problem or why the equations work. Instead he guides us toward a method where we preserve a noetic process, where we implement our affirmative cognition to draw towards a solution. In that light, math is no longer about memory or following the rules, but instead about utilizing our appreciation for the framework of the world to come to our own conclusions. In America, we see civil rights, societal treatment, and legal doctrine changed all the time as society does. Change is a neutral thing; sometimes it's good, sometimes bad, and it's often hard to draw the line. But through preserving freedom of thought and respect for one another, we come to our own conclusions instead of swallowing the pills of what is contemporarily believed to be right or wrong.

*This* is how progress is made. When we as a society entertain all points of view, and have an open discussion where people aren't ostracized for their views (as they are today). When our culture represents the idea that decency is important. Much of the core of our society is elastic, as long as it is within the confines of reason, logic, debate, open-mindedness and love for one's neighbor as for oneself. After all, in the words of Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel, "for every insight we must pay a new deed. We must strive to maintain a balance of power and mercy, of truth and generosity....The degree to which one is sensitive to other people's suffering, to other men's humanity, is the index of one's own humanity."<sup>15</sup>

However, there are differences between legal values and societal values. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., in his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, explains that there are just laws which one is obligated to follow and unjust laws which man is obligated to break. The problem lies in the definition of just and unjust. The opinion that "Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that

degrades human personality is unjust”<sup>16</sup> is an abstract and subjective concept. By that logic, any time anyone didn’t like a law, they could and must morally disobey it. This is a direct transgression of the Kantian moral imperative that one should “only act on that maxim through which [he] can at the same time will it become a universal law”<sup>17</sup> and would cause the collapse of society. In order to understand how these ideas can be reconciled we must look at the context in which King was writing. He was oppressed and silenced. If he had been treated as an equal, if his opinions were respected, if governmental officials had been willing to speak to him, maybe he would have thought differently. The law is important, and once a decision is made, although it can be contested, it must be upheld. In a world where freedom of thought is prized and where the American Dream is allowed to develop, there is no justice in civil disobedience and the Kantian imperative is preserved.

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END NOTES

- 1 Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Babylonian Talmud, *Tractate Ta’anit*, 5b.
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## ***Welcome to Mars: The New Space Race***

Eli Lichtenstein ('19)

Ever since the Apollo 17 moon landing in 1972, humans have never stepped foot on another planet. Plans for people to once again leave the Earth, usually with Mars as the ultimate target, have been scrapped due to policy changes and budget cuts. In the United States, for instance, work stalls with every change of administration, as each new president creates a different strategy for space exploration. After the first Apollo missions, further large-scale exploration missions were nixed and resources instead went to an Earth-orbit-bound space shuttle. The target that most seem to agree on nowadays for manned exploration is Mars. However, nations besides for the US are also having difficulties with going to Mars. The Russian and the European space programs are restricted mainly by small budgets, while the space agencies of two other countries, China and India, are still in their early stages. However, there is now another consideration: the private spaceflight sector. Unhindered by bureaucracy and often backed by billionaires, these companies stand to have the greatest chance of putting humans on the surface of the red planet.

There are many reasons to send humans to Mars. Firstly, the effort involved in doing so will benefit Earth as a whole as new technologies are created. For instance, if astronauts grow crops on Mars, it will be done in suboptimal conditions; greenhouses will be small and could be underground. Productive agricultural techniques will need to be developed to grow crops efficiently, which can then be used on Earth. Another innovation will be in communica-

tion. Mars is about 140 million miles away from Earth, so communications with high data loads will be difficult. The development of precise antennas that can transmit large data loads across great distances will translate to a greater communications network on Earth. These are only a few of the many technologies needed on a Mars mission. From water reclamation to energy production, every technology involved in a mission can then be used on Earth. Secondly, a crewed Mars expedition is a goal that commercial companies can work towards. The creation of more powerful and better technology by these companies will open up space and make access to it safer and cheaper. This will allow for currently unsustainable yet profitable activities like space tourism and asteroid mining.

But these are benefits that arise from an already completed task. Why go to Mars in the first place? One of the main reasons to go is because of the scientific discoveries the planet offers. Mars offers a planet worth of science. Its unique geological features, for example, can show how planet formation differs at a farther distance from the sun. The differences between the Red Planet and our own shows the conditions required to create permanent habitability.

Additionally, one of the most likely places to have, or to have had, life is Mars. The planet may have once had the conditions necessary to support organisms, namely liquid water. NASA uses a “follow the water” strategy, and Mars has it, in the form of ice. Clays on the Martian surface, which form from a mixture of volcanic rock and water, proves that Mars was once wet. What is debated, however, was how long Mars had water for, and whether or not there was enough time to allow for life to form. Recently, organic material has been discovered, supporting the theory that the planet could have supported life in the past. Additionally, methane has been found on Mars.<sup>1</sup> On Earth, methane is mainly produced by living organisms, and on Mars, this could be indicative of life as well. As one of Earth’s neighbors, Mars is an excellent place to search for life.

Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX, offers another reason to go to the Red Planet. Under his direction, SpaceX is trying to achieve an ambitious goal, the

creation of a self-sustaining colony. The benefit of this is that if a global catastrophe were to occur on Earth, such as an asteroid strike, then Mars could theoretically act as a backup home for the human species.

Currently, the frontrunners in space commercialization are SpaceX and Blue Origin. Both companies are creating affordable and efficient launchers to low Earth orbit, with the goal of eventually expanding their range to Mars. Each company is developing manned space capsules for the purposes of space station visits and tourism. This will also allow for people, not just cargo, to go to Mars.

But why should humans go to Mars when robots already have? The answer is because of efficiency. As compared to a rover, a human can do work more intelligently and at a faster rate. The Spirit and Opportunity rovers, for instance, both had a primary mission length of 30 days. When the principal investigator of these missions was asked how long it would take for humans to do the same thing, he responded “20 minutes.”<sup>2</sup> This is because a person could think for himself and quickly traverse the terrain. An astronaut could pick out samples on his own, without having to wait for instructions from Earth. Additionally, detailed experiments can be done on all samples collected by trained astronauts, even those that won’t be returned to Earth.

Although unmanned technology is becoming more advanced, none could ever be as effective as humans. Rovers, the most efficient way to robotically explore the surface, are limited by the time it takes for mission controllers to create safe driving paths. Even if a rover was autonomous, it would still drive very cautiously and slowly on the ground, out of fear of rolling over a sharp rock or tumbling over a cliff. A person, with superior judgment, could just steer around the obstacles. Another limiting factor is the fact that a machine couldn’t identify interesting scientific targets to go to, contributing to the inefficiency of the mission.

Despite what some believe about the dangers of interplanetary spaceflight, there is really no significant risk towards human health. On a mission, astronauts will face radiation exposure and long periods of time in microgravity.

Both of these are non-issues. On such a mission, the risk of developing cancer from radiation is less than one percent. For context, an average earthbound person already has a 20 percent chance of getting cancer.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the radiation received by a person on a Mars mission is insignificant. Additionally, this level of risk is well within NASA's tolerance levels of an increased three percent chance of cancer on a mission. As for the lack of gravity on a flight, there have already been astronauts who have spent longer than half a year in space without ill effects. In fact, a cosmonaut named Valeri Polyakov has set the record for the longest single spaceflight at 438 days, and he wasn't harmed.<sup>4</sup> The lack of gravity also won't be a burden on the crew once they land, because Mars has one-third the gravity that Earth does. Thus, astronauts will be able to adjust with relative ease.

SpaceX, led by Elon Musk, has expressed its commitment to putting people on Mars. Musk is driven by a desire for humanity to become a multiplanetary species, both as the next step of a developing society and a backup for Earth. SpaceX already has two successful launchers. The Falcon 9 is the first to have a reusable lower stage, and is capable of launching upwards of 50 thousand pounds to low Earth orbit. The larger Falcon Heavy, made up of three reusable Falcon 9 first stages, can lift more than 63 metric tonnes to orbit.<sup>5</sup> The reuse of rocket stages significantly lowers the cost of rocket launches. A Mars mission can take advantage of this and launch different parts of the mission, such as the lander and the interplanetary transfer stage, separately. This bypasses the weight limits of a single launch. A Mars mission utilizing already developed SpaceX hardware could use the Falcon Heavy rocket and manned Dragon 2 capsule. As a capsule isn't sufficient for a multi month long expedition, other modules will need to be created. This is the most theoretical part of a mission. No Mars lander has ever been created that can handle the weight of a crewed mission. There's been no habitation module designed to support a mission over such long travels in space. However, SpaceX is already working on a solution. Instead of a traditional mission made of several different spacecraft, SpaceX aims to make a single monolithic spacecraft called the BFR, short for the Big Falcon Rocket, which could bring 100 people to Mars from launch to landing. Although the BFR has not yet been constructed, progress on it is being made. Another yet-to-be-created technology is Blue Origin's New Glenn rocket.

Like the Falcon 9, this rocket will be reusable, and it can launch over 45 tonnes to orbit. This is good for any group seeking to make an interplanetary mission. This additional launch option means there is one more competitor in the sector, limiting monopolization and causing a drop in launch costs. However, it seems that Blue Origin itself will not send people to Mars, as Jeff Bezos, the company's founder, said he would like to focus on the Moon instead.<sup>6</sup>

As for NASA, its focus has been shifted yet again. President Trump has mandated NASA to change its focus from Mars to the moon.<sup>7</sup> There's no real reason to send people Moon—it's already been done. Doing so is unnecessary even as practice for a Mars mission. Because of how the how bodies differ from one another, developing technology for one won't be beneficial for the other. Mars has an atmosphere, and the moon is airless. Mars is scales of magnitude farther away than the moon, and its resources are entirely different. So instead of wasting time on returning to the Moon, NASA should put priority in creating technology for a Mars program.

Although development has been slow, NASA has two promising pieces of hardware, the SLS launcher and the Orion capsule. The soon to be completed SLS will be the most powerful rocket to be created since the Saturn V, with a lift of 95 metric tons. Complementing the SLS is the Orion capsule, which can launch up to six crewmembers to Earth orbit. Unfortunately, that is all NASA has. As stated before, other crucial technologies need to go to Mars just don't exist yet, and NASA has no clear path to procure them and integrate them with existing ones. Unless it takes the initiative soon, NASA will find itself watching as a private company puts the first people on Mars.

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#### END NOTES

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## ***An Introduction to Solomon Ibn Gabirol***

Rabbi Mordechai Brownstein

### **His Philosophy**

Stephen H. Webb,<sup>1</sup> in the April 2015 edition of *First Things*,<sup>2</sup> crowned Ibn Gabirol “the first Jewish philosopher in Spain”. The significance of that laudatory remark removes Ibn Gabirol from the league of Jewish philosophers whose source was Aristotle from the Arabic to the unique position of reading Plotinus, the Neoplatonist, from the Arabic. Ibn Gabirol based his philosophical thought on Plato, not Aristotle. Maimonides followed Aristotle. However, neither Maimonides, born in Cordoba, Spain on Passover Eve, 1135 or 1138 and died on December 12, 1204 (20th of Tevet 4965), or Ibn Gabirol, born in the Spanish city of Malaga in 1021-22 and died 1058, was the very first Jewish philosopher. That glory belongs to Rav Saadya Gaon.

Rav Saadya Gaon (Saadya ben Joseph, known in Arabic as Sa'id 'ibn Yusuf al-Fayyûmî) was born in Fayyûm (Upper Egypt) in 882 and died in Baghdad in 942. He was the very first Jewish philosopher, a full century before Ibn Gabirol. Theologian, philosopher and rabbi, Rav Saadya's legacy includes a number of philosophical and theological treatises, two Arabic translations of the Bible, a [mostly non-extant] Biblical commentary in Arabic, various rabbinical, mathematical, and grammatical writings, a Hebrew dictionary, liturgical poems and a Jewish prayer book.

A key figure in the life of the Jewish community, Rav Saadya's rabbinic career

included influential involvement in a controversial Jewish calendrical reform and a contested rise to the position of head Rabbi at the Sura Academy.

In his general philosophical comportment, Rav Saadya upholds the need for and importance of reason, even in a religious context of revelation and faith. In fact, in his commitment to the importance of human reason (including the sense in which reason can judge the rightness of at least a number of Biblical commands and prohibitions), Rav Saadya's theological ideas may be said to reflect Islamic Kalām sensibilities (in particular, the teachings of the Mu'tāzilites).<sup>3</sup>

Rav Saadya was indeed the first Jewish philosopher, though his philosophy is influenced by Islamic thought and perhaps only indirectly from Hellenic notions that were absorbed in the Arabic. Yet Ibn Gabirol travelled a different route. He followed Plotinus and the Neoplatonic Greek School.

Webb continues, "Medieval Christians knew him only by his Latinized name, Avicbron, and they assumed that he was either a Christian or a Muslim." Authenticity of Ibn Gabirol's authorship of *Fons Vitae*, the *Font of Life*, was proved by Solomon Munk and has been since undisputed.<sup>4</sup> "Most scholastics also thought he was a deeply misguided thinker. [Ibn] Gabirol was identified with the doctrine of universal hylomorphism." The word "hylomorphism" is a composite of two words: "hyle," Greek for matter, and "morphe," Greek for form or shape.

The Greek term "hyle" is found also in Jewish sources

רמב"ן בראשית פרק א פסוק א:  
 אבל הוציא מן האפס הגמור המוחלט יסוד דק מאד, אין בו ממש, אבל הוא כח ממציא,  
 מוכן לקבל הצורה ולצאת מן  
 הכח אל הפועל, והוא החומר הראשון, נקרא ליונים "היולי".

It is difficult to know if the Ramban merely adopted the term from the Platonists or if some Platonian or Plotinian thought stowed away aboard the Ramban's mental construct.

Webb explained the Plotinian view ascribed to Ibn Gabirol, “It is the idea that everything G-d creates is composed of form and matter—and treated as a precursor of the nominalist emphasis on the absolute freedom [and thus inscrutability] of G-d’s will.” Now, let us define nominalism.

Nominalism is the doctrine that abstract concepts, general terms or universals have no independent existence but exist only as names. Therefore, various objects labelled by the same term have nothing in common but their name. Put another way, only actual physical particulars are real, and universals exist only subsequent to particular things, being just verbal abstractions.

Nominalism arose in reaction to the problem of universals and in particular to Plato’s solution to it, known as Platonic Realism, which holds that abstract objects like universals and Forms exist in their own right and are wholly independent of the physical world, and that particular physical objects merely exemplify or instantiate the universal. Nominalists ask exactly where this universal realm might be, and find it unusual and unlikely that there could be a single thing that exists in multiple places simultaneously.<sup>5</sup>

Stated differently, the physical particulars are the matter shaped by the universal forms and the climax of the creative energy of G-d. The universals do not exist outside or above the physical particulars. There is no perfect house, chair, horse, sword, or lance in a higher intellectual realm. Ibn Gabirol based his world view on the Greek thinker Plotinus, known as a Neoplatonist.

The term “Neoplatonism” refers to a philosophical school of thought that first emerged and flourished in the Greco-Roman world of late antiquity, roughly from the time of the Roman Imperial Crisis to the Arab conquest, i.e., the middle of the 3rd to the middle of the 7th century. In consequence of the demise of ancient materialist or corporeal thought such as Epicureanism and Stoicism, Neoplatonism became the dominant philosophical ideology of the period, offering a comprehensive understanding of the universe and the individual human being’s place in it. However, in contrast to labels such as “Stoic,”

“Peripatetic” or “Platonic,” the designation “Neoplatonic” is of modern coinage and to some extent a misnomer. Late antique philosophers now counted among “the Neoplatonists” did not think of themselves as engaged in some sort of effort specifically to revive the spirit and the letter of Plato’s dialogues.

To be sure, they did call themselves “Platonists” and held Plato’s views, which they understood as a positive system of philosophical doctrine, in higher esteem than the tenets of the pre-Socratics, Aristotle, or any other subsequent thinker. However, and more importantly, their signature project is more accurately described as a grand synthesis of an intellectual heritage that was by then exceedingly rich and profound. In effect, they absorbed, appropriated, and creatively harmonized almost the entire Hellenic tradition of philosophy, religion, and even literature—with the exceptions of Epicureanism, which they roundly rejected, and the thoroughgoing corporealism of the Stoics. The result of this effort was a grandiose and powerfully persuasive system of thought that reflected upon a millennium of intellectual culture and brought the scientific and moral theories of Plato, Aristotle, and the ethics of the Stoics into fruitful dialogue with literature, myth, and religious practice. In virtue of their inherent respect for the writings of many of their predecessors, the Neoplatonists together offered a kind of metadiscourse and reflection on the sum-total of ideas produced over centuries of sustained inquiry into the human condition.

Plotinus was born in 204 C.E.<sup>6</sup> in Egypt, the exact location of which is unknown. In his mid-twenties Plotinus gravitated to Alexandria, where he attended the lectures of various philosophers, not finding satisfaction with any until he discovered the teacher Ammonius Saccas. He remained with Ammonius until 242, at which time he joined up with the Emperor Gordian on an expedition to Persia, for the purpose, it seems, of engaging the famed philosophers of that country in the pursuit of wisdom. The expedition never met its destination, for the Emperor was assassinated in Mesopotamia, and Plotinus returned to Rome to set up a school of philosophy. By this time, Plotinus had reached his fortieth year. He taught in Rome for twenty years before the arrival of Porphyry, who was destined to become his most famous pupil, as well as his biographer and editor. It was at this time that Plotinus, urged by

Porphiry, began to collect his treatises into systematic form, and to compose new ones.<sup>7</sup>

It is precisely Ibn Gabirol's Neoplatonic system that ostracized him from the Jewish philosophical forum that saw reality through an Aristotelian lens. Maimonides, in his *Guide for the Perplexed*, never mentions Ibn Gabirol. Neither does he mention Plato with the same awe as Aristotle. Ibn Gabirol, an intellectual heir of Plato through Plotinus, would have been subject to the same consideration as Plato in the pages of the *Guide for the Perplexed*.

For example, Maimonides declares:

Aristotle says in his *Physics*, that according to Plato the heavens are transient. This view is also stated in Plato's *Timaeus*. His opinion, however, does not agree with our belief; only superficial and careless persons wrongly assume that Plato has the same belief as we have. For whilst we hold that the heavens have been created from absolutely nothing, Creation Ex Nihilo, Plato believes that they have been formed out of something.<sup>8</sup>

Stated differently, Plato rejected Creation Ex Nihilo. Aristotle rejects Creation Ex Nihilo also. The discerning reader is encouraged to peruse Maimonides' cushioned rejection of the Aristotelian theory of the Eternity of the Universe as opposed to Creation Ex Nihilo.<sup>9</sup>

Webb elaborates,

Plotinus pictured the divine emanations flowing downward from a singular unity until they settled into the opacity of matter before petering out into nothingness....Gabirol dramatically reverses this valuation by arguing that the lower actually sustains the higher. Matter can function as form and form can function as matter because matter itself is the universal spiritual substance out of which all things are formed. Matter only appears lower than form when we look at it from our limited perspective. When seen from G-d's viewpoint, matter is the medium of G-d's

intention to bring the entire cosmos into a state of redemption....The lower, in the end, is actually the higher. Matter appears to serve form, but form is destined to give way to matter's consummation [or, we could say, matter's transubstantiation].

### **Ibn Gabirol's Poetry**

Some of Ibn Gabirol's poetry remains in liturgical use in Judaism to this day, but his philosophy was all but forgotten. Even experts in medieval theology typically treat him as little more than a footnote to scholastic debates about how angels can be individuated without being embodied.

See Ibn Ezra Bereishis 1:3, and Bamidbar 22:28.

Rav Shlomo Ibn Gabirol asks: "If one is to assume the serpent and donkey possessed the faculty of speech, why was it withdrawn from them? Loss of speech is not recorded as their punishment!

See also Bereishis 28:12.

Rav Shlomo Ibn Gabirol interpreted the dream: "The ladder symbolizes the Divine soul; the angels are the flashes of inspired thought."

In addition, Ibn Gabirol's poetry is woven into Jewish aspiration in prayer form:

סליחות לערב ראש השנה:  
שופט כל הארץ ואותנו במשפט יעמיד,  
נא חיים וחסד על עם עני תצמיד.

סליחות ליום חמישי של עשרת ימי תשובה:  
או בהר מר דץ יונת אלם, בקחתו איתן עולה שלם.

Webb writes,

Instead of being a universal [rather than limited] holymorphist, he wanted to get to the root of the Aristotelian definition of matter—and to pull out. Gabirol offered the most systematic and creative alternative to hylomorphism possible, and he did so by working within the very parameters of the Neoplatonic project.

John Laumakis, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Illinois College, prefaced his English translation of *Fons Vitae*, *The Font of Life*, or *Mekor Chaim*, with a well-researched biography of Ibn Gabirol. He too, begins with the acknowledgement of Ibn Gabirol's philosophical premiere on the Spanish stage of Jewish philosophers, and cautions the reader that biographical sketches of the Spanish philosopher are rare. Laumakis bases his biography on two sources: *The Generations of Nations* by Sa'id al-Andalusi [1029-1070] and *Discussions and Memoirs* by Moses Ibn Ezra [circa 1055-1070].

For the sake of brevity, I shall merely record some bullet points of Laumakis' biography. Since great writers never write in a vacuum, one can assume the philosopher's experiences contributed to his genius and perspective as reflected in his beautifully inspiring poetry.

1. Gabirol was born in the Spanish city of Malaga in 1021-22. His parents relocated to Saragossa, a city known for its Islamic and Jewish scholarship.
2. There Gabirol was instructed by one Jekuthiel ben Hassan, a prominent and well-connected elderly Jew.
3. When Jekuthiel became a victim of political conspiracy, Solomon Ibn Gabirol sought refuge in Granada.
4. It appears that it was in Saragossa that Ibn Gabirol wrote his, *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities*, a work that some citizens felt was directed at them. This perhaps incriminated Ibn Gabirol in Jekuthiel's alleged crimes.
5. Ibn Gabirol died before his fortieth year.
6. He suffered all his life from a "painful and disfiguring skin condition".

7. “The Royal Crown is the most famous as well as the most philosophical of Ibn Gabirol’s poems,” writes Laumakis. See the opening stanza below:

כתר מלכות

גבר, / כי בה ילמד ישר חכות-בתפלתי יסכן.

ספרתי בה פלאי א-ל חי / בקצרה אך לא באריכות.

שמתי על ראש מהללי / וקראתיה כתר מלכות.

Translated by the Jewish Publication Society of America, *Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*; Philadelphia, 1924.

### The Royal Crown

May this my prayer aid mankind  
 The path of right and worth to find;  
 The living G-d, His wondrous ways,  
 Herein inspire my song of praise.  
 Nor is the theme at undue length set down,  
 Of all my hymns behold “The Royal Crown”.

The Royal Crown is recited by Yemenite communities each year as part of Yom Kippur service. Many other North African communities have adopted the poem in their liturgy.

John Laumakis in *The Font of Life*; Translated from the Latin with an Introduction, summarizes<sup>10</sup> Ibn Gabirol’s philosophy in this manner:

Reality, referring to the observable and unobservable, is viewed as a progression. Beginning with the 1] first essence, G-d, the potential proceeds to 2] the divine will, and on to 3a] universal form and 3b] universal matter. Matter describes the observable world shaped by form as Platonic

wisdom informs. Laumakis sees the progression of reality as a series of concentric circles with G-d represented by the largest overarching circle; divine will and intelligence, smaller than the first; lastly form and matter, the smallest and lowest.

The higher the circle, the more opaque unobservable and inscrutable it is. However, the progression is such that the higher becomes perceptible through the lower which is its image and example in an inferior level of reality. But the human is charged with gaining wisdom which means knowledge of reality and its progression, the map of the route from the most inscrutable to the manifest beginning with the obvious and from there to ascend. The human rises up the slope following the path of the surrounding circles from the bottom—natural elements such as water, air, and fire, accidents such as color, shape, texture, then higher to the planets and stars which is the limit of the sphere of sight and touch, the world of sense perception.<sup>11</sup>

The ascending path affords a twofold purpose: A] It is the journey incumbent upon all intelligent beings lifting them toward their goal of nearness to G-d and B] refining the soul enabling it to relate better to new heights and visions of divine will; increasing the soul's understanding and knowledge of the essence—G-d. Laumakis concludes thus: "The ultimate goal of *The Font of Life* is to reveal the knowledge one needs to lift the soul up to the higher, intellectual world, that is, to return the human soul to its own world, with the hope of ultimately being united with G-d so that one may experience enduring happiness."<sup>12</sup> Platonic idealism is unmistakably present in Ibn Gabirol's philosophy, and not surprisingly, since he is drinking from the deep well of Plotinus, the Neoplatonist. "Knowledge is what a human being should seek in this life because 'the knowing part of a human being is better than all of his other parts.'"<sup>13</sup>

Recall the previous discussion, above, concerning the Ramban's referring to the "hyle" in creation. Sampling *The Font of Life*,<sup>14</sup> Treatise Two, chapter 11, we overhear a conversation between Teacher and Student:

Student: Which of these names is more fitting for discussing between us by its means concerning the subject that sustains the form of the world?

Teacher: The name that is more fitting for what sustains the form of the world is “matter” or “hyle,” because we are considering it only as stripped of the form of the world that is sustained in it...

Let us eavesdrop on the final dialogue:<sup>15</sup>

Student: What fruit will we attain from this endeavor?<sup>16</sup>

Teacher: Avoidance of death and union with the origin of life.<sup>17</sup>

Student: What will help attain this noble hope?

Teacher: To be separated from sensible things,<sup>18</sup> to be poured out in intelligible things<sup>19</sup> by the mind, and to be completely suspended<sup>20</sup> from the giver of goodness. When you do this, he will look upon you and will be generous to you, as is appropriate for him. Amen.

We agree.

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**END NOTES**

- 1 Stephen H. Webb (March 13, 1961–March 5, 2016) was a theologian and philosopher of religion. Webb graduated from Wabash College in 1983, earned his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, and taught at Wabash College as Professor of Religion and Philosophy from 1988 to 2012.
- 2 A journal of Religion and Public Life.
- 3 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
- 4 Munk, *Melange de philosophie juive et arabe*; 1859, 170-173.
- 5 Internet Encyclopedia.
- 6 Rabbi Yochanan, the author of Talmud Yerushalmi, lived from 200–279 C.E. Rav, Shmuel, and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi were also his contemporaries.
- 7 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
- 8 *Guide for the Perplexed*, Part Two; chapter 13.
- 9 *Guide for the Perplexed*, Part Two; chapters 19 and 23.

- 10 *Medieval Philosophical Texts in Translation*, No. 51,  
Roland J. Teske, SJ, Editor, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2014).
- 11 P. 24.
- 12 P. 24-25.
- 13 Introduction; P. 25.
- 14 P. 88 (P. 43 in Baeumker's Latin edition).
- 15 P. 261 (P. 338-339 in Baeumker's Latin edition).
- 16 Times haven't changed much!
- 17 "Life" and "Death" need commentary. "Death" is defined as the opposite of "Life"  
which is union with the source, G-d.
- 18 The term "sensible" refers to the things perceived by the senses, as opposed to  
the spiritual.
- 19 To Platonists, intelligible means spiritual. The spiritual realm is the heavenly  
spiritual realm.
- 20 One is suspended in air when in the spiritual realm above.

## *The Legend of the Golem*

Micha'el Shloush ('19)

The Golem is a clay figure brought to life through *Kabbalah*, and there are many legends of such creatures throughout Jewish history. Some describe it as a large giant, while others suggest that he looked just like any other person, with special hidden abilities. One of the first sources of such a creation would be from the holy Talmud.<sup>1</sup> In it, Rava produces a “man” and sends him to Rav Zeira. Rav Zeira starts talking to it, and when it didn't respond, he concluded that a *chacham* (wise scholar) made it. He then proceeded and destroyed it.

Similarly, the Talmud<sup>2</sup> quotes that Adam himself was originally created as a Golem. Adam, like all Golems, was made from mud.

Possibly the most famous Golem would be the one made in Prague. Rav Yehuda Loew (commonly known as the Maharal) prayed to G-d to spare the Jews from the terrible accusations of the Christians in his time. In response, G-d sent a message to him in a dream telling him to create a Golem from clay, in order to destroy the enemies of the Jews. Rav Loew fulfilled G-d's task by using clay from the banks of the Moldova River. Along with his son-in-law, Rav Yitzchak Hakohen, and his student, Rav Yaakov ben Chaim Sasson Haleivi, the trio went together to execute this phenomenon. The Maharal taught them special prayers and instructed them to purify themselves. On the twentieth of Adar, the Maharal gathered the two righteous men to create the Golem as G-d commanded. They brought it to life through his recital of deep and complicated Kabbalistic formulas. They circled the clay figure seven times and

said many incantations, and they ended by quoting a verse in Bereishit: “And he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul.”<sup>3</sup> The mold began to glow and its eyes opened. He was ordered to get up, and was dressed by the three men.

Contrary to popular belief, the Golem of Prague actually looked like any other man. He was named Yosef, and was told that he must obey the Maharal’s every order. He was soon known as Yossele. The Maharal created him in order to defend the Jews from the anti-Semitic Pogroms, and blood libels. In the famous tales about him, Yossele was known for his extraordinary strength, and his skill to make himself invisible. Although many stories state that he was sent on household chores, he was actually reserved for performing the imperative demands of the great Maharal. One time when he was sent on a chore was one Friday afternoon. The Shamash (caretaker of the Synagogue) asked him to bring water to the Synagogue. He must have forgotten about him, for when it was time for services, the Synagogue was flooded, and the Golem was on his way to bring even more water. When he wasn’t actively helping Rabbi Loew, Yossele was known to sit in the corner of the Synagogue with his head in his hands.

Many versions of the story end up with the Golem going out of control, with random rages and frenzies. The Maharal decided that he had no choice, and he reluctantly removed the letter Alef from the word Emet, which was engraved onto his forehead.<sup>4</sup> This resulted with the word Meit, which means death. He then placed his motionless body in the attic of his shul. On the other hand, when the attic was remodeled in 1883, no sign of the Golem was present. There have been various accounts of what really happened to the remains of the hero of Prague. One version states that the Golem was moved from the attic and buried in a local graveyard, while another states that a Nazi officer once went up to kill the Golem, and never came back down.<sup>5</sup> The attic is closed to the public.

Many state that the Golem needed to rest on the Sabbath. It was said that every Friday afternoon, the Maharal would remove the parchment from the Golem’s mouth, which contained G-d’s name, rendering him motionless until Saturday

night, where he would insert it again.

There is a similar tale about the renowned Vilna Gaon. He reported that prior to the age of 13, he once started to form a Golem, but received a heavenly message that he was too young, and, in haste, he destroyed it.

One of the other well-known stories was the Golem of Chelm. Created by the devout Rabbi Eliyahu, there are many similar stories about his Golem. Rabbi Eliyahu suddenly started to daven and fast with more fervor than ever. One day Rabbi Eliyahu asked his shamesh for two sacks of clay. He locked himself up in the attic. He created a Golem, and when he wrote the word Emet on his forehead, it came to life. The Golem of Chelm was known to just do ordinary chores. He had phenomenal strength, and he was asked to do various everyday errands. However, besides for not being able to speak, he had one other short-coming: he couldn't think for himself. One such story was when he was sent to the forest for firewood. He was sent on Friday morning, and in the afternoon, just a little before Shabbos, he was nowhere to be found. The Rabbi and the Shamesh travelled to the forest...or what was left of it. The Golem was busy cutting down every tree. He was never told just how much firewood was needed.

The Golem of Chelm was said to have stood in the marketplace, with an ax in his hand. Whenever a peasant was attacking a Jew, the Golem struck the peasant with a fatal blow, killing him. Like the Golem of Prague, the Golem of Chelm also had the name Emet engraved on his forehead (it seems that many Golem stories overlap). Rabbi Eliyahu soon realized that the Golem was growing bigger and bigger, and he decided to neutralize it, lest he destroy the world. However, the Golem was too tall for Rabbi Eliyahu. One day, he brought him up to the attic. He then asked the Golem to tie his shoe. The Golem bent down, and at that very moment, Rabbi Eliyahu erased the Alef, killing the Golem. As he tried to erase the Alef, however, before it expired, the Golem got away with scratching the Rabbi's face which left him with a notable scar. Taking the key with him, he then bolted the attic door, where it is still believed to be today.

However, there are many non-believers. Rav Shlomo Rapaport claims that the

Maharal never made a Golem. One of his strongest proofs is that the Tzemach David, one of Rav Loew's students, never mentions that his predecessor ever made such a creature.

Interestingly, the root word for the word "Golem" is only mentioned once in Tanach: Tehillim 139:16.

Others say that to bring the Golem to life would be to write G-d's name on parchment, and place it in the Golem's mouth. It seems that the Golem of Prague had a parchment in his mouth as well as the word Emet on his forehead.

Rav Zevi Hersh Ashkenazi actually discussed whether a Golem could be counted in a *minyán*.

Interestingly, in all of his numerous Seforim, the Maharal makes no mention whatsoever of forging a Golem. Nor did any of his contemporaries or students. There happens to be a sefer called *Niflaot Maharal* which goes in depth of the Golem's life. The author describes how the Golem countered blood libels. This book was written in 1909. Yet the Maharal himself died in 1609, so why was it written about 300 years later?

*Niflaot Maharal* was a manuscript found in Metz, France. The editor, Rav Yudel Rosenberg, a prestigious Rabbi, wrote in the introduction that he found this rare manuscript and edited it. Rav Yudel was not just an ordinary man; he wrote many holy books including the *Yadot Nedarim*. He even translated the entire *Zohar* from Aramaic to Hebrew. An utter genius, he received *semichah* (Rabbinical ordination) at the youthful age of sixteen! He was the head of *beit din* in Poland, and was a respected man. Rav Yudel insisted that this manuscript was written by the Maharal's son-in-law, Rav Yitzchak Hacohen. However, with lots of research, one soon sees that there was no such manuscript called the *Niflaot Maharal*. So how could Rav Yudel have "edited" it? Furthermore, there are more than a few errors within this book. The dates are off by a few years, and a library written about in the manuscript seems to have never existed.

To sum up, it seems impossible that this book was written by Rav Yitzchak Hacohen, and we are forced to reason that this book is a fraud, written by Rav Yudel himself. But with all his reliable books verified by many great Rabbis, why would Rabbi Rosenberg make up such a fable? After much rigorous research by Rabbi Dr. Shnayer Leiman, one can finally find an answer. In Montreal, Dr. Leiman found a priceless book, which displayed an invaluable outline of Rabbi Yudel's books. There were three sections: his Rabbinic works, his *sifrei derush*, and finally the third section: folk literature. It was this section which contained his sefer of the *Niflaot Maharal*. Basically, the young Jewish kids needed some good stories, and Rav Yudel himself went ahead and wrote up an amusing anecdote for them.

All in all, if Rav Yudel was the only source for the Golem, then, unfortunately for many believers, the Golem didn't exist. However, there was an even earlier source for the Golem: in 1837, we find the first story of the Golem ever written, which was the story of the Golem flooding the Synagogue before the Sabbath. Furthermore, this very story was omitted in the *Niflaot Maharal*, so we may infer that Rav Yudel wished to make up his own little story of the Golem.

To conclude, the stories of the Golem may or may not have occurred. It may remain a mystery until the end of times.

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#### END NOTES

- 1 Gemara Sanhedrin 65b.
- 2 Ibid., 38b.
- 3 Bereishit 2:7.
- 4 Dan Bilefsky, "Hard Times Give New Life to Prague's Golem," *New York Times*, May 10, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/11/world/europe/11Golem.html>.
- 5 [http://www.bibleandjewishstudies.net/stories/The\\_Golem\\_of\\_Prague.pdf](http://www.bibleandjewishstudies.net/stories/The_Golem_of_Prague.pdf). Other sources include: <https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/16236/was-there-a-golem> and [http://www.bibleandjewishstudies.net/stories/The\\_Golem\\_of\\_Prague.pdf](http://www.bibleandjewishstudies.net/stories/The_Golem_of_Prague.pdf). Also, see the *shiur* "Golem of Prague, Fact or Fiction?" by Rabbi Dr. Shnayer Leiman.



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