מילין חביבין

BELOVED WORDS

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Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School
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Our mission is to recruit, professionally train, and place rabbis throughout the world who will lead the Jewish people and shape their communities' spiritual and intellectual character in consonance with modern and open Orthodox values and commitments.

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Encouraging intellectual openness, questioning, and critical thinking as essential components of one's full service to God (*AVODAT HASHEM*).

Affirming the shared covenantal bond between all Jews, promoting love of all Jews (*AHAVAT YISRAEL*) and actively pursuing the positive and respectful interaction of all Jewish movements.

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Recognizing *ERETZ YISRAEL* as our homeland and affirming the religious and historical significance of the State of Israel for all Jews in Israel and the Diaspora.

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Menorah, E. Lambert, Oil on paper, 20 x 24

~ *For Aunt Liz* ~

This year's edition of

Milin Havivin "Beloved Words"

is dedicated to the memory
of our beloved friend

Elizabeth "Elisheva" Lambert z"l,

who was artistically fruitful
and multiplied beauty in the world.

May the lights from our menorahs shine brightly
throughout the world and be blessings for peace and love.

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President's Introduction

Office of the President
Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School

YESHIVAT CHOVEVEI TORAH is thrilled to be releasing another issue of *Milin Havivin* under the leadership of our dear student Daniel Goodman. Over the past year we at the Yeshiva have watched him shepherd this exciting volume with care and determination. This accomplishment—getting brilliant articles from inside and outside the Yeshiva—bodes well for his future in the rabbinate and the abilities of all the contributors.

Milin Havivin represents the creativity and independent thinking that Yeshivat Chovevei Torah seeks to nurture in our students, along with the dedication to passionate Torah Judaism that is the bedrock of our identity and way of life. This issue should nourish both the mind and the soul of every reader who is looking for the best Orthodox intellectual writing.

I hope that *Milin Havivin* inspires all our readers to join with our students, graduates, faculty and friends all over the world to reinvigorate and rejuvenate a Modern Orthodoxy that has so much to contribute to our lives. May this issue be part of our Yeshiva's goal to train rabbis who bring meaningful Yiddishkeit to every type of Jew wherever they go.

With blessings of Torah and our Tradition,
Rabbi Asher Lopatin

Editors' Introduction

"Man's likeness to God expresses itself in man's striving and ability to become a creator."
— Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*

"Life, like a dome of many-colored glass, Stains the white radiance of Eternity."
— Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*

A JUDAISM ENGAGED WITH THE ARTS

IN HIS FINAL AUTHORIAL STATEMENT as Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and British Commonwealth, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks challenged twenty-first century Jewish leaders "to deepen the conversation between Torah and the wisdom of the world, and to do so globally."[1] Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (YCT) Rabbinical School is an innovative Orthodox institution that is on the cutting edge of this intercultural conversation. The faculty, students and publications of YCT exemplify the openness and sophistication of academic freedom, and the rootedness and sanctity of the halakhic (observant) Jewish tradition. YCT now seeks to deepen the conversation between Torah and one of the essential bodies of worldly wisdom and beauty—the arts.

Milin Havivin is very pleased to present our first-ever special issue: *A Judaism Engaged with the Arts*. The outstanding articles in this issue demonstrate that Judaism and the arts are not separated by an impassable cleft, but are joined together in a surprisingly intimate relationship. Judaism has enjoyed a longstanding engagement with the arts—from literature to music, from theatre to dance, and from painting to film—and the arts are more and more frequently engaging with Jewish subjects as well.

We at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah have the opportunity to exemplify a Judaism that engages with the world by demonstrating that halakhic Judaism can, and perhaps *should*, engage with the arts, and that the arts can, and perhaps *should*, engage with Judaism. *Milin Havivin*'s first-ever issue on Judaism and the arts illustrates that the fullest, richest, and most vital Judaism is not one which is segregated from the world, but one which engages with the best the world has to offer. The tremendously diverse and edifying articles in this issue confirm that religious Judaism is no impediment to a serious engagement with the arts but is, au contraire, a catalyst for an engagement with the

arts. The authors in this volume indicate that Jews need not disengage from Judaism upon entering the museum, theatre, cinema, concert hall, or library; on the contrary, Jews will actually glean *more* from these artistic experiences precisely by bringing their Judaism to these venues.

And we can simultaneously show that a proud, self-confident, religious Judaism that engages with the world in this fashion is not subject to slipping off of some phantom slope of the imagination, but will instead emerge stronger due to this engagement with the world of the arts. Moreover, an inward-looking, segregationist, sectarian Judaism may abdicate its responsibility of *kedoshim ti'hyu*—sanctifying the secular—and may not fulfill the Jewish ideal of serving as an *Or LaGoyim* [a Light Unto the Nations].

Menachem Kellner leads us off by illustrating that the defining characteristic of the arts—creativity—is an essential aspect of Judaism as well. Kellner demonstrates that even rabbinic paragons of elite intellectualism—Maimonides in particular—also prize artistic creativity. According to Maimonides, *imitatio Dei* [the imitation of God] is a fundamental ethical precept, and thus, when we human beings create, we fulfill this primary Jewish imperative: to create is to imitate God.[2]

The other voices in this issue join Kellner in reminding us that even though "we do not ordinarily associate Judaism with the arts, if we look again at the Torah, we see that Jews were once commanded to build beautiful structures, fashion beautiful articles of clothing, and craft implements of artistic merit." The arts, then, appear to be an integral aspect of Judaism: the Torah, writes Kellner, also values literary beauty; Maimonides treasured music, valued beautiful paintings, and appreciated aesthetically pleasing items.

Judaism is often termed a tradition that privileges sound over sight—after all, our central text is the "Shma," the command to hear—but the motif of sight in Jewish tradition should not be overlooked. Tobi Kahn writes that sight is an important traditional mode of Jewish expression. In his beautiful, lyrical essay, Kahn also writes that to create art is to imitate God, the artistic Creator par excellence. And when we appreciate art, we learn to see—and thus further come to a "mode of knowing the world and its maker." If the study of science brings us closer to God,[3] so too does the study of art bring us closer to understanding our Creator.

Jill Nathanson's *Seeing Sinai*, and her reflections upon her artistic interpretation of the Sinai experience, exemplify why visual literacy is a prerequisite for full access to the entire modality of Torah interpretation. Traditional Jewish learning and academic studies tend to privilege textual interpretation over visual interpretation. Nathanson encourages us to become visually literate in order to access and appreciate these visual interpretations of Torah. As

art historian Matthew Baigell writes, "Art can open up new avenues of approach to understanding and internalizing textual materials, but you must start from the art objects themselves."[4]

Steven Fine's learned discussion of the Jewish visual traditional, "*Lernen* To See: 'Modernity,' Torah and the Study of Jewish 'Art,'" shatters the "false and deeply modern dichotomy" inherent in the misguided notion that Judaism is only a "'religion of the book'" and not a "'religion of the image.'" Fine also suggests that a proper understanding of "the variety of the canon of Jewish art" is necessary in order to fully fathom the ways in which *halakhah* treats "art."

It has long been evident, as the school of theopoetics has shown, that the arts offer rich and effective techniques of illustrating theology. Ben Schachter illustrates—figuratively and literally—how art can be used to illuminate halakhah as well. Schachter's artistic renderings of the eruv demonstrate that the arts have a place in the most traditional form of Jewish learning of all: the study of Jewish law.

In her article on the relationship between Judaism and abstract art, Jill Nathanson helps us realize that art allows us to see the often unseen spiritual dimension of life. One of the challenges of living a spiritual life in a material world is the difficulty of discerning the hand of the hidden God. Nathanson writes that "[a]bstract art can be a way to make visible that which we cannot or can barely see." Developing an appreciation of abstract art could significantly assist the religionist's task of making visible those workings of God that we would not otherwise notice.

Richard McBee's erudite and nuanced analysis of contemporary Jewish art highlights the simultaneous challenges and exciting possibilities presented by integrating the visual arts into traditional Jewish learning. Whereas the position that "Jews inherently do not and cannot produce a visual culture" was once maintained as an insurmountable obstacle to religious Jews' engagement with the visual arts, later rabbinic authorities (such as Rabbi David Feinstein) have held that "almost all artworks created as artworks are permissible." Sculptures, however, still present stiff halakhic dilemmas.

Bezalel Naor and Susan Nashman Fraimain likewise illustrate the fruitful ways in which Judaism can engage with the arts. Naor shows us that an understanding of the visual arts can help us decipher the meaning of biblical words and important Jewish motifs. Naor also highlights Rav Kook's interpretation of the "power of imagination" [*ko'ah ha-medameh*] in Judaism. And in "A Jewish Art," Susan Nashman Fraiman definitively refutes Richard Wagner's utterly false canard that "Jews were . . . incapable of producing real art" by demonstrating that Jewish art has been flourishing—particularly in contemporary Israel.

Dalia Davis shows us how the art of dance can be used to interpret Jewish text and to enhance (and supplement) traditional yeshiva-style learning. Dance can be an important artistic discipline within Jewish learning, for "movement too can arouse the soul in ways not necessarily possible by means of the intellect alone." Furthermore, dance—like other artistic practices—offers individuals for whom traditional textual study is not feasible a means of entry into Jewish learning.

Jim Diamond discusses the significance of music in the biblical and rabbinic tradition. Diamond demonstrates that the art of music has long engaged with the *akedah* [the binding of Isaac] and other Jewish topics, and explains the intriguing relationship between the popular protest music and poetry of 1960s America with Jewish philosophy and theology.

Drawing upon Paul Ricoeur, Robert Alter, and the poetry of Geoffrey Hill and Micheal O'Siadhail, David Mahan's eloquent essay explores how the literary arts, and theological approaches to literature in particular, can significantly enhance the religious deed of remembering. It has been observed that reading literary fiction fosters empathy, and Mahan notes this important feature of literature as well, writing, "[i]t is my own conviction that through their keen attention to words, works of the literary imagination bring an articulacy to the obligation to remember in all of its complexity, which enable us to bridge distances between ourselves and our neighbors, including and especially our suffering ones."

Joseph Lowin's insightful treatment of A. B. Yehoshua's masterpiece *Mr. Mani* demonstrates that literary fiction helps us engage with difficult texts—such as the *akedah*—in sophisticated, nuanced, and highly reflective manners. And Marc Zvi Brettler's essay sheds light on how an understanding of literature can help us better understand our own Bible. Brettler, though, reminds us that while "the Bible is certainly literature, and uses literary rhetorical devices," it "is not comprised entirely of Literature."

My commentary on J. C. Chandor's "All is Lost" illustrates how film is an artistic medium that can adumbrate Jewish moral, theological, and ethical messages.

And finally, I offer some thoughts, notes, and reflections regarding the relationship between Judaism and the arts.

This issue would not have been possible without the hard work and gracious assistance of many people. I give thanks to our indefatigable Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Dov Linzer, and to our amazing emeritus and current Presidents, Rabbi Avi Weiss and Rabbi Asher Lopatin, for their editorial comments, encouragement, and suggestions. I thank Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

and Rabbi Ysoscher Katz, my intellectual, ethical, and spiritual paragons, each of whom is a ner tamid of spiritual inspiration in my religious and intellectual life. We thank Dr. Marc Shapiro, Rabbi David Fried, Dr. Michelle Friedman, and my friend and editor emeritus Dr. Ben Elton, for their vital contributions—be they published essays, significant suggestions, and other unheralded input—to this issue.

We thank the entire YCT Administration, Board of Directors, and Professional Staff for their constant diligence and unremitting kindness. Mati Friedman, Sara LeVee, Gila Romanoff, and Noya Lavie were instrumental in coordinating the many logistical and financial necessities that made the publication of this issue a reality.

We are particularly grateful to Madeline Calabrese, Diane Troderman, and Harold Grinspoon of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation for their sponsorship of this year's issue.

This issue is a tribute to all of them and to the entire extended family of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

This volume of *Milin Havivin* is an encomium to creativity, and as such, I thank the three *shutafim* who have created me: my parents, Alan Goodman and Joan Goodman, and the Creator, the *Makor HaChaim* of us all.

Last but not least—*aharon aharon haviv*—we express deep gratitude to our devoted teacher Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot for his many years of teaching at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, and for his years of serving as the faculty advisor of *Milin Havivin*. I am joined by associate editors Avi Schwartz and Dan Margulies, and by the rest of the student body and faculty of YCT, in our profound appreciation for Rabbi Helfgot's guidance, and in the conveyance of our utmost wishes for *hatzlahah* as he transitions from a less active role at YCT and assumes the position of Chair of Talmud at SAR High School.

After reading these wonderful articles on Judaism and the arts, we may daresay, based upon Rabbi Dr. Irving Greenberg's interpretation of Jewish theological history, that much as the rabbis showed us how to see God's presence in Torah study, in visiting the sick, and in adjudication—areas in which biblical Jews may have been unaccustomed to seeing God's presence—the modern-day scholars whose essays are collected in this volume teach us how to see God's presence in literature, painting, music, dance, and film. Though we may have been unaccustomed to sensing the *shekhinah* in these spheres, with the help of these essays, we now know that if we engage in the arts and look at the arts closely enough, we may glimpse the presence of God.

Menachem Kellner's powerful peroration is a fitting charge with which to commence this volume: "In seeing creativity as a way to imitate God, we

follow in Maimonides' footsteps and expand the tents of Torah in a way which can only bring us closer to the messianic era."

Be-Ahavat ha-Torah,
Daniel Ross Goodman

NOTES

1. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *A Judaism Engaged with the World* (United Kingdom: Exco DPS Ltd., 2013), 28.
2. See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (trans. Lawrence Kaplan; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 91-136, 164 n. 147, and esp. 99: "The dream of creation is the central idea in the halakhic consciousness—the idea of the importance of man as a partner of the Almighty in the act of creation, man as creator of worlds. This longing for creation and the renewal of the cosmos is embodied in all of Judaism's goals . . . this wondrous spectacle of the creation of worlds is the Jewish people's eschatological vision, the realization of all its hopes." Cf. idem, *Lonely Man of Faith* (*Tradition*, 1965; New York: Random House, 2009), 11-15, esp. at 11. Cf. Paul Gauguin, in "From a letter to Emile Schuffenecker, Copenhagen, 14 January 1885," in *Theories of Modern Art*, edited by Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 60: "Creating like our Divine Master is the only way of rising toward God."

   On the conceptual association between creativity and Godliness, see also Rashi, commentary to Genesis 1:26, s.v. "*kid'muto*" (describing '*tselem Elokim*'—man's Godliness—as a component of man's intellectually creative capacity); Karl Löning and Erich Zenger, *To Begin With, God Created…: Biblical Theologies of Creation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 62 (depicting God as an artist who creates the universe "in a kind of euphoric 'creative high'"); John Barth, Lecture at Hiram College (1960) (pondering the novelist's "immodest and subversive resemblance to God"); Harold Bloom, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (New York: Warner, 2002), xii (relating the literary artist's creative capacity to godliness); and Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 84: "In the case of the Tabernacle, the exactitude of the correspondence of construction with divine commandment is underscored powerfully by the notice that the master craftsmen Bezalel had been endowed with the spirit of God (*ruaḥ elohim*) for the purpose of this work. This is the same term that in P describes reality just before the great cosmogony: 'wind from God (*ruaḥ elohim*) sweeping over the water' in the dark chaos.' "
3. Cf. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (trans. Shlomo Pines; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), Introduction.
4. Matthew Baigell, "Art and Religion" (unpublished paper: 2013).

MENACHEM KELLNER

Judaism and Artistic Creativity: Despite Maimonides and Thanks to Him

IN SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND the place of artistic creativity in Judaism, Maimonides hardly appears to be a promising source with which to start. His emphasis on intellectual perfection as the defining characteristic of humanity would not appear to make him a promising candidate for our project. This is all the more the case when we consider that, for him, intellectual perfection involves the apprehension of already established truth, not the creation of new knowledge. Despite this, I suggest that Maimonides can be very helpful in seeking to elaborate a Jewish approach to the value of artistic creativity.

Maimonides may have been the first *posek* to count the imitation of God (*imitatio Dei*) as a specific commandment of the Torah. Yea or nay, he certainly emphasized its importance. The first text in which Maimonides discusses the imitation of God is his *Book of Commandments*, positive commandment 8:

> Walking in God's ways. By this injunction we are commanded to be like God (praised be He) as far as it is in our power. This injunction is contained in His words, *And you shall walk in His ways* (Deut. 28:9), and also in an earlier verse in His words, [*What does the Lord require of you, but to fear the Lord your God,*] *to walk in all His ways?* (Deut. 10:2). On this latter verse the Sages comment as follows: "Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called merciful [*rahum*], so should you be merciful; just as He is called gracious [*hanun*], so should you be gracious; just as he is called righteous [*tsadik*], so should you be righteous; just as He is called saintly

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> [*hasid*], so should you be saintly."[1] This injunction has already appeared in another form in His words, *After the Lord Your God shall you walk* (Deut. 13:5), which the Sages explain as meaning that we are to imitate the good deeds and lofty attributes by which the Lord (exalted be He) is described in a figurative way—He being immeasurably exalted above all such description.[2]

The point that *certain* of God's actions are models for our imitation[3] is reiterated in the second text in which Maimonides deals with the imitation of God, in *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Moral Qualities," i.5-6:

> The ancient saints trained their dispositions away from the exact mean towards the extremes; in regard to one disposition in one direction, in regard to another in the opposite direction. This was supererogation. We are bidden to walk in the middle paths which are the right and proper ways, as it is said, *and you shall walk in His ways* (Deut. 28:9). In explanation of the text just quoted, the sages taught, "Even as He is called gracious, so be you gracious; even as He is called merciful, so be you merciful; even as He is called holy, so be you holy." Thus too the prophets described God by all the various attributes, "long-suffering and abounding in kindness, righteous and upright, perfect, mighty, and powerful," and so forth, to teach us that these qualities are good and right and that a human being should cultivate them, and thus imitate God, as far as he can.[4]

The third text in which Maimonides discusses *imitatio Dei* is in his *Guide* I.54. There he quotes again from the *Sifrei*:

> For the utmost virtue of man is to become like unto Him, may He be exalted, as far as he is able; which means that we should make our actions like unto His, as the Sages made clear when interpreting the verse, *Ye shall be holy* (Lev. 19: 2). They said: 'He is gracious, so be you also gracious; He is merciful, so be you also merciful."[5]

What must a person do in order to become like God, and fulfill the commandment of *imitatio Dei*? Maimonides addresses this questions in the very last chapter of the *Guide of the Perplexed* (III.54), famously glossing Jeremiah 9:22-23:

> Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth.

Maimonides explains that it is God's "purpose that there should come from you *loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth* in the way that we have explained. . ." (III.54, 637). I take Maimonides' point here to be that God expects human beings to emulate his actions of *loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth* after they have each reached the highest level of intellectual perfection available to her or to him.[6]

Although there is a great deal of scholarly controversy over what precisely Maimonides expects of the person who seeks to walk in God's ways, and thus imitate God, it is evident that he believes that one is indeed so commanded, and that fulfillment of that command involves some combination of ethical perfection (for Maimonides a prerequisite of intellectual perfection) and intellectual perfection.

Thus far Maimonides. Can we accept his *pesak* that there is a commandment to imitate God, without necessarily following him in his understanding of how one imitates God, i.e., through perfection of the intellect only? The Torah helps here. What does the Torah itself teach us about which of God's actions should be imitated?

The very first thing we learn is that God is to be understood as a Creator. We human beings cannot create universes, but we can create things of beauty, and in that fashion imitate the Creator.[7] For a variety of reasons, we do not ordinarily associate Judaism with the arts,[8] but if we look again at the Torah, we see that Jews were once commanded to build beautiful structures, fashion beautiful articles of clothing, and craft implements of artistic merit. This is obvious from the detailed instructions for the building of the Tabernacle in the desert, the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, the fashioning of the priestly raiment and the various accoutrements of the Tabernacle and the Temple.[9] Bezalel's special divine inspiration in fashioning these things is emphasized in the Torah (Ex. 31:3) and by the Talmudic rabbis (*b. Berakhot* 55a). In fact, in that latter text, we find:

> Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: Bezalel knew how to combine the letters by which the heavens and earth were created. It is written here, *And He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom and in understanding, and in knowledge* [*da'at*] (Ex. 35:31), and it is written elsewhere, *The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens* (Prov. 3:19), and it is also written, *By His knowledge* [*da'ato*] *the depths were broken up* (Prov 3:20).

Here we have a rabbinic text which explicitly associates God's creativity in creating the cosmos with Bezalel's skill in fashioning the Tabernacle.

But the Torah does not only teach us to value beautiful things, it also implicitly reverences literary beauty: after all, what is the Book of Psalms if not a series of exalted poems? The classical prophets of Israel wrote words that have inspired the world for thousands of years, not only because of their content, but also because of the beauty of their expression. Whatever else the Tanakh is, it is a work of surpassing literary beauty.

The Talmudic rabbis also seemed to have valued and even reveled in literary beauty—were this not the case, they would surely have invested less effort in the fashioning of aggadot and midrashim which stimulate literary analyses and imitation to this very day

If we are commanded to imitate God, as Maimonides repeatedly insists, ought we not also strive to imitate God's creativity, aesthetic and otherwise? There is little doubt that Maimonides would be amused by my attempt to use his doctrine of the imitation of God to argue for the religious importance of artistic creativity, if not downright annoyed.[10] But there is evidence of his own appreciation for aesthetic experience, so it is at least possible that he could be convinced that if one could not imitate God in the most perfect possible way, then at least there is reason to think that he might be willing to grant the artist a lower level of the imitation of God.[11] But even if we could not convince Maimonides, it will be acknowledged that, to put it mildly, his intellectualist claims about the nature of Torah are unusual in the tradition. Indeed, many have read his words in this connection and been moved to exclaim: "It's Greek to me!"

Maimonides, as is well-known, expressed reservations about poetry and music. His views on these subjects are actually more nuanced than is usually thought, and, indeed, as befits a cultured Andalusian gentleman, he wrote poetry of his own. Maimonides certainly understood the value of music, even in connection with so exalted a religious experience as prophecy.[12] In his explanation of the differences between Mosaic and non-Mosaic prophecy in the seventh of his thirteen principles of faith, he writes:

> The Fourth Difference: Every other prophet did not receive inspiration by his own choice, but by the will of God. The prophet could remain a number of years without inspiration, or an inspiration could be communicated to the prophet but he would be required to wait some days or months before prophesying, or not make it known at all. We have seen that there are those among them who prepared themselves by simplifying their soul and by purifying their minds as did Elisha when he declared, *Bring me now a minstrel* (2 Kings 3:15), and then inspiration came to him. . . .[13]

Now it is indeed the case that in the seventh of his *Eight Chapters*, Maimonides in effect explains the text from 2 Kings by informing us that Elisha needed the soothing effects of music to calm his anger, since one can certainly not prophesy in a state of anger. Music, thus, has definite religious value.

In the fifth of his *Eight Chapters*, Maimonides cites the value of aesthetic experience generally as a source of spiritual refreshment and as a cure for melancholy:

> He who follows this line of conduct will not trouble himself with adorning his walls with golden ornaments, nor with decorating his garments with golden fringe, unless it be for the purpose of enlivening his soul, and thus restoring it to health, or of banishing sickness from it, so that it shall become clear and pure, and thus be in the proper condition to acquire wisdom. Therefore, our Rabbis of blessed memory say, "It is becoming that a sage should have a pleasant dwelling, a beautiful wife, and domestic comfort";[14] for one becomes weary, and one's mind dulled by continued mental concentration upon difficult problems. Thus, just as the body becomes exhausted from hard labor, and then by rest and refreshment recovers, so is it necessary for the mind to have relaxation by gazing upon pictures and other beautiful objects, that its weariness may be dispelled. Accordingly, it is related that when the Rabbis became exhausted from study, they were accustomed to engage in entertaining conversation[15] (in order to refresh themselves). From this point of view, therefore, the use of pictures and embroideries for beautifying the house, the furniture, and the clothes is not to be considered immoral nor unnecessary.[16]

Before we hasten to dismiss Maimonides on artistic creativity, note must be taken of an important new book by David Gillis, *Reading Maimonides' Mishneh Torah*.[17] Gillis argues persuasively that the *Mishneh Torah*, in addition to its halakhic profundity and philosophic sophistication, is also a work of surpassing literary mastery; its structure is every bit as important as its content.

But, despite that, Maimonides only brings us halfway to our goal. We learn from him the central importance of the imitation of God in the Jewish religion, but in order to remain true to that religion, we cannot follow him all the way. His extreme intellectual elitism leaves all but the philosophically sophisticated out in the cold.[18] But that very same elitism makes Maimonides into one of the great universalists in the history of Jewish tradition: what determines a person's value has nothing to do with race, gender, or religion, and everything to do with what does with one's life.[19] Creativity, artistic and

otherwise, is hardly the special preserve of Jews. In seeing creativity as a way to imitate God, we follow in Maimonides' footsteps and expand the tents of Torah in a way which can only bring us closer to the messianic era.[20]

NOTES

1. *Sifrei* on Deut. 10:12.
2. Quoted, with emendations, from *The Commandments* (Charles B. Chavel, trans.; London: 1967), vol. 1, 12-13.
3. See *b. Sotah* 14a for the impossibility of imitating *all* of God's actions.
4. Quoted, with emendations, from *Mishneh Torah, Book One: The Book of Knowledge* (Moses Hyamson, trans.; Jerusalem: 1974), 47b-48a.
5. *Guide of the Perplexed* (Shlomo Pines, trans.; Chicago: 1963), i.54, 128.
6. For a detailed analysis of this passage, see M. Kellner, *Maimonides on Human Perfection* (Atlanta: 1990), ch. 4. It is particularly appropriate here to write "her or him," since of all the people to have reached this level of perfection, as Maimonides states in this chapter (Moses, Aaron, and Miriam), one was a woman. Further on this subject, see M. Kellner, "Misogyny: Gersonides vs. Maimonides," in *Torah in the Observatory: Gersonides, Maimonides, Song of Songs* (Boston: 2010), 283-304.
7. Indeed, since we cannot become *God-like*, the most we can do is imitate God's *actions*. This is the message of *Guide* I.54. God created a new and beautiful cosmos; we at least can fashion beautiful things, in the plastic arts, in music, in literature. We can also seek to *understand* the cosmos which God created ("Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," ii.1-2) and in that fashion come closer to God. The practice and study of science can also be thus assimilated to the imitation of God. Jolene S. Kellner points out that Maimonides could easily have (but actually did not) connect his doctrine of *imitatio Dei* to the idea that human beings are fashioned in the image of God. It is God's image in us that it makes it possible for us to imitate God.
8. See Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmation and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, NJ: 2000).
9. This is emphasized in Kenneth Seeskin, *No Other Gods: The Modern Struggle Against Idolatry* (New York: 1995), ch. 3.
10. There is little direct evidence that Maimonides had a sense of humor, even though there is one apparent joke in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In I.36, Maimonides implies that God will be angry at those who believe that God gets angry.
11. See M. Kellner,"The Virtue of Faith," in Kellner, *Science in the Bet Midrash: Studies in Maimonides* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), ch. 11. Strict intellectualist that he was, Maimonides had room in his heart (and mind) to admire what to him were lesser forms of perfection. See also the studies cited by Zachary Braiterman, "Maimonides and the Visual Image after Kant and Cohen," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 20:2 (2012): 217-30.
12. For discussion, see M. Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism* (Oxford: 2006), 9n, and 29-30, and Braiterman, ibid.
13. I cite David Blumenthal's translation as found in M. Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006), 170.

Maimonides does not list this distinction in his second account of the differences between normal and Mosaic prophecy ("Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," VII.6).

14. *b. Shabbat* 25b.
15. Ibid., 30b.
16. Trans. J. Gorfinkle, from: http://archive.org/stream/eightchaptersofm00maim/eightchaptersofm00maim_djvu.txt
17. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, forthcoming.
18. My wife, Jolene S. Kellner, takes particular umbrage at the fact that a consequence of Maimonides' intellectualist approach to the nature of humanity is that the mentally defective can have no share in the world to come.
19. On the connection between Maimonides' elitism and his universalism, see Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, supra n. 12, at 15-17, and 216-264.
20. My thanks to Jolene S. Kellner for her helpful criticism and to Eugene Korn and James Diamond for their suggestions.

TOBI KAHN

The Meaning of Beauty

TO CREATE ART is natural, an act in the image of the Creator, whose materials are light and darkness, generative and reflecting luminosities, and their attendant color and shadow. Art begins in the capacity to see, a mode of knowing the world and its Maker that is indispensable to the religious and cultural expression of a people.

The sacred spaces and their constituent works in this exhibition have been made for celebration and remembrance in loving community, for the marking of boundaries between holy and daily time, for the beginning of life and its end. They embody a passion for seeing. (Fig. 1) The Torah, from which our expanding tradition of text and interpretation descends, is replete with the word *re'eh*, with the glory of sight as a unique medium for exalting the Creator. Extended passages are devoted to the visual elements of the portable Sanctuary in the desert—to crimson, silver and gold, and the Jewish color *t'khelet*, to bells and pomegranates. The lush portrayal of the Tabernacle's exquisite detail, in a text that privileges brevity, teaches us how inextricable beauty is from holiness.

The centrality of beauty to holiness is not only authentic but essential to Jewish tradition. All those whose civilization bears a relationship to the Hebrew Bible share this bequest, but the making of art offers the provenance and vocabulary to exemplify it.

In the Jewish way, the divine presence is abstract, incorporeal, without beginning or end. How, then, can God be made manifest in the material world? The infinite and mortal can meet in spaces designated as liminal, dwelling places that invite our spirit, made in the Image, to encounter the ineffable God

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TOBI KAHN is a painter and sculptor whose work has been shown in over 50 solo exhibitions and over 60 museum and group shows since he was selected as one of nine artists to be included in the 1985 Guggenheim Museum exhibition, New Horizons in American Art. Works by Kahn are in major museum, corporate, and private collections. For over twenty-five years, he has taught fine arts workshops at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. He co-founded and facilitates the Artists' Beit Midrash at the Skirball Center of Temple Emanu-El. Kahn lectures extensively at universities and public forums internationally on the importance of visual language and on art as healing.

Fig. 1. EMET, Meditative space, HealthCare Chaplaincy, New York City, 2001

in both splendor and intimacy. The media for the engagement between transcendence and immanence are the same as those with which the world itself was created: Light, horizon, breath, pattern, the holiness of distinctions.

For me, the life of the spirit is integrally bound to the beauty of the world. Rather than being forbidden, beauty in praise of the Creator is given an honored place. The name of the Tabernacle's chief artist, Betzalel, means "in the shadow of God," for his work is understood to be divinely inspired.

Judaism is not an exclusively textual tradition, nor is the making of art prohibited because of the Second Commandment's injunction against the worship of graven images. The commandments by which Jews express their awe and love of God are *performed*; their fulfillment is often tactile. When the soul of the Sabbath departs, we breathe in the fragrance of cinnamon, of cloves. On the festival of Succot, we shake the frond of a palm tree and utter a blessing upon smelling the unique perfume of the *etrog,* the citron. Intrinsic to every commandment is the prospect of *hiddur mitzvah*, of amplifying the commandment's sacredness with beauty.

• • •

By the time I was six, I knew I would be an artist. Born into a Jewish life saturated with both richness and tragedy, I could not in those early years distinguish between my vision and my Judaism. For hours, I stood at the window of my room in Washington Heights, riveted by the passing world. At my grandfather's side in the Breuer Synagogue, I was transfixed by the living green of Shavuot leaves and the pattern cast by their shadow, mesmerized by the transformation of the room into a pure white space for Yom Kippur. I thought all Jews lived in the same visual enchantment.

My parents and grandparents, refugees from Germany, encouraged my artistic pursuits. They took my sister and me to museums, concerts, and walks in all seasons in Fort Tryon Park. My sister was named after our murdered aunt, and I was named after our uncle, a medical student and artist who, in 1933, was one of the first three Jews killed by the Nazis. The annihilation of European Jewry is a reality that continues to shape my being.

As an artist, I am obsessed by memory and its imperatives. The tribute that the dead ask of us is not only to mourn their irreplaceable existence, but to live with joy and fruitfulness. I am always aware of time's passing, of the possibility of loss, of an abrupt reversal of safety. In the face of the world's instability, I want to reveal not the evident reality but its essence, the inherent vitality that is possible. (Fig. 2)

FIG. 2. LAHAV, SEVEN MEMORIAL LIGHTS, 9-11 IN 2011, EDUCATIONAL ALLIANCE, NEW YORK CITY, 2011

FIGURE 3. INSTALLATION CONSISTING OF PAINTINGS, ARK DOORS, ETERNAL LIGHT AND MENORAHS FOR TEMPLE EMANU-EL, B'NE JESHURUN, MILWAUKEE, WI, 2009

Holiness in Practice

The life of a community within the sacred space of a synagogue encompasses ardor and despair, turbulence and tranquility, sorrow and elation. When a community gathers, its members celebrate and grieve, rejoice in the birth of a child—a new presence—and lament the death of a beloved—newly absent.

Abstraction in imagery and form summons that most Jewish mode: interpretation. The paintings created for this sacred space are an invitation to discover the grandeur of the world we were given, to contemplate the beginning—its first shapes and forms—and to taste a return to the paradise of creation in a world that only our deeds can redeem. These works suggest the continual flowering of life: its radiance and darkening, its elemental particles of being, and its earthbound and celestial vantage points.

In living relationship to a Creator, awe and intimacy are in nourishing exchange. Throughout our lives, the microscopic corresponds to the cosmic. We praise and protect the natural world while acting to repair the brokenness—in ourselves and in the global community.

These paintings and ceremonial objects are not static; they are in communion with those who sit in their midst, awakening new and renewed ways of seeing, deepening ways of doing, and revealing beauty in light dazzling and evanescent. In this sacred space, we are porous to each other and to God. (Fig. 3)

The work created for the memorial chapel recognizes the severance of humankind from those in grief at the times when they are most in need of the solace of community. It reflects our longing in the face of the irrevocability of death to resume our place in an infinite, benign universe composed only of the most enduring elements—the vast sky, the healing bestowed by light, and the golden desert in which we were forged as a chosen community. The painting, wall sculpture, and memorial light are designed to offer this stark consolation: anguish can be contained in a larger, embracing world.

In the beginning, chaos became luminous, newborn. The chairs for the naming of a daughter are new ritual architecture; Jewish life does not yet have a communal, time-hallowed tradition for the covenantal naming of a daughter. These four chairs—on which mothers, grandmothers, and other wise women who transmit the power of the tradition are seated before the welcoming community—invoke the vision of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, our wise ancestral women seers who were able to discern which of their children should be blessed as leaders. Art confers on newest life the hallmark characteristics of the biblical mothers: the laughter, strength, tenderness, and fertility we seek to bequeath to our daughters. (Fig. 4)

Fig. 4. AHMA, Four baby naming chairs, 2008. Commissioned by the Shaykin Family Foundation for the Abraham Joshua Heschel School, New York City

Fig. 5. SAPHYR III, Omer Counter, 2011

Jews are commanded in the Torah to count the forty-nine days of the *omer* from the second day of Passover until the first day of Shavuot. The *omer* commemorates the journey from exodus to peoplehood, from subjugation to the giving of the Torah. I was born in the middle of the *omer*, the seven-week period between the season of our liberation and the festival that celebrates the giving and receiving of the Torah at Sinai. Traditionally, Jews count each of the forty-nine days by reciting a *brakhah* [blessing], and then naming the day's number and its place within the week. In Jewish mysticism, each day and week are linked to a unique attribute of the Creator. (Fig. 5)

To me, the counting of the *omer* represents the relationship between a person and his or her community. Each day is distinct, but the sequence of days and weeks is set in a larger framework. Beginning with one, we become an ordered multitude—accruing the dimensions of peoplehood in our journey from slavery to redemption.

For decades, I thought about how to embody this paradox in a work of art. The *omer* counter that resulted consists of forty-nine sculpted forms in a grid; each one can be set in its place in only a single way. By a daily act, the viewer becomes a participant in the changing work, a celebration of measured time. One by one, the gold-lined spaces of our inner lives are inhabited, each miniature structure refracting the other's light until the work is complete—and we have counted our way once more to revelation.

• • •

These works of sacred space and ceremony are not a rupture from the past; they express the past's living possibilities in the idiom of abstraction. They make visible a preoccupation with art and holiness, a quest to distill what we remember into essential images. They are archetypes that allow the past to be transformed by imagination into a capacious future, a resonant sanctuary in a still struggling world. (Fig. 6)

Excerpted from the book accompanying the exhibition
Tobi Kahn: Sacred Space for the 21st Century*, ed. Ena Giurescu Heller*
(MOBIA and D Giles Ltd: London, 2009)

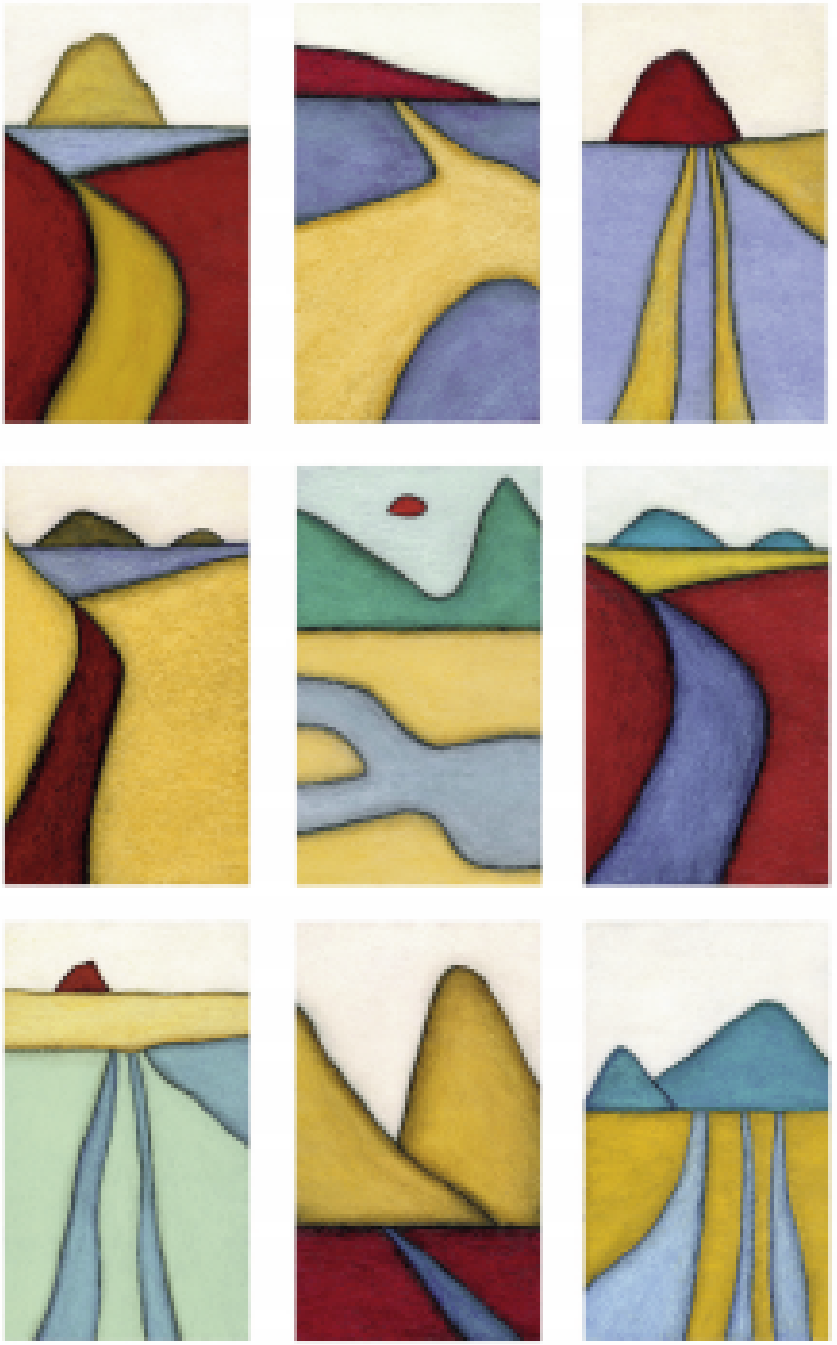

FIG. 6. DREAMING OF SINAI, NINE PAINTINGS, 2010

JILL NATHANSON

Visual Art and Judaism

> *Literature, Painting and Sculpture aim to bring to realization all the spiritual concepts impressed deep within the human soul.*
>
> —*Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook*[1]

VISUAL ARTISTS WORKING IN ABSTRACTION, representation, mixed media and photography have been seeking a place at the table—or "on the walls"—of serious Jewish life in recent decades. Working largely against the grain of the international Art World, which often has an anti-religious or anti-'moralistic' ethos, this Jewish Art is often shown in Jewish cultural spaces outside the commercial galleries. The international Art World is a roiling, molten arena of contradictions and intentions based in museums, auction houses and galleries large and small. There is spirituality to be found in some Contemporary Art in the galleries and museums if you know where to look, but much current art and theory negates the very idea of spirituality that Rav Kook wrote of one hundred years ago. Jewish artists working now are consciously re-asserting the spiritual life through specific Jewish ideas in the work; in the best cases, this content determines the form of the work. Making Jewish art in the context of Post-Modernism is not a matter of naïvely adding Jewish flavor or subjects to ambient styles.

As an artist, I work in both cultural spaces: specific Jewish Art and abstract painting within the general Art World. I have an intuition that abstract art and Jewish thought have, with intention, areas of overlap and for some thrilling periods I have devoted myself and my studio to exploring this terrain. One of these times was in 2004-5. During that time, I worked with Professor Arnold Eisen (now Chancellor Eisen of JTS) on a project: four large paintings and three commentaries by Eisen which came to be called "Seeing Sinai." Based on close reading of Exodus 33-34 and discussions in the studio,

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the Torah study was to be the basis of both form and content in the paintings. The paintings are exhibited with the section of the Torah text and Eisen's writing. Near the reproductions below I've very roughly indicated the ideas in the paintings.

Abstract art can be a way to make visible that which we cannot or can barely see. It can allow us to see and understand relationships between objects, and it provides a way to see beyond the objects-with-names that form our day-to-day visual life. It is really a language of relationship: all language is relationships between signs or sounds. Abstract art takes the world we see and sets it (back) into primary visual relationships. Most artists agree that all great art, even if representational, is strongly abstract.

Having painted some abstract Judaic works in the 1990's, I felt that the connections and overlaps between abstract art and Jewish ideas needed expansion and a learned guide would help me to ask the right questions. I contacted Eisen, with whom I had studied, and asked him to work with me. Of the questions I wanted to explore, one that was easy to explain was this: the language of Torah, the very letters, are viewed, in Jewish sources as creating Creation. How can language underlie nature and the seen world, and what does that mean for visual experience and for an artist for whom the visual world is primary? More personally, I felt that vision was somewhat denigrated in Judaism: is this so in the Torah?

We worked without a clear plan: we spoke in my studio, looked at my abstract paintings, and Eisen listened as I spoke about color, light, unity, and dynamics. He understood that my paintings were anti-image paintings; a viewer was meant to experience a visual process, to apprehend the "becoming" of abstract unity, not to see an image.

We decided to work with Exodus 33-34, the central Torah text in which Moses asks to see the Glory of Hashem on Sinai. My speech about painting influenced Eisen's reading of this text he had read so many times. Reading Torah in the studio brought the subject of vision in this text into a new context—it was like reading Song of the Sea at the beach.

I was hoping to create a hybrid form of Torah study and art; I wanted the sense of insight that one can feel when looking at art to join with Torah insight. After we met, I painted for about a month, showed Eisen the paintings, and then he commenced to write commentaries on the text, considering the paintings. The four paintings and the writings were done over the course of a year.

The subject matter of the paintings was the verbal text: mostly Hashem's words in response to Moses' request, "please Grant me a vision of Your Glory"

(Exodus 33:18). What happens to nature, to the seen world, when the Creator of all is present, speaking: the same act that was and is Creation? In these minutes of Revelation, what was the air like? The light? The wind? Even though Hashem could not be seen, how could Presence not leave traces? Hashem made His Goodness pass before Moses, not His image, but still, might there have been something to see?

Nothing about this project came easy. And it was frankly terrifying to muck around with paint while thinking about this Torah. I was grateful for Eisen's investment of time and presence, and his interpretations informed my choices in the paintings. He was grateful for a chance to do something "outside of the box." It helped that I had previously engaged in Jewish text study and that my art practice tends to be an experiment in form and human meaning.

Art is a vast cultural space around the world right now, and the artists devoting their lives to Jewish Art reflects just one aspect of it. In our time, looking at art offers a shared space of openness that's very powerful; perhaps we don't have the right words for many aspects of experience now, but art may strike the right chords. Jews share the space and time of prayer; that's central. But we don't really experience nature in common these days, and the built world can set an unnatural tone. Jewish architectural spaces, though beloved, may be old, and to renew them involves vast sums of money and organization. Works of art can bring us together in shared time and space. In a moment when so much is digital and solitary, art makes a space of common presence in the present. (Works of art can also disappoint and annoy, but that's another story.)

I've now exhibited the Sinai paintings a number of times, and it's always been a surprise to see how they are experienced. Viewers' reactions to the paintings have not always been exactly what I intended, but the reactions have been successful in ways I had not anticipated. The exhibitions seem to offer a space of light and shared experience that is connected to Torah.

My next project, "New Translations," was not a collaboration, and was based on Genesis 1. It used abstraction and text in a very different way: one image is included below. There are other experimental works done by other artists and many more are possible. Such work gives the makers, participants, and viewers a chance to stand in a place of thought and vision, and to share new songs of praise.

When people say my Judaic paintings are beautiful, I feel an element of discomfort. When I learned to pray the Amidah and encountered the

Kedushah, I was an adult. As a visual person, my mind's eye would fill with visual somethings; forces, movements, and qualities which found their way into the Sinai paintings. I didn't make up the majesty: I was responding to what is in the siddur. What I find interesting is that when I have spoken of this visualization in public, other people have said, "Yes! The Kedushah sometimes does something like that to me." It is well-documented that color visualization was a common practice in Kabbalistic prayer of the seventeenth and eighteenth Centuries. Though specific colors were connected to specific Sefirot, this was clearly an inner experience of visualization. I suggest that this inner aspect of prayer has "come out" now that abstract art is an established art practice. Here's what I've made of it so far.

NOTES

1. *Olat Hare-ayah* II,3, "Hamizrach" (1903), 352.

All images copyright Jill Nathanson

First Day. From New Translations: Genesis 1 (2010). (Mixed Media)

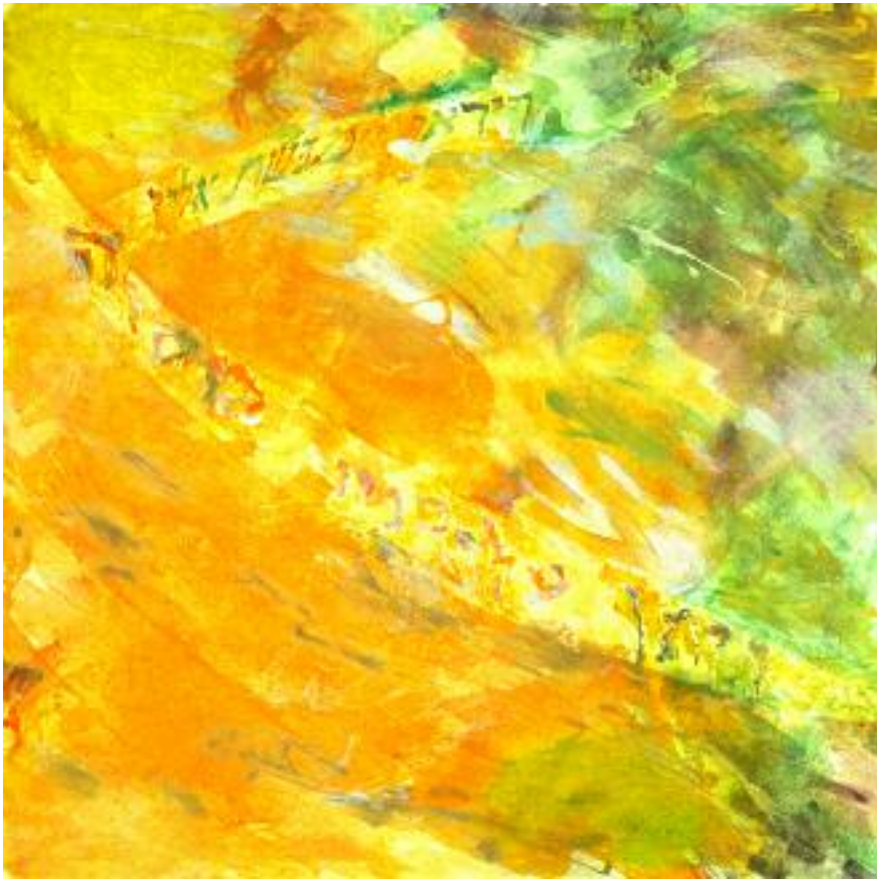
Seeing Sinai (2004-5): Painting 1: "Please Grant Me a Vision of Your Glory, Behold There is a Place With Me", Exodus 33: 18, 21

The dialogue begins: Moses makes his request. After telling Moses that He cannot be seen, Hashem says there is a place where Moses can experience His Presence.

Seeing Sinai Painting 2: "When My Glory Passes I Will Place You . . . Cover . . . Pass . . . Uncover"

Hashem describes what He will now do, which the painting shows through the words of God's speech. The painting includes only the verbs.

Seeing Sinai Painting 3: "And I Will Write on These Tablets." Exodus 34:1
Hashem declares that He will write the second tablets
while with Moses on the rock.



Seeing Sinai Painting 4: "They Were Afraid To Come Close To Him; He Put a Veil Over His Face." Exodus 34:30, 33

After Moses has descended from the mountain, the people are afraid and can only listen to the revealed words when they see the light flowing from Moses' face. This light is a visual aspect of Revelation.

STEVEN FINE

Lernen To See: "Modernity," Torah and the Study of Jewish "Art"[1]

JEWISH ART IS TODAY a well-established area of Jewish culture. It is collected and displayed in museums across the globe; ancient, medieval and modern synagogue and historic artifacts are lovingly preserved and curated; excavations yearly uncover ever more examples of Jewish art and archaeology from Western Europe to the Galilee; two scholarly journals are dedicated to the study of Jewish Art; books are published and dissertations agonized over. "Jewish" artists, "religious" and "secular" (sometimes the same person!) thrive everywhere that Jews do. As late as 1900, by contrast, this was barely the case. Hebrew didn't even have a term for "art." Eliezer Ben Yehuda (d. 1922), for example, referred to the introduction of the noun *omanut*, "art," to the developing modern Hebrew lexicon: "A word (*omanut*) that was recently coined (*niṯḥadesh be-zeman ha-aḥaron*), and its usage has spread in newspapers and in speech."[2] Speakers of modern Hebrew developed this word at a time when Cultural Zionists, followers of Ahad ha-Am, Asher Ginzberg (d. 1927) were focusing upon the development of a distinctly Jewish national art, a prerequisite, they believed, to the Jews being accepted as a modern national entity.

This project was the life's work of Ben Yehuda's neighbor and fellow-traveler Boris Schatz from his base at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem (figs. 1-2).[3] While officially a crafts center, college and museum, the

STEVEN FINE is the Dr. Pinkhas Churgin Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University and Director of the Center for Israel Studies. He received his doctorate in Jewish History from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which resulted in *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue During the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame UP,1997). Fine's *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge UP, 2005; rev. ed. 2010) received the Association for Jewish Studies' Jordan Schnitzer Book Award in 2009. Steven Fine is a founding editor of *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture*.

FIG. 1. THE BEZALEL NATIONAL ACADEMY OF ART, JERUSALEM, 1920'S, POSTCARD BY YAACOV BEN DOV. SCHATZ IS TO THE LEFT.

FIG. 2. JUDAICA HALL, THE BEZALEL NATIONAL ACADEMY OF ART, JERUSALEM, 1920'S, POSTCARD BY YAACOV BEN DOV.

FIG. 3. INTERIOR OF THE HURVA SYNAGOGUE, JERUSALEM, 1934-1939
(COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION).

Bezalel School, led by the charismatic Schatz, saw itself as a vanguard, creating a national art for a people that was universally perceived as lacking one. Jews were not alone in the need to create a national art. Other "new" nations, most notably recently unified Germany and the United States, were struggling with this problem of identity and art on much larger scales. So were the smaller national groups within the multicultural Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires—Czechs, Serbs, Ukrainians, and yes, Jews (many of whom were Zionists). In fact, Schatz came to his Zionist task after helping to create a national art for the new kingdom of Bulgaria as founding director of the Royal Art Academy in Sofia.

For Jews, this process was uniquely complex, as they were spread over so many languages, and now nation states. With the onset of Emancipation, Jews, as communities and increasingly as individuals, were engaged in the often bewildering task of reforming themselves in the images of the new "modern" nation-states in which they were now citizens. They did this differently in different places, fashioning Judaism on the model of Protestantism in Protestant countries like Germany, England and the United States; Catholicism in Italy; and as a national minority in the Hapsburg lands. The porous and flexible boundaries that differentiated Jewish culture from premodern host societies—an international virtual community sharing a deeply mimetic tradition—which includes within it *halakhah*, language, script, and sacred story—were broken down, as Jews sought to rebalance who and what it meant to be Jewish in ways that the majorities of their newly-fellow countrymen would find exemplary (or at least not offensive). "Art" became an important point of identity formation.

For those committed to maintenance of Jewish "peoplehood" during the latter 19th and the early 20th centuries, often Zionist and "Diaspora nationalists" of Eastern Europe, the existence—and thus the invention—of a canon of Jewish art that would reflect the "spirit" of the nation was a national priority. This is no better expressed than in a periodical that appeared in Berlin between 1922–4, which was published both in Hebrew as *Rimon*, and in Yiddish as *Milgroim*—"Pomegranate" in both languages—and was directed to both of these constituencies and edited by Mark Wischnitzer and Rachel Wischnitzer (after the War, "Mrs. Wischnitzer," as she was called, was professor of Jewish Art at Yeshiva University). Since every true "nation" was believed to express its inner spirit through its "Art," Jews set out to "discover" and curate a distinctly Jewish artistic canon from Hebrew illustrated manuscripts spread across the great libraries of Europe, ceremonial objects found in communal contexts, scattered synagogues (some now churches)

and cemeteries and archaeological sites across the Mediterranean basin. The first great repository of this virtual and international canon is the *Jewish Encyclopedia* of 1905–7. Jewish museums, including one at the Bezalel School, were in formation.[4]

For others, however, the non-existence of Jewish national "Art" was a virtue, and claims for its existence a challenge. These Jews—both Reformers and neo-Orthodox, with their roots in Germany—accepted Protestant notions of aniconism as their standard. They adhered to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who praised Judaism for being closer to Protestantism than to hated Catholicism for its lack of an Artistic tradition.[5] It was far "better" to be like the "enlightened" with their focus on "the Word" than the much-disliked Catholics with their "idols." In a decidedly polemical article entitled "Art: Attitude of Judaism Toward" in the self-same *Jewish Encyclopedia*, American reform leader Kaufmann Kohler and President of the Hebrew Union College, emphasized Judaism's lack of a national art. In effect, he imagined "Art of the Mosaic persuasion," for Germans/Frenchmen/Englishmen and Americans of the "Mosaic persuasion":[6]

> Art, the working out of the laws of beauty in the construction of things, is regarded in the Bible as wisdom resulting from divine inspiration (Ex. xxxi. 1-6, xxxv. 30-35, xxxvi.-4), and is called in the Talmud "hokmah" (wisdom), in distinction from labor (חכמה ואינה מלאכה, R. H. 29b; Shab. 131b). It is, however, somewhat incorrect to speak of Jewish art. Whether in Biblical or in post-Biblical times, Jewish workmanship was influenced, if not altogether guided, by non-Jewish art.

The "art" of the Jews, then, was part and parcel of the world in which the Jews lived, Jews secondarily forming those visual cultures in the "spirit" of Judaism. He concedes, nonetheless, that "Still, both ecclesiastical and secular art existed to some extent among the Jews of the Middle Ages" before asserting that "Modern Jewish art no longer bears the specific character of the Jewish genius, but must be classified among the various nations to which the Jewish artists belong." Much maligned in recent years for his "anti-Jewish Art" stance, Kohler is not wrong—if hard to hear. Jewish art is, as another Germanophone scholar, Stephen S. Kayser, founding director of the Jewish Museum in New York (and my teacher), wrote in the *Mordechai Kaplan Festschrift*, "art applied to Judaism"[7] German-Israeli scholar Heinrich Strauss called it "a minority problem."[8] Still, Kohler's polemical tone is a response to the "Jewish national art" approach of Jewish nationalists—by the 1950's dominated by Israelis bent upon constructing a "national art" and overcoming this religionist voice.[9]

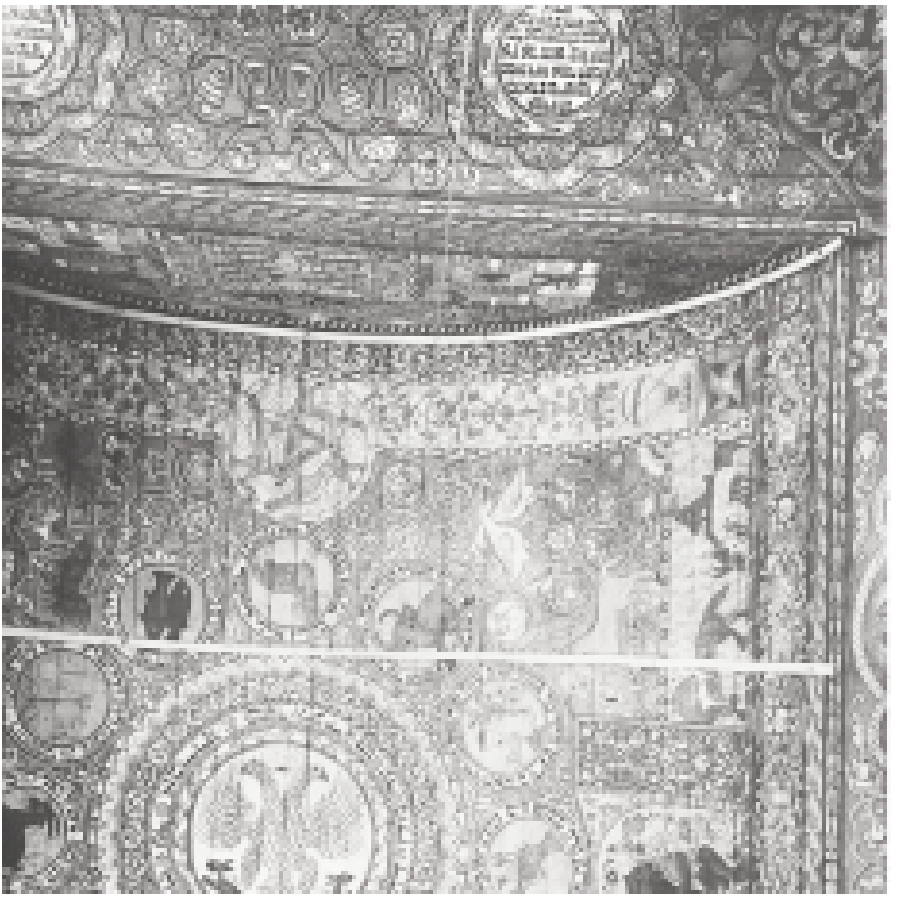


FIG. 4. CEILING OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF CHODOROW, UKRAINE, NOW DESTROYED (ALOIS BREIER COLLECTION, COURTESY OF THE TEL AVIV MUSEUM OF ART)

Kohler's article continues with a discussion of "idolatry" as formative to Jewish attitudes toward art, stressing the ways that Jewish attitudes toward visual culture were formed by the literature on *Avodah Zarah*. This immediate turn to idolatry is typical of historical scholarship on "Jewish Art" ever since. Accordingly, Jewish attitudes toward visual culture, it is tacitly assumed, are framed and given meaning through recourse to what it is not. A negative boundary here becomes the categorical determinant of this material, this focus within the literature of the rabbis the operative way to define it. Thus, the notion that Judaism is a "religion of the book" and not a "religion of the image" became a modern truism and one that was respectable to

Figs. 5-6. Torah Ark and Ceiling (detail, below) of the Bialystoker Synagogue, Manhattan. (Photograph by Steven Fine)

a Protestantizing Western rabbinate. This false and deeply modern dichotomy places the riches of Jewish textual culture in competition with a recently constructed Jewish national artistic tradition, clearly an unfair set-up that served polemical purpose and contemporary identity politics.

With this as background, I turn to Vivian Mann's *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts*, first published in 2000,[10] and now available in paperback. Mann has assiduously made available to the English reader a broad collection of Jewish reflection, mostly writings by rabbis in the form of *teshuvot*, and quickly become the standard body of this material for scholars of a wide variety of fields. The literature ranges from the Talmud to medieval and modern rabbis, to a few pieces referring specifically to the formation of the "Jewish art" canon beginning during the latter 19th century. The translations are excellent, even as, for obvious reasons, our author often leaves out the kinds of

technical discussions that are the "meat" for Jewish studies scholars, but the gristle for those working in other fields interested in Jewish subjects. In a sense, it is the textual companion to the canon of Jewish art built up over the last century. The overwhelming sense that I gain from Mann's very representative collection is that *Hazal*, the *Rishonim* and the *Aharonim* had at best a jaundiced eye toward "Jewish art," discussing it only when some "problem" arose. Some were more laissez faire in their regulation, some more stringent, but *Avodah Zarah*—however broadly construed, was the main way that "art" was discussed in rabbinic sources for nearly two millennia.

The problem is that much of the literature assembled by Mann (as it was for Kohler) is at best situational. In a typical situation, a rabbi was asked his opinion on some point of visual culture, and he answered using the very narrow group of texts at his disposal, often in very repetitive fashion. The ordinary case, where a beautiful building was built, manuscript illustrated or a *parokhet* embroidered that no one deemed "problematic" (to use contemporary yeshiva jargon) is virtually unrepresented in the Rabbinic corpus, particularly after antiquity. What is forgotten, for example, are rabbinic panegyrics on the throne of Solomon, descriptions of the holy vessels and benefactions to the Temple, and *piyyutim* on the garments of the high priests—to name just a few places where rabbinic visual imagination is particularly rife.[11] What halakhic literature as a genre cannot include is the vast majority of cases where rabbis chose not to write down their thoughts, were not asked, were not consulted or even involved. Only when a particular rabbi, or some faction, or an individual objected to what was, in most cases, a mimetic tradition of decoration, did questions of synagogue decoration become relevant. For this reason, I began my discussion of rabbinic attitudes to "art" in my *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 2005, rev. 2010) with example after example of rabbis enjoying, indeed reveling, in the colors and forms of Jewish visual culture before I ever approached questions of *Avodah Zarah*.[12] Allowing our literary canon to guide the discussion, we have been asking the question of Jewish visuality backwards, starting with the *assur,* the "problematic," and ignoring the "of course!"—the normal, "unproblematic," and thus undiscussed.

E. L. Sukenik, the father of the modern study of "Jewish archaeology," responsible in large part for the development of the Jewish art canon for antiquity, sums up well the dynamic in a footnote to his *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (Oxford, 1932):[13]

> An incident from modern times is typical of the whole history of such controversies. The interior of the largest and best-known synagogue in Jerusalem (fig. 3) is graced by a very obvious illustration of the

FIG. 7. SYNAGOGUE OF UMM AL-QANNATIR, GOLAN HEIGHTS. (PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS OLSON)

> Rabbinic adage, "Be fierce as the leopard, swift as the eagle, fleet as the deer, and brave as the lion to perform the will of thy Father in Heaven," *Mishnah Aboth* 5:20. At the time when it was painted the Chief Rabbi voiced protest, but it is still there, and the most pious Jews still worship at this place.

Such paintings were so common in Eastern Europe as to be stereotypical and "normal." Few remain today, wiped out by the ravages of World War II (fig. 4), the abandonment of urban synagogues in 1950's America and the modernist impulse that swept synagogue architecture in Central Europe after World War I and then in America after World War II (figs. 5-6). When the Hurva was recently rebuilt, the animals were left out, though "unproblematic" depictions of the Holy Cities of Israel that appeared in the original synagogue decoration were repainted. This short memory was shortened even more when twentieth century thinkers asserted that this modernist architecture and art is the MOST Jewish of all. Without the development of the visual canon—organized, published and exhibited by Jewish nationalists—we might well have forgotten that other approaches have existed throughout Jewish history. Left to their own internal literary logic—often reinforced by modernizing attachment to the apologetic "truism" that Judaism is a textual and not a visual religion that suited the Emancipation project so well, one might imagine that good "frum" Jews throughout the ages allowed only aniconic synagogue decoration. Anything else must be non- or even anti-rabbinic!

It is my contention that knowledge of the Jewish mimetic tradition of visual representation—the canon of Jewish art—allows us to contextualize and indeed, sideline, the border patrolling function of halakhic discussions, setting this rich literary material within a context that better reflects the original intentions of its framers. The implications of this assertion for contemporary "students of the Sages" are larger than they may seem. If it is the case that without knowledge of the variety of the canon of Jewish art, it is impossible to truly understand the implications of the *halakhah* regarding "art," how many other areas of Jewish law and lore require full historical contextualization in order to be fully appreciated? The rabbinic imperative to פוק חזי מאי עמא דבר, "Go out and see what the people are doing" (*b. Berakhot* 45b; *Eruvin* 14b), thus takes on a historical imperative to "go out and see what the people *did*." For modern Orthodox scholars and rabbis, this is an imperative, as we strive to fully understand the ways that this literature—and its "Modern" interpretation, impacts and is impacted by our own world. While I am no believer in the integration of the results of researchers like me into the halakhic process—in a sense treating an avowedly secular

discipline as if it is sanctified and sanctifying (it is not—at least not in a premodern sense),[16] I do believe that the full contextualization of Jewish sources in terms of the world in which they were created is essential to understanding the settings in which our sources and their authors "lived"—in antiquity, the middle ages, and especially in the modern period.

In this short excursus, I have presented just some of the complex issues related to the place of "Art" in Jewish life, and the ways that these issues touch on the root of Jewish identity in the wake of the reformation of Jewish identity that "modernity" caused. For *talmidei hakhamim*, "students of the sages," the four walls of the traditional *beit midrash* are no longer sufficient for this kind of analysis. For the kind of *lernen* that I am describing the *beit*

Fig. 8. Research by the Arch of Titus Digital Restoration Project in Rome, June, 2012 (Courtesy of the Arch of Titus Digital Restoration Project).

midrash is a lonely archaeological site in the Golan Heights, a *mikveh* in medieval Germany, the Archaeology and Judaica wings of the Israel Museum (the successor of the Bezalel National Museum) or even atop rickity scaffolding at the Arch of Titus (figs. 7-8). Torah resides in all of these places for those who "see."

NOTES

1. This article is for Norman Adler, a Jew who can truly "see."
2. E. Ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Makor, 1980), 1: 286, in Hebrew.
3. For an excellent introduction to the Bezalel School in English, see Margaret Olin, *The Nation without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 127–56, and the bibliography there.
4. Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology,* revised edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20.
5. Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 14, 30.
6. Kaufmann Kohler, "Art: Attitude of Judaism Toward," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1905), 2:141-3. See similarly: Louis Ginzberg, *The Responsa of Professor Louis Ginzberg,* ed. D. Golinkin (New York and Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1996), 157-63, discussed by Fine, *Art and Judaism,* xv-xvi.
7. S. S. Kayser, "Defining Jewish Art," *Mordecai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1953), 457-467.
8. E.g., H. Strauss, "Jewish Art as a Minority Problem," *Journal of Jewish Sociology* 2 (1960), 147-171.
9. The fact that Strauss never found employment as an art historian in Israel is indicative. In later times, the silent response by much of the Israeli "Jewish Art" community of Bezalel Narkiss (himself named while his father served as director of Schatz's "Bezalel National Museum," and later my teacher) to the work of German-American scholar and reform rabbi Joseph Gutmann, reflects the continuing power of this argument. On Narkiss, http://cja.huji.ac.il/Narkiss/MY%20PATH%20THROUGH%20ART.html On Gutmann, http://www.ajs-net.org/ajsp04fa.pdf.
10. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. For Hebrew readers, see: David Kotlar, *Art and Religion* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: David Kotlar, 1971).
11. See also Bland, *Artless Jew,* 109-140.
12. Fine, *Art and Judaism,* 97-121; Michael D. Swartz, *The Signifying Creator: Nontextual Sources of Meaning in Ancient Judaism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).
13. E. L. Sukenik *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (Oxford, 1932).
14. Here I am intentionally staking out a position that contrasts with halakhic method within Conservative contexts. See Joel Roth, *The Halakhic Process: A Systemic Analysis* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1986).

BEN SCHACHTER

Artistic Engagement with Halakhah

JEWISH LEARNING AND TORAH directly influence the art I make. But unlike many other artists whose work interprets aggadah and biblical narratives, my work explores the creativity of rabbinic logic and halakhah. At first it may seem that there is very little room for creativity in regards to law and regulation. But anyone who takes the time to consider the implications of rabbinic decisions on individuals and community may quickly realize that in fact legal thought is replete with "what if's?"

Artistic creation has a similar component. Artists are constantly exploring alternative solutions, arrangements and compositions. Even this exploration operates within limits. Avant-garde artists, as much as they forged new ground, settled into styles that produced what is known as their mature work. It was through creative trial and error that each of these artists developed a set of rules for themselves, though it is rare that modernist artworks are thought to be limited in this fashion. Likewise, the designer must address different restrictions. The architect and industrial designer integrate building codes, expense, client needs, and the laws of physics, all while maintaining their own personal vision. Many revel in the process; the more intricate the limitations of the site and the needs of the client, the greater the challenge.

Sukkah City 2010 is a recent example. The competition's organizers invited individuals and teams of designers to create non-traditional sukkot. Several of them were constructed in Union Square, New York. The organizers required adherence to Talmudic rules on what makes a 'kosher' sukkah. Even with these restrictions, several of the designs bore very little similarity to the traditional three-walled booth.

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An even more complex set of building codes is for the eruv, a symbolic Jewish enclosure that unifies a community as if it were living in one extended domestic space. The regulations for the boundary are based on architecture during the period in which the Talmud, the oral law, was written. Much of it centers on the definition and variations of a doorway. These doorways, or gates, comprise the boundary that surrounds a neighborhood. Namely, each fence includes a horizontal beam resting on top of two supports. Even this simple composition can be abstracted so that a wire replaces the lintel. Moreover, the wire lintel does not need to connect to the posts, in some situations, as long as it passes directly over the post as *if* it were a lintel. While

TEL AVIV ERUV 2012

I've never been involved in the construction of an eruv, I imagine that the persons who have are rabbinic engineers working out how to apply Talmudic regulation to given urban situations.

I make paintings of eruv maps. The silhouette of an eruv is stitched with blue thread through the paper. The interior of the boundary is painted white so that attention remains on the line. I use thread to emulate the wire that is often used to complete an eruv. I've painted eruvim from cities all over the world, including: Venice, London, Manhattan, Los Angeles, and many others. Each one calls to mind the geography of the place. *Tel Aviv Eruv 2012*

WASHINGTON, DC ERUVIN 2012

shows a meandering line bounded by the ocean, highways and canals. The perimeter does not include the entire city but offers a different approach to understanding urban planning and history.

Recently, I have been using Google maps to integrate eruvim into one painting. If two eruvim share a boundary, one can usually carry across the boundary. But if they do not, each community is separated from its neighbor. In lived experience, one might know that there is another community nearby, but it does not matter; the boundary is set. Therefore, most websites and synagogue maps include only the eruv that matters to them. The paintings that I've made of Philadelphia and Johannesburg show how these communities either cluster or radiate out from major metropolitan centers. Of note is *Washington, DC Eruvin 2012*. Several eruvim cluster to the north of the city. One group of eruvim touch one another, while two constellate to the east and west. Often, when one looks into whether or not a community has an eruv, only one is illustrated. With the convenience of Google maps, some community maps do show if another eruv adjoins the first. My work is unique, as it shows all the eruvim in this suburban district.

I'm attracted to these maps because they represent a series of creative interpretations made manifest with materials. As a collage is composed of paper, cardboard, paint, and other materials, an eruv is an admixture of things: walls, fences, terrain, and wire. In artistic terms, a sculpture made out of mixed materials is called an assemblage. Looked at as art, an eruv is also like public art. More specifically, it is a sculptural assemblage that is constructed throughout an urban environment.

Yet it can also be seen as another kind of artwork: a non-traditional drawing. Made popular in the twentieth century by cubists and Dadaist artists, such drawings are not made with pencil or charcoal or even a paper surface. Marcel Duchamp, an artist connected with the Dada movement, famously ran hundreds of feet of yarn all over a gallery, thereby inhibiting visitors from viewing the other work. Pablo Picasso and Alexander Calder both made wire sculptures that sometimes appeared flat and at other times took on a three-dimensional form. Wire in this case is used like a calligraphic line that forms contours through space. Fred Sandback formed rectangles and other shapes by pulling yarn taut across the gallery. These minimal forms had the uncanny appearance of perfectly clean sheets of glass, yet only their edge was actually there! Looking at the eruv as an artwork helps to show the creative solutions required for its construction.

My paintings are based on community eruvim. But an eruv can be put up for a picnic, a shabbaton, or for other events. In these cases, its construction

is a bit more do-it-yourself. And this illustrates yet another comparison between contemporary art and Jewish tradition. Individuals in their homes and communities practice ritual and follow laws. Most decisions made throughout the day are made not in consultation with a rabbinic authority but through familiarity. There is a similar trend in the arts. The DIY movement has encouraged people to use colloquial processes like knitting and sewing to make artwork instead of relying on materials that require a professional to demonstrate how to carve marble, weld steel, or layer oil paint. *Instant Eruv 2007* draws upon the DIY aspect of both Judaism and contemporary art. What makes this piece of string different from any other? Nothing, really—just marketing.

INSTANT ERUV 2007

Recently, my work was part of two major exhibitions on the eruv – one at Yale University, and the other at the Yeshiva University Museum. These exhibitions explored different facets of how the eruv works, displayed contemporary expressions of the eruv, and touched upon artists interpretations of the eruv. It was interesting to see how artists explored legal ideas. These artists engaged halakhah, an aspect not traditionally examined in the arts. More often than not, Jewish Art presents aggadah, such as Archie Rand's series of paintings based on biblical narrative. My artwork, and the work of some other artists, examines halakhah—not to posken or adjudicate on matters of law, but rather to to elucidate, explore, and engage rabbinic thought.

RICHARD McBEE

Contemporary Jewish Art: The Challenge[1]

The Problem

THE IDEA OF "JEWISH ART" is such a strange and troubled notion. Long denied even as a possibility because of the simplistic reading of the Second Commandment expressing the Torah's abhorrence of idolatry,[2] since the eighteenth century, "Jewish aniconism finally emerged as an unmistakably modern idea." Kalman Bland's deconstruction of Jewish aniconism sees this notion as initially a non-Jewish invention with anti-Semitic undertones—so much so that, "If not for Kant and Hegel the denial of Jewish art would not have been invented."[3] And, in spite of the fact that this notion flies in the face of the significant historical record of Jewish visual creativity dating from antiquity to the present,[4] the concept that Jews inherently do not and cannot produce a visual culture was frequently championed by the Jews themselves. Bland lists notable modern Jewish proponents of the aniconic theory, including Bernard Berenson, Harold Rosenberg, Max Dimont, Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas.[5] Cynthia Ozick sums up this cultural prejudice with her declaration: "Where is the Jewish Michelangelo, the Jewish Rembrandt. . . ? He has never come into being. . . . Talented a bit, but nothing great. They never tried their hand at wood or stone or paint. 'Thou shalt have no graven images'—the Second Commandment—prevented them."[6]

This is patently untrue historically and theologically. With few exceptions, contemporary halachic understanding easily distinguishes between fashioning objects and images for idol worship and the creation of artworks for aesthetic edification. Unfortunately, the historical record of rabbinic

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opinion has been less than reassuring; vacillating between condemnation of the visual when the Jewish community was threatened as opposed to a more relaxed attitude towards the use and appropriation of visual culture when relations with non-Jews were peaceful. Indeed, the range of rabbinic understandings of the Second Commandment through the ages has in fact circumscribed Jewish visual creativity and has certainly served to hamper Jews' confidence in their abilities to develop a creative visual language.[7] That is, at least until the mid-twentieth century.

Definitions

First, let us offer some definitions that can help us clarify what we mean by "Jewish Art." For purposes of this discussion, Jewish visual art does not include Judaica and synagogue architecture simply because there is no argument about their permissibility or their extensive use throughout history.

The most parochial definition codifies Jewish Art as limited to cultural production utilizing specific Jewish subject matter, drawn from Jewish sacred and secular texts that explore Jewish social life, history and ritual. Since content is the defining factor, this can and should include artwork created by non-Jews. On the other hand, the more catholic view would include any kind of art that Jews happen to create that reference universal concepts such as peace, spirituality, brotherhood, ethnic identity, and family. Generally, these subjects simply mirror contemporary pluralistic American culture. However defined, in all its permutations it is its Jewish content that denotes the work as Jewish Art. While both formulations are important to a vital Jewish Art, important distinctions must be made in order to understand better the consequences of each approach.

Golden Age

Jewish Art since the 1970's has been slowly gaining a distinct identity as a dawning cultural consciousness greater than the sum of its creators and creations. This awareness has gained the most traction in the United States, even though hints of it are arising in other parts of the world. In particular, some Israeli artists are touched by this consciousness, although they are caught in a double cultural bind. For them, Jewishness is of course a given, since Jewish subjects typically form an integral part of the fabric of their upbringing. Nonetheless, for many years the Israeli art world has taken its cues from the New York art world that overtly rejects the notion of "Jewish Art." Therefore, significant resistance still exists in Israel to the very notion of the category

"Jewish Art." Therefore, when historian Matthew Baigell declared in a lecture at the Jewish Museum in New York on March 7, 2011, "we are living in a golden age of Jewish American art," part of the silence that greeted his thesis reflected a redoubling of institutional and international resistance to the appropriateness of "art" being qualified by the descriptor "Jewish."[8]

Museums

Remarkably, most American Jewish museums are resistant to exhibiting contemporary Jewish Art—that is, art created with a self-consciously explicit Jewish content. Generally the artists who are the most committed to Jewish subject matter have been ignored. With the exception of Hebrew Union College Museum under the direction of Laura Kruger that has consistently exhibited cutting edge contemporary Jewish art, as well as occasional efforts on the part of Yeshiva University Museum, the wall of silence has been complete. To be sure, American Jewish museums, large and small, are fully supportive of historical exhibitions of Jewish visual and material culture, and relish exploring a given Jewish individual's involvement in mainstream culture. While most are publicly and even stridently committed to diversity, tolerance, interfaith dialogue and community involvement, they seem to have a blind spot regarding promoting and exhibiting contemporary art with explicit Jewish content. While it may be institutionally understandable that they have major concerns about vulnerable budgets—along with deep fears of seeming "too Jewish" within an assumed dominant, assimilationist culture—their stance is nonetheless deeply problematic. Turning such a blind eye to overtly Jewish-themed art is injurious to the education of its audience and devastating to the artists. In fact, such myopia evinces a pathological adherence to an anachronistic paradigm of the quietistic role that Jews should play in American culture. For at least 25 years, the mantra of social diversity was normative in encouraging explicit cultural expressions of black, ethnic, feminist, and gay culture. Somehow, only explicit Judaism is still an anathema.

Nonetheless, Baigell finds this rising tide of Jewish-themed visual art to be profoundly broad-based, wonderfully chaotic, and—above all—exhilarating. The artists who are leading the way take their themes from a wide range of sources. The Bible, Talmud, Kabbalah, Midrash, ritual and all aspects of American Jewish life are all fair game for contemporary Jewish artists. The only unifying feature that underpins this artistic eclecticism is the desire to depict an identifiably Jewish content.

Baggage

Significantly, Baigell identifies the sociological foundations for this phenomenon. To broadly paraphrase his historical analysis, the generation of Jewish artists from the first third of the twentieth century tended to move away from their Jewish heritage and roots. For the vast majority of Jewish artists of that time, many of whom were European-born, the job at hand was to integrate into American culture, to be modern and successful and, above all, to fit in with the overwhelmingly non-Jewish cultural environment. For artists coming of age in the 1970's and later, though, none of that seemed necessary. As second or third generation Americans who happened to be Jewish, the entire cultural spectrum, including Jewish thought and subjects, was available with little or no negative connotations. The Six Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973 gave Jewish Americans a new sense of pride in their religion and culture, and allowed Jews to take their place alongside other minority groups such as blacks, Latinos, gays, and women in the march towards mainstream recognition.[9] In an age profoundly defined by identity politics, Jewishness became a publicly accepted option. Just as walking down the street with a yarmulke no longer prompted scorn or worse, so too, Jewish subject matter could be equally considered as legitimate artistic subject matter. To simplify Baigell's analysis, the crucial issue is cultural baggage. Baigell's Jews at the end of the twentieth century have little or no such cultural impediments that hamper their exploration of Jewish themes.

The Exception—Visual Art

In the broader view, cutting-edge American Jewish culture has been flourishing ever since the 1960's. Major developments have been seen in the utilization of Jewish themes in literature, music, and performance. Until recently, though, the visual arts have lagged behind. The reasons are complex. In all other cultural expressions, the Jewish presence had been strong from the heyday of early Modernism, seemingly a natural outgrowth of Jewish assimilation into western secular culture. And while Jews' participation in American culture was characteristic of their own assimilation, they remained nonetheless deeply Jewish because literature, music, and performance had a long history in traditional Jewish culture as well. In a way, not much had changed for these artists. Therefore, once they were no longer marginalized, for a generation or two they could more easily explicitly examine Jewish subjects. However, this was not so for the majority of visual artists.

While Jews have always been well represented among twentieth century visual arts, the shift into explicit Jewish subject matter met with more resistance than in other mediums. As these artists learned their trade as visual artists, they were unaware of any Jewish visual tradition to inform their Jewish consciousness. Neither colleges nor art schools ever taught about the extensive history of Jewish art. (With rare exceptions that is still the case today, even in Jewish secondary and higher education schools.) The ghost of an alleged aniconic Jewish history combined with a modernist dismissal of traditional religion effectively shackled Jewish visual artists in a disproportionate manner. And while there were notable exceptions, they were almost always ignored—even if the artists managed to break through the conceptual wall, there was practically no audience prepared to appreciate their efforts. But things were about to change.

Modernism / Postmodernism

In the early 1970's, the orthodoxies of High Modernism and Abstract Expressionism that celebrated purity of form, and the extravagances of Minimalism, slowly gave way to increasing consideration of textual content, first seen in Pop Art's ironic messages. The reintroduction of figurative painting and the advent of photography as a fully recognized artistic medium along with the integration of narration broadened the cultural possibilities for the visual artist. In the following twenty-five years, the collapse of cultural hegemonies made way for the relative chaos of Postmodernism. These years celebrated a return to texts, conceptual issues, idiosyncratic techniques, and multiplicities of meanings in one work. Postmodernism, according to H. H. Arnason's *History of Modern Art*, "encouraged overtly polemical practices and an ironic distance from conventions of the past." Additionally, it was "facilitated by the tools of Poststructualism and deconstruction… ." [10] In a very significant manner, this multiplicity of means in visual creation along with a complex and arm's length attitude to tradition seemed to echo the complexity of Jewish ideas that were publicly airing within organized American Judaism at the same time.

Judaism

Organized Judaism experienced both maturation and fracturing in the second half of the twentieth century. The Reform and Conservative movements grew dramatically at mid-century, and because of the devastations of the Holocaust and the suburban flight of many nominally Orthodox Jews

into more liberal movements and secularism, traditional Orthodoxy seemed doomed. Unexpectedly, the rise of Modern Orthodoxy, the *Baal Teshuvah* movement, and the exponential growth of the Ultra-Orthodox have vastly complicated the demographics and content of organized Judaism. The liberal denominations of Judaism are increasingly faced with internal challenges, especially those linked to intermarriage and plummeting literacy with regard to Jewish religion and culture. In cultural terms, the shifting sands have resulted in increased cross-pollination between the Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Jewish Renewal movements. The ongoing expansion of the role of women in Jewish thought and practice as well as a cautious openness to gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered individuals has changed the face of all aspects of American Judaism, including various expressions of Orthodoxy. It is no longer simply made up of discrete movements, but rather the options within contemporary Judaism are arrayed in a hodge-podge of frequently overlapping ideas and practices. Additionally, for those who are not literate in Hebrew but who are nonetheless interested in exploring Jewish texts, the proliferation of English translations of many traditional texts has dramatically facilitated access to the vast body of Jewish lore and tradition, much of which until recently was the sole providence of the learned Orthodox.

Even more startling is the recent profusion of learning programs designed for visual artists called the Artist's Beit Midrash. First conceived and inaugurated by artist Tobi Kahn at the Skirball Center at Temple Emanu-El in New York, there are now at least eight in the United States and one operating in Tel Aviv. This is perhaps the first time in modern Jewish life that artists, mostly liberal and secular, are being exposed to classical Jewish texts for the purpose of creating visual art. All of this bodes well for artists who wish to explore the many aspects of Jewish thought and ideas in light of contemporary society. And increasingly, many are doing so.

Jewish Art Groups

Within the last ten years we have seen the formation of two organizations of artists dedicated to Jewish visual art. The Jewish Artists Initiative, based in Los Angeles, was founded in 2004 by Ruth Weisberg and currently has close to 70 members. In New York, the Jewish Art Salon, created in 2008 by Yona Verwer, is much more loosely organized, and has 376 artists and over 500 individuals associated with it. The organizations, while very different in scope and focus, share a fundamental belief that Jewish art is a growing movement that needs a forum and organizational support to thrive. Both organizations, along with a

handful of other smaller groups, have utilized Internet websites and email to create something unheard of before: a national community of Jewish Artists. The existence of the web as well as almost universal email and social networking sites has greatly facilitated this profusion of artist groups. The very fact of their existence indicates a groundswell of interest and enthusiasm for the idea of Jewish Art. This in turn promotes a proliferation of interconnectivity via the web, which has led to increased cultural crossovers and hybridization—not to mention the growing sense of an actual movement of Jewish Art. When artists hear that a contemporary historian feels they are collectivity creating a "Golden Age," it is much more than a temporary ego boost. Rather, such an appreciation begins to validate and strengthen their commitment to continue to create artwork with serious Jewish content.

Golden Age—Almost

The confluence of Postmodernism, theological diversity, and unprecedented social networking has led to a rare moment in Jewish cultural history: increased choice, clarity, and freedom in Jewish visual creativity. Hence Baigell's "Golden Age."

Just as any fledgling movement needs a history, so too does it need a vision of what will sustain its continued growth. A critical apparatus is essential for the creation of a nurturing environment of creativity. While I share Baigell's enthusiasm for the profusion of recent serious Jewish art and the enormous range of subjects explored, I simultaneously note a disheartening hesitancy to tackle a whole host of difficult but enormously fruitful Jewish subjects.

The reality is that far too many contemporary Jewish artists are content with superficial versions of Jewish ideas combined with an uncritical appropriation of contemporary art styles. And while this is not crippling to a cultural movement and may even produce a healthy diversity, in order for Jewish art to become a serious cultural expression, it must engender a creative exegesis to confront the depth and seriousness that is inherent in our rich Jewish culture.

To be fair, many contemporary Jewish artists are not even aware of what they are missing. The aforementioned inadequacy of Jewish education, both in terms of Judaism's texts and Jewish Art history, is appalling. Both can be remedied with sustained individual effort combined with a modern critical apparatus. I believe that it is essential to encourage Jewish artists to interrogate the very heart and soul of the *Tanakh* into their work boldly and without compunction. That is the challenge for contemporary Jewish Art.

Paradigms of Challenge

Fig. 1. Rembrandt, Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons, 1656. Oil on canvas, 69 x 83, Courtesy Gemaldegalerie, Kassel, Germany

The need for a creative exegesis in Jewish visual art has never been greater, and one particularly generative visual tradition for us to learn from is non-Jewish Biblical art. Rembrandt's "Jacob Blessing Joseph's Sons" (1656 – Kassel, Germany) is but one example. At first glance, the painting seems to be a straightforward reflection of the text in Genesis 48:14-22 depicting Jacob's willful 'crossed blessing,' conferring primacy on Joseph's younger son over the elder Manasseh and simultaneously giving Joseph a 'double portion' over his brothers. In Rembrandt's hands, the animal skin draped on Jacob's shoulder echoes back to Jacob's own 'stolen blessing' and introduces a subtle tension to this otherwise calm familial scene, made especially so with the introduction of the woman, not featured in this biblical text, who is none other than Asenath, Joseph's wife. Two distinct midrashic traditions, one a tale of conversion and romance from the Apocrypha,[11] and the other linking her as the daughter of Dinah, Joseph's raped sister,[12] make Rembrandt's inclusion of Asenath here

especially provocative. One interpretation of her role may see her as creating a familial closure to Jacob's tumultuous narrative that began with his own mother's divisive schemes and their epochal consequences. Here Asenath acts as a confirmation of her grandfather's vision for the Jewish future.

For visual artists, there is possibly nothing as rich as the parallel textual traditions of the *Tanakh* and the various midrashic and talmudic texts. The extremely terse nature of the biblical narrative cries out for the kind of textual deconstruction that the rabbis in midrashic literature pursued. In the course of explaining, elaborating, or exploding the thorny theological, moral, or practical issues the biblical texts present at practically every turn, the ancient rabbinic minds have provided a plethora of diverse strategies for contemporizing these stories. Every textual opening or a long-standing tradition of something gone awry allows them to provide a creative explanation. Understanding two contradictory thoughts at the same time is central to their methodology, since the Torah, according to midrashic tradition, is understood to be able to accommodate "70 different facets," i.e., valid interpretations. The seeming violence the rabbis do to the original is no less than a ruthless determination to possess the ancient text for themselves as an inheritance that carries enormous responsibility. Rabbinic interpretations, as evocative and disturbing as they may be, are almost never simply personal. While for some Jewish artists there is a lingering hesitancy about actually depicting the patriarchs, matriarchs, holy prophets and kings, this misplaced piety must be resisted. The Rabbis themselves were never so circumspect.

Eden Morris

Eden Morris's painting, *Sarah's Nightmare* (2010), has internalized Sarah's horrified reaction upon hearing of the near slaughter of her son Isaac in the Akeidah. In the face of the biblical silence and the proximity to Sarah's death in the text (Gen. 23), Rashi comments:

> Genesis: 23:2; *And Abraham came*: From Beersheba; *To eulogize Sarah and to bewail her*: Sarah's death is juxtaposed with the Binding of Isaac because through hearing the news of the Binding, that her son was readied for slaughter and was nearly slaughtered, her soul flew from her and she died.

In this radical painting about unintended consequences, the biblical narrative itself is barely seen in the background, while the artist's unique take on the midrash is prioritized in the foreground. As Isaac simultaneously becomes the sacrificial ram and Sarah's haunted son, the artist has appropriated both

Fig. 2. Eden Morris, Sarah's Nightmare, 2010. Oil on canvas, 30 x 30
Courtesy the artist

biblical and midrashic texts to place the horror she perceives at the center of the narrative.

Precisely because of the undeniably patriarchal nature of so many biblical narratives—all of which tend to attract extensive criticism in Jewish feminist literature—a fresh appraisal of the pivotal role of women and sexuality in nearly all these narratives continues to be compelling and relevant to visual artists of both sexes.

Janet Shafner

In the Genesis narrative of the three angels who come to visit Abraham, Sarah plays a passive and meek role. Standing in the shadows of the doorway, she laughs incredulously at the news of her impending miraculous pregnancy at the age of 90 and then clumsily lies to God about the incident. Janet

Fig. 3. Janet Shafner, Sarah, 1998. Oil on canvas, 58 x 50
Courtesy the Estate of Janet Shafner

Shafner's *Sarah* (1998) totally reassesses the matriarch's role. Now sitting in the foreground, patiently waiting, her husband Abraham is nowhere to be seen, and the three angels/strangers are likewise waiting, presumably for lunch (Gen. 18:1-15). Rising up behind them is a bright but curious landscape dominated by two enormous breast-like mountains. The rivulets that spill down the mountainsides are at first puzzling until one recalls a curious midrash that speaks of a miraculous validation of Sarah in her generative role. The Talmud (Baba Metzia 87a) reports:

> How many children then did Sarah suckle? — R. Levi said: "On the day that Abraham weaned his son Isaac, he made a great banquet, and all the peoples of the world derided him, saying, 'Have you seen that old man and woman, who brought a foundling from the street, and now claim him as their son! And what is more, they make a great banquet to

> establish their claim!' What did our father Abraham do? — He went and invited all the great men of the age, and our mother Sarah invited their wives. Each one brought her child with her, but not the wet nurse, and a miracle happened unto our mother Sarah, her breasts opened like two fountains, and she suckled them all."

Shafner's painting recasts the biblical Sarah's passive role by portraying her as a source of enormous sustenance and blessing by alluding to the midrashic tale.

Such a lens that bends gender tensions and conflicts in the biblical narrative can become a powerful tool for visual creation. And yet all too many artists, curiously including many women, seem to be oblivious to the dynamic and crucial role of women in biblical narratives.

Archie Rand

Sadly, many biblical strategies finely suited to uncover hosts of alternative meanings such as juxtaposition, repetition, serial narratives, and textual contrasts, are underutilized by contemporary artists. In contrast, Archie Rand's work is dominated by serial narratives that reflect the sequential nature of many Jewish texts. *The Chapter Paintings* (1989) explore 53 discreet sections of the Torah; *The Nineteen Diaspora Paintings* (2002) spell out the individual petitions and praises of the *Amidah*, the central Jewish prayer, interpreted through biblical texts envisioned as illustrated pulp fiction; *The Seven Days of Creation* (2004) speak for themselves in a semi-abstract play of free association as well. And *The 613* (2008), perhaps his most ambitious work, measures in at 1600 square feet and gives each and every commandment in the Torah its own canvas for Rand to personalize. Many of his works initially puzzle the viewer with a bewildering complexity of images, fittingly echoing many primary biblical strategies. As in all Torah study, understanding takes concentrated effort.

Robert Kirschbaum

Another artist who uses juxtaposition and textual contrasts is Robert Kirschbaum, especially in his recent small paintings "The Akeida Series" (2008-2009). Kirschbaum narrates the Akeidah story in ten abstract images that employ three registers to represent heaven and the earth below—the world of action. In a field of frantic gestures, squares arise to form a symbolic altar until there appears to be a violent clash of abstract forces. As the confrontation subsides, other square and rectangular forms coalesce into the final

Fig. 4. Archie Rand, The 613, 2008. Oil on 613 canvases, 22' x 100'.
Courtesy the artist

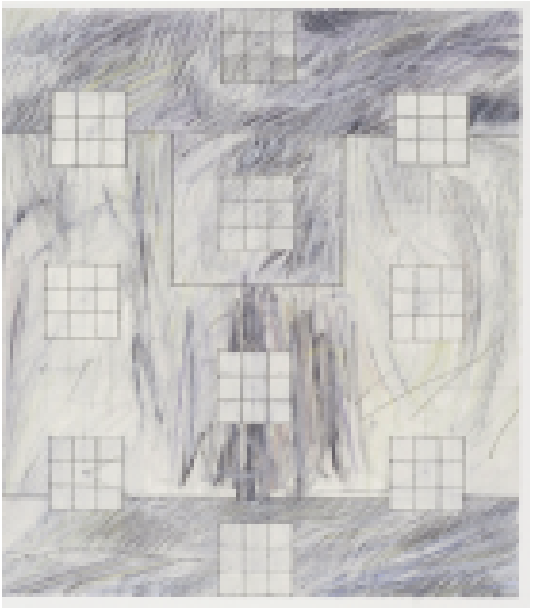

Fig. 5. Robert Kirschbaum, Akeida 45, 2008-2009. Mixed media on paper 9 x 8.
Courtesy the artist

image of a doorway that appears to enter a sanctuary. Since this "scene" is in some sense the climax of the Akeidah, it would seem that Kirschbaum has taken us to a portal of the Divine. The appearance of this portal is found in the fifth image, *Akeida 45*. In this image all of the agitated marks have assembled, each register defined by its own calligraphy, and, floating over them all, is the immediately recognizable pattern of the Zoharic chart of the ten *Sefirot*, each represented by a nine square grid cube, reflecting 10 perfect self-contained universes. In Kirschbaum's depiction, it is the fulcrum of the Akeidah narrative—the Divine meeting with Abraham and Isaac at the moment of the aborted sacrifice. Blind faith and unquestioning obedience are rewarded by the revelation of the Divine Presence. Kirschbaum has imposed a Kabalistic synthesis on one of the most disturbing narratives in the Torah and has, as a result, found a remarkable Divine Portal beckoning us.

Jacqueline Nicholls

"Draw Yomi - Drawing the Talmud," by Jacqueline Nicholls, sums up an entire daily page of Talmud with one drawing and a short and pithy commentary. "Brochot 13 (14 August 2012)" features a stark rendition of a human heart with her terse commentary: "How long can the heart be bound up? how long can the heart concentrate? – a paragraph? 2 paragraphs? . . . 3? or just a sentence?" The Mishnah and following Gemara explore the few permitted interruptions in the recitation of the Shema, as depicted in her drawing by the letter shin and its extension that binds the frail human heart. Additionally, her drawing and text echoes the paradigmatic opinion on the page that "mitzvot must be performed with intent," asking 'how long can the heart be bound up?' This effectively cements together the concept of concentration (bound straps) with intent (the heart). Nicholls' contemporary text raises the critical question as to exactly how long we can realistically maintain both concentration on the content of a mitzvah and the larger issue of intent. Halakhah becomes inquiry.

Richard McBee

Over the last thirty years, my own artwork has plumbed the Torah for contemporary meaning and expression. Recently, "Hagar The Stranger (2010 – 2013)," a series of sixteen large paintings, explored the role of Hagar in Sarah and Abraham's household and beyond. Initially, my interest was aroused by the Rashi that states that Abraham's second wife, Keturah, was none other

Fig. 6. Jacqueline Nicholls, Brochos 13, 2012. pencil on paper, Courtesy the artist

than Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid Sarah had forced upon him. During my research, I learned that Black American Christian women celebrated Hagar as a heroine, and therefore depicted her as a woman of color. This literally transformed my understanding of all the relationships in the narrative.[13] Adding race to the dynamic propelled the biblical story firmly into a contemporary and, surprisingly, American landscape. Clearly, issues of race and gender dominate contemporary American dialogues for Jews and non-Jews alike.

These examples of possible "paradigms" that arise out of classic Jewish texts as they collide with some aspects of Postmodernist sensibility are, of course, not exclusive prescriptions for Jewish artists. I offer them only to demonstrate what is possible if our Golden Age artists would consider the many options that the rich traditions of Jewish biblical and rabbinic texts make available to them.

Fig. 7. Richard McBee, Hagar and Her Children Bury Abraham, 2013. Oil on canvas 72 x 60. Courtesy the artist

Prospects

It should be obvious that the current revival of Jewish Art can only bloom into a true Golden Age if it has broad public support, especially from the Jewish community in America. Just as there is now a sustained readership for Jewish-oriented literature and ideas (and even occasionally some visual art) in such venues as the *Jewish Review of Books*, *Tablet*, *Jewcy*, and *The Forward*, so likewise must we develop the potentiality of a literate visual Jewish culture and audience.

Jewish institutions across the board, including synagogues, community centers, museums and media, must raise the bar and demand textual literacy. A constant daily outpouring of Jewish texts, in English and Hebrew, must inundate our communities. Our writers must not dumb down complex Jewish concepts; rather, we must have confidence that our people will always be curious to find out more about their precious heritage. Equally important is community education in visual literacy; our community should insist upon being visually literate in the two-thousand years of Jewish Art in both the Jewish and Western visual canon.

Critics and journalists must be encouraged to analyze, thoughtfully comment on, and explain these artists' works to a Jewish audience so that both the Judaic and aesthetic elements are treated with equal respect. The public must listen and become engaged. The Jewish museums must overcome their reluctance and open their doors. In order to thrive, the Golden Age must be recognized.

We have made a good start. From out of the wilderness of our own doubts, we have found our way through a troubled past and, thanks to America's loving embrace, we have emerged into a new artistic landscape full of promise. More artists, self-consciously drawing upon Jewish Tradition as a springboard for inspiration, have produced more explicitly Jewish Art. If we can muster the courage to stand apart as proud Jews in contemporary America, while fully embracing three-thousand years of our history and close to two-thousand years of visual creativity, contemporary Jewish Art has more than a fair chance to find its rightful day in the sun.

NOTES

1. This is a revised and expanded version previously published in *Jewish Cultural Aspirations: The Jewish Role in American Life*; Annual Review: USC Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life, vol. 10 (Purdue University Press, 2013), 33-48.
2. Cf. Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 5:8-10. The long and tortuous controversy over Jews creating visual art is perhaps best summed up by Cecil Roth: "In all Jewish history, attitudes and interpretations varied from land to land and from generation to generation. Sometimes the application of the prohibition was absolute…even in relatively 'liberal' Jewish circles. . . . Sometimes men went to the other extreme, and great latitude was shown, human figures being incorporated freely even in objects associated with Divine worship." Cf. *Jewish Art*, Cecil Roth, ed. (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, Ltd, 1971), 11.
3. Kalman P. Bland, *The Artless Jew* (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 2000), 8.
4. See Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Jewish Art* (New York: Abrams, 1997). This excellent survey is simply an introduction to the extensive literature on Jewish art that dates from the third century C.E. Dura Europos synagogue murals, the many dozens of illuminated manuscripts in fourteenth and fifteenth century Spain and central Europe, the extensive illustrated Haggadot and Jewish books, seventeenth and eighteenth century illuminated Jewish manuscripts, nineteenth century Jewish genre painters and extensive artwork from the Bezalel School in pre-state Palestine, and twentieth century modernist masters. Additionally, www.richardmcbee.com features over 250 critical reviews of Jewish visual art.
5. Bland, 40-44.
6. Cynthia Ozick, "Previsions of the Demise of the Dancing Dog," in *Art and Ardor* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 278.
7. See Vivian B. Mann, *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 2000). The diversity of rabbinic opinion on the permissibility of Jewish image-making is breathtaking. What becomes clear is that in many cases over the millennia, visual art was permitted by the rabbis and that, as the threat of idolatry faded, the issue became more academic. My own inquiries, addressed to a number of orthodox rabbinic authorities (including Rabbi David Feinstein) have yielded the opinion that, other than a three-dimensional highly finished and realistic statues, almost all artworks created as artworks are permissible.
8. Matthew Baigell, unpublished lecture (published 2013; see *infra,* n. 9); summary appeared "The Arty Semite" (The *Jewish Daily Forward* Blog), March 4, 2011.
9. Baigell, "We are Living in a Golden Age of Jewish American Art and We Really Don't Know It," *Jewish Cultural Aspirations: The Jewish Role in American Life*, *supra* n. 1, 1 – 31.
10. H. H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art,* 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2004), 685.
11. "Joseph and Asenath" (written in the Hellenistic age), in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*; (Patricia Ahearne-Kroll, trans.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013), 2525; see also www.markgoodacre.org, translation by H.F.D Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford University Press, 1984).
12. Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer (ca. 6th century C.E.) (Gerald Friedlander, trans.; North Stratford, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, 2004) 287-88. See also www.books.google.com/books…pirke de rabbi eliezer english online.
13. Delores S. Williams, *Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation*, Hagar, Sarah and Their Children, Phyllis Trible & Letty M. Russell, ed.s (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 171–184.

BEZALEL NAOR

"My Beloved is Like a Gazelle" (Domeh Dodi li-Tsevi): The Esthetic Messiah

(An Essai in Rabbinic Surrealism, or Another Jewish Bestiary)[1]

IN THE SONG OF SONGS, King Solomon writes:

> My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart; behold, he stands behind our wall, he looks in through the windows, he peers through the lattice.[2]

According to the Midrash, the verse describes the elusive character of the Redeemer: "Just as a deer appears and disappears and reappears, so the first Redeemer is revealed and occulted and revealed."[3] The commentators limn for us the timetable of the first Redeemer, Moses, who after an initial contact with the Children of Israel subjugated in Egypt, absented himself, only to reappear on the scene at a later time.[4] (Some make the astute observation that in the Bible code known as *Atbash*, the Hebrew word *tsevi* [deer] is permutated to *Moshe*.) And so too, we are told, the *future* process of redemption will be a symphony in three movements: revelation/occultation/revelation.[5]

Yet, there is another sense in which the Beloved is compared to a deer. Besides its elusive behavior, the deer symbolizes the entire esthetic dimension. Part and parcel of the redemption of the soul of mankind is the redemption of the esthetic (perhaps erotic is the better word) dimension of being.

BEZALEL NAOR is the founder of Orot, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the dissemination of the writings of Rav Kook. He is the author of *The Kabbalah of Relation* (2012); *The Limit of Intellectual Freedom: The Letters of Rav Kook* (2011); and *Post-Sabbatian-Sabbatianism* (1999). Most recently, he edited Rabbi Pinhas Hakohen Lintop of Birzh's critique of the *Leshem* (the classic of Lithuanian Mitnagdic Kabbalah), *Kana'uteh de-Pinhas* (2013).

I will not commit the *faux pas* of writing that the Hebrew word for "deer," *tsevi*, has an additional meaning of "beauty," because I know that though they look alike, these are actually two different words derived from separate proto-Semitic roots.

Be that as it may, the works of Solomon, Song of Songs and Proverbs (but especially the former) are replete with the image of the Beloved portrayed as a deer.

> Your two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies.[6]
>
> I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, that you awaken not, nor stir up love, until it please.[7]
>
> A lovely hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; with her love be you ravished always."[8]

This fascination with the gazelle is common to both Hebrew and Arabic literature. Classical Arabic poetry abounds with the imagery of beautiful gazelles (i.e., women, metaphorically speaking). Appreciated for its grace, the gazelle is a symbol most commonly associated in Arabic literature with female beauty. One of the traditional themes of Arabic love poetry involves comparing the gazelle with the beloved, and linguists theorize that *ghazal*, the word for love poetry in Arabic, is related to the word for gazelle. Finally, it is thought that through the Persian *gazal*, the word "gazelle" entered the European languages.

In medieval Arabic and Persian civilization, the fawning (pun intended) on the graceful hind did not remain restricted to the realm of poetry (as in Hebraic civilization), but extended into the visual arts as well. In the Jewish world, the deer as visual image would be kept waiting in the woods for several centuries.

Belated as its arrival may have been, come the seventeenth century the icon of the deer exploded upon the Jewish world with full force. In 1666 ("the Year of the Beast" from the perspective of English Protestant millenarians), a Turkish Jew by the name of "Tsevi" (first name "Shabbetai") captured the Messianic imagination of the Jewish People the world over. The symbolism of the deer was lost neither on Shabbetai Tsevi (he signed himself "*Tavya devei 'ila'ah,*" Aramaic for "celestial deer")[9] and his admirers, nor on his eventual critics (after the necessary sobering) who punned on his name "*tsevi shavur*" ("a broken deer," a Mishnaic reference).[10] Sabbatian iconography (the little that has survived in frontispieces of books) makes ample use of deer representation.[11]

The great visionary of Israel's rebirth, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook (1865-1935), first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Erets Israel, saw a simi-

Frontispiece to Rabbi Tsevi Chotsh's *Hemdat Tsevi* (Amsterdam,

larity between Shabbetai Tsevi and Nietzsche.

> What Nietzsche is to humanity, Shabbetai Tsevi (may the name of the wicked rot) is to Judaism; and just as Nietzsche took leave of his senses, so Shabbetai Tsevi took leave of his religion. One shell (*kelipah*) related to the Footsteps of Messiah.[12]

Rav Kook's intriguing *pensée* has left many of us in suspense. Could he by some stretch be alluding to Nietzsche's triumphing of the Dionysian element over the Apollonian element?[13]

• • •

Speaking of Rav Kook. In his seminal work, *Orot* (1920), Rav Kook would devote two crucial chapters to the "power of imagination" (*"ko'ah ha-medameh"*) and the role it is destined to play in the redemptive process.

Initially, Rav Kook's survey of the contemporary scene assumes a rather pessimistic tone:

> All of contemporary culture is built on the foundation of the imaginative faculty. This is the pagan legacy of the civilized nations caught up in the imaginative faculty, from which developed physical beauty, both in action and in representation. The imaginative faculty progresses, and with it, the applied and empirical sciences, and in proportion to the ascendance of the imaginative faculty and its hold upon life, the light of intellect recedes, because the entire world supposes that all happiness depends on the development of the imaginative faculty. So things continue gradually, until the remains of reason in the spirit of secular wisdom are also converted to the imaginative faculty. The speakers and raconteurs, the dramaturges and all engaged in *les beaux arts*, assume prominence in society, while philosophy hobbles and totters because pure reason disappears. As much as reason recedes, so "impudence increases, and the wisdom of sages rots, the sin-fearing are reviled and truth is absent, and the face of the generation is as the face of a dog."[14] That inner gentleness, which comes from the spirit of wisdom, disappears. The longing for spirituality and transcendence; for divine communion; for the higher world; for the clarity of ethics in the apex of its purity; for the concepts of intellect in and of their eternal selves, become a rare spectacle. This global phenomenon is reflected proportionately in Israel vis-à-vis divine inspiration and love of Torah with an inner spirit and essential freshness of faithful Judaism. There rules in the world a material spirit. *Woe unto you, O land, when your king is a lad and your princes eat in the morning!*[15]

And then in an abrupt turnabout, we are treated to a glint of the brilliant ironic wit which is the signature of Kookian vision:

> But all of this is a far-reaching plan, the Lord's plan to perfect the imaginative faculty, for imagination is the healthy basis for the supernal spirit that will descend on it . . . the supreme divine spirit destined to come through King Messiah. Therefore, now the imaginative faculty is being firmly established. When it is completely finished, the seat will be ready and perfect for the supernal spirit of the Lord, fit to receive the light of the divine spirit, which is the spirit of the Lord, *a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and strength, a spirit of knowledge and awe of the Lord.*[16]

Not content with sociological study and survey of modern intellectual history, Rav Kook, a kabbalist of note, goes on to provide Lurianic underpinnings to his observations, whereby the harlotry first addressed by Joshua (or rather his spies) with only partial success, is later confronted by King Solomon, with complete (or near complete) success. In the Kookian interpretation of this Lurianic myth, Rahab the Harlot and the Two Harlots symbolize the unbridled power of imagination:[17]

> When the time had as yet not arrived for all the purity to appear at the final heights, there were sent by Joshua two spies to reconnoiter the land, and they came to the home of a harlot by the name of Rahab.[18] All is tied together with holiness and the highest good, but the attribute of judgment is aroused and true fear of punishment is required in proportion to the empowerment of the imagination and its deepening. But in the essence of the national will, the imaginative dimension—which entails the embodiment of knowledge on the one hand, and all description of beauty on the other—was still not completed at that time. This was brought to completion in the days of Solomon: *Then two harlots came* before the judgment of the King of Israel, who sits on the throne of the Lord.[19]

Rav Kook continues to trace the historic process of *"birur ko'ah hamedameh,"* the clarification of the power of imagination (to employ the terminology of Rabbi Nahman of Breslov), through the idolatrous leanings of King Solomon in the First Temple period (attributed by the Bible to the influence of his foreign wives), which in turn prompted the hamstringing of imagination by the Men of the Great Assembly at the beginning of the Second Temple period, and finally culminating in the re-emergence and re-empowerment of imagination at the time of the national renascence in the Land of Israel:

> However, through the interference of the foreign women,[20] together with the inability to digest foreign things, there resulted the wickedness that caused the founding of the great city of Rome,[21] and the siftings of elements had to be stretched out for eons, until the imagination was disempowered in Israel. The drive for idolatry was captured in a "lead pot" and "slaughtered."[22] By the same token, *there is no more any prophet*,[23] and the flame of love for nation and land is not felt in the same profound way as in the good days. This is related to the pain of the entire world. Until at the End of Days, the traces of the power of imagination are revealed and the love of the Land is aroused. The thing appears with its dregs, but it is destined to be purified. *The smallest will become a thousand, and the youngest, a powerful nation, I am the Lord, in its time I will hasten it.*[24]

In Rav Kook's vision, a reactivation of the imagination is necessary for the return of prophecy to Israel. *U-be-yad ha-nevi'im adameh. By means of the prophets I have spoken in images*.[25] Rav Kook is indebted to Maimonides for placing the *ko'ah ha-medameh*, the imaginative faculty, front and center, rendering it an essential component, perhaps even *the* essential component of prophecy.[26] While a dormant imagination may not pose an obstacle to the intellectual pursuit of Torah study, Israel's renewed quest for prophecy in its land makes the revival of the moribund "*medameh*" an absolute necessity.

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Rav Kook may not have been alone in the belief that the non-cerebral (or right-hemispheric) dimension, so long missing from Judaism, would play a vital part in the national renascence. There is an intriguing remark of the Rebbe of Sokhatchov that leads one to suspect that he too may have been thinking in such terms, that Israel in its struggle for final redemption must encompass a dimension hitherto almost alien to its being. His oral remarks (which fortunately, were preserved for posterity) take the form of commentary to the *Haftarah*, the reading from the Prophets for the Intermediate Sabbath of the Festival of *Sukkot* (Booths). According to Talmudic tradition, on that Sabbath morning we read *Be-Yom bo' Gog*,[27] Ezekiel's apocalyptic vision of the confrontation between the army of Gog and Magog on the one hand, and Jerusalem on the other.[28] Rav Hai Gaon, quoted in the *Tur*, explained that this occasion was deemed appropriate for that reading, because the War of Gog and Magog will take place on Sukkot.[29]

Rabbi Samuel Bornstein (1855-1926), the Rebbe of Sokhatchov (a school of Polish Hasidism known for its penetrating thought), could not

leave matters at that. He probed for some intrinsic connection between the prophesied cosmic struggle and the observance of the commandment of *sukkot*, those booths or huts that serve as temporary residences throughout the festival.

But first, the $64,000 question: Who are Gog and Magog? Some say that they symbolize the seventy nations of the world, all lined up against Israel. (The Hebrew words "*Gog u-Magog*" have the numerical value of 70.[30]) The Sokhatchover, drawing on a Midrash, traces Gog back to his ancestor Yephet, son of Noah. Likewise, Israel is traced back to Shem, son of Noah.[31] In the post-diluvian world, Yephet received the dimension of "*hitsoniyut*" ("outwardness"), and Shem, the dimension of "*penimiyut*" ("inwardness").[32] In the apocalyptic struggle of titans, Israel's eleventh-hour salvation will hinge on its ability to take hold of the outward dimension, symbolized by the commandment of the *sukkah* or booth, which may be fulfilled by the mere act of sleeping in the *sukkah*. In sleep, one is stripped of the cerebral and reduced to the external, bodily aspect of one's being.[33] (Though the Sokhatchover does not couch it in such terms, sleep is also a window of opportunity for imagination to run wild; for the soul to enter the *'alam al-mithal*, as the Sufi mystics termed it, translated by Henri Corbin into Latin as *mundus imaginalis*, or imaginal world.[34])

Rabbi Gershon Hanokh Leiner (1839-1890), the Rebbe of Radzyn, in *his* analysis of the confrontation between Gog and Israel, focuses specifically on the Greek connection. In this regard, the Radzyner quotes the Talmud: "Our rabbis permitted [to write a Torah scroll in] Greek."[35] As is well known, the civilization of *Yavan*, or Greece, excelled in the arts and appreciation of the esthetic dimension of being. The Talmud will justify the practice of writing a Torah scroll in Greek by invoking the verse "*Yapht Elohim le-Yephet ve-yishkon be-aholei Shem*" ("May God enlarge the boundaries of Yephet, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem"), which they paraphrased as "*Yaphyuto shel Yephet yehe be-aholei Shem*" ("The beauty of Yephet shall be in the tents of Shem").[36] To the Radzyner's thinking, implicit in Ezekiel's prophecy, "And it shall come to pass on that day that I will give unto Gog a place there for a grave in Israel,"[37] is the prediction that the good, positive element of Gog—or Greece—once extracted from the dross, will be incorporated within Israel's collective consciousness. Gog being buried in Israel, which is to say, the soil of Israel receiving into its midst the body of Gog, symbolizes the introjection of Greek civilization—or rather the salient, redeeming feature thereof—into the nation of Israel.[38] "And the precious, the good, found in this victory, will remain in Israel for eternity."[39]

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There is no denying that *Hazal*, the Sages of blessed memory, were open to allowing the *or hozer*, the reflected light of Hellenic (or Japhetic) civilization, shine upon Hebraic (or Semitic) civilization, but we find in the writings of the Rabbis another strain of thought whereby beauty shines upon Zion not as an *'or hozer*, a reflection of a foreign civilization, but as an *'or yashar*, a direct illumination from the source of Israel, whose rays extend to the entire world.

> The sages say: "From Zion was created the world, for it is said, *A psalm of Asaph. The God of gods, the Lord, spoke, and called earth, from the rising of the sun until its setting. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty* (*mi-Tsiyon mikhlal yophi*)—from it is perfected the beauty of the world (*mimenu mukhlal yophyo shel 'olam*)."[40]

> Ten measures (*kabin*) of beauty (*yophi*) descended to the world; nine, Jerusalem took, and one, the rest of the world."[41]

In the mystical *Hekhalot* literature, we discover that the name of the "Prince of Torah" (*Sar ha-Torah*) is *Yophiel*, or in other texts, *Yepheiphiyah*.[42] At first glance, this might strike us as a strange name for an angel: "The Beauty of *Yah*." However, as scholars have pointed out, the setting for the visionary experiences recorded in the *Hekhalot* is the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.[43] A student of the Talmud will recall that on the seventh day of Sukkot (or *Hoshana Rabba*) in the Temple, at the conclusion of the seven *hakafot* or circumambulations, they would bade farewell: *"Yophi lakh, mizbe'ah! Yophi lakh, mizbe'ah!"* ("Beauty to you, Altar! Beauty to you, Altar!"). According to the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer [ben Jacob], they would say*: "Yophi le-Yah ve-lakh, mizbe'ah! Yophi le-Yah ve-lakh, mizbe'ah!"* ("Beauty to *Yah*, and to you, Altar! Beauty to *Yah*, and to you, Altar!").[44] One speculates that the name of the angel *Yepheiphiyah* derived from this salutation: *"Yophi le-Yah!"* Verily, the Temple in Jerusalem is the source of all beauty in the world.

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> Said Rav Hisda: "What is written, *The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob?*[45] The Lord loves gates distinguished by *Halakha* more than synagogues and study-houses."

> This is what Rabbi Hiyya bar Ammi said in the name of Ulla: "From the day the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, has naught in His world except the four ells of *Halakha*."[46]

With the return of the lovely *Shekhinah* to Zion, all of the beauty and romance which are hers will reappear in the Gates of Zion. If, as the Sages say, the *Sha'arei Tsiyon* (Gates of Zion) are "*she'arim metsuyanim ba-halakha*" ("gates distinguished by *Halakha*"), then they are also "*she'arim metsuyanim*" ("decorative gates") without further modification.[47] With the destruction of the Temple, the Holy One's world was reduced to "four ells of *Halakhah*,"[48] but with the national rebirth, the Holy One's world broadens to encompass other dimensions as well. "*Ohev Hashem Sha'arei Tsiyon*." "The Lord loves the Gates of Zion."

And my Beloved, the Messiah, with his nose pushed up against the glass window like that of a fawn, is taking it all in.

NOTES

1. In 2012, Bezalel Naor published *The Kabbalah of Relation: "We Would Have Learned the 'Way of the Earth' From the Cock"* (A Jewish Bestiary), which dealt with the symbol of the cock in Talmud, Kabbalah and the surrealist art of Marc Chagall.
2. Song of Songs 2:9; cf. ibid., 2:17.
3. *Numbers Rabbah* 11:2; *Song of Songs Rabbah*, Parashah 2.
4. See Rabbi Ze'ev Wolf Einhorn, *Peirush Maharzu* to *Exodus Rabbah* 5:19.
5. *Numbers Rabbah* and Song of Songs Rabbah, loc. cit.
6. Song of Songs 4:5.

   The recent shocking statement by author Melissa Mohr is an apt description of the contortions like verses are put through in various quarters: "Some of these euphemisms are obvious, as in the Song of Songs…It is almost painful to watch scholars insist that this passage has nothing at all to do with sex. No, it is truly and *only* about God's love for Israel, Christ's love for the Church, or the soul's spiritual union with God." Melissa Mohr, *Holy Sh*t: A Brief History of Swearing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83-84 (italics mine).
7. Song of Songs 2:7; 3:5. I am still undecided whether the comment by some that "*tseva'ot*" is a pun on the divine name *Tseva'ot* and "*ayelot ha-sadeh*" a pun on the divine cognomen *El Shaddai*, constitutes genuine Bible commentary or merely *letsanut* (comedy).
8. Proverbs 5:19.
9. *b. Hullin* 59b.
10. *Mishnah*, *Bava Metsi'a* 1:4.
11. See Bezalel Naor, *Post-Sabbatian Sabbatianism* (Spring Valley, NY: Orot, 1999), 79-82, concerning the frontispiece to Rabbi Tsevi Chotsh, *Hemdat Tsevi* (Amsterdam, 1706).
12. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, *Kevatsim mi-Khetav Yad Kodesho*, Vol. I, ed. Ofen (Jerusalem, 5766/2006), *Pinkas "Aharon be-Boisk,"* par. 40 (56).
13. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872).
14. *Mishnah*, *Sotah* 9:15.

15. Ecclesiastes 10:16.
16. Isaiah 11:2.

    Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, *Orot* (1920), *Yisrael u-Tehiyato* (Israel and Its Renascence), chap. 17.
17. See Shlomo Katz, "Rahav and Yehoshua: Imagination and Intellect," *Orot: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Judaism* I (5751/1991), 49-64, and Editor's Apercu, 65-67.
18. Joshua 2.
19. I Kings 3. See Rabbi Hayyim Vital, *Sefer ha-Likkutim*, Joshua 2; I Kings 3; idem, *Likkutei Torah*, Joshua 2; I Kings 3.
20. I Kings 11:1-8.
21. *b. Shabbat* 56b, *Sanhedrin* 21b. However, a different version of the founding of Rome is recorded in Rashi, *Megillah* 6b.
22. *b. Yoma* 69b, *Sanhedrin* 64a, *Avodah Zarah* 17.
23. Psalm 74:9. According to the *Sefer Hasidim*, Vilna Gaon and Rabbi Zadok Hakohen of Lublin, the cessation of prophecy was linked to the eradication of idolatry. See Bezalel Naor, *Lights of Prophecy/Orot ha-Nevu'ah* (1990).
24. Isaiah 60:22.

    Orot, *Yisrael u-Tehiyato*, chap. 18.

    In *Shemonah Kevatsim* 5:190 the conclusion reads: "The smallest will become a thousand," "the thousand for you, Solomon" (Song of Songs 8:12). This is actually the more logical conclusion. Logic would dictate that Solomon reappear in the conclusion to the *pensée*.

    (The author of this essay is in the process of preparing a new edition of his English translation of *Orot,* which will address the textual variants of *Orot*, edited by Rav Zevi Yehudah Hakohen Kook, son of the Chief Rabbi, and the original manuscript version of *Shemonah Kevatsim*.)
25. Hosea 12:11.
26. See Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* II, 36. Another latter-day visionary who pursued this line (while downplaying the indebtedness to Maimonides, of course) was Rabbi Nahman of Breslov. Rabbi Nahman, as Rav Kook (who was very attached to and inspired by the writings of Breslov), is intent on the rectification and clarification of imagination as a means to revive prophecy. See, e.g., *Likkutei Moharan* II, 8 (*Tik'u Tokhaha*), pars. 7-8. See also Zvi Mark, *Mistikah ve-Shiga'on bi-Yetsirat R. Nahman mi-Breslov* [*Mysticism and Madness in the Work of R. Nahman of Bratslav*] (Tel Aviv: 2003), chap. 5 (*"Dimyon, Nevu'ah ve-Emunah"*), especially 86-95.
27. Ezekiel 38:18.
28. *b. Megillah* 31a.
29. Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, *Arba'ah Turim*, *Tur Orah Hayyim*, 490.
30. *Midrash Tanhuma*, end *Korah*.
31. *Genesis Rabbah* 36:6. See Genesis 10:2: "The children of Yephet: Gomer and Magog and Media and Yavan and Tubal and Meshekh and Tiras." Cf. Ezekiel 39:1: ". . . Gog, chief prince of Meshekh and Tubal."
32. Rabbi Samuel Bornstein recorded this insight in the name of his father Rabbi Abraham Bornstein, author of the Responsa *Avnei Nezer*.

    It would be apposite to point out that Noah's blessing to Yephet bespeaks the assignation of outwardness to Yephet and inwardness to Shem. "May God enlarge Yephet and may he dwell in the tents of Shem." In the Hebrew original it reads: *"Yapht Elohim le-Yephet ve-yishkon be-aholei Shem"* (Genesis 9:27).

Yapht may, by a stretch, be related to the Hebrew word for beauty (*yophi*). As the Rabbis paraphrased the verse: "The beauty (*yaphyuto*) of Yephet shall be in the tents of Shem" (*b. Megillah* 9b). The halakhic discussion there concerns the permissibility of writing Torah scrolls in the very esthetic Greek script. But this Rabbinic coopting of the term is the stuff of *derash* or homily.

From a perspective of *peshuto shel mikra*, the simple sense of the verse, *yapht* as a verb (*pth*) is an expression of width or spatial extension. (See Onkelos, Rashi and Ibn Ezra to Genesis 9:27; the last-mentioned in opposition to Sa'adya Gaon.) At the other extreme stand the "tents of Shem," archetypical domiciles symbolic of inwardness.

One notes that whereas in the Sokhatchover analysis Yephet and Shem in their new incarnations of Gog-and-Magog and Israel are pitted against one another, in the passage from the Talmud cited above there is expressed an ideal marriage of the two *Weltanschauungen*. Out of the confrontation of the two ideational continents of Yephet and Shem may yet come a synthesis, or better yet, a creative tension.

33. Rabbi Samuel Bornstein, *Shem mi-Shemuel*, *Rosh Hashanah—Sukkot* (Jerusalem, 5734/1974), *Yom Shabbat Hol ha-Mo'ed Sukkot*, Year 5677 (191b-192a).
34. See Henri Corbin, "*Mundus Imaginalis* or, the imaginary and the imaginal," *Cahiers internationaux de symbolism,* Vol. 6 (1964): 3-26.
35. *b. Megillah* 9a.
36. Genesis 9:27; *b. Megillah* 9b.
37. Ezekiel 39:11.
38. Rabbi Gershon Hanokh Leiner, *Sod Yesharim*, *Sukkot* (Warsaw, 1903), *Shalosh Se'udot shel Hol ha-Mo'ed Sukkot*, par. 39, s.v. *Ve-hayah ba-yom ha-hu be-yom bo' Gog 'al admat Yisrael* (63c-64a).

Historically speaking, Sokhatchov and Radzyn were on opposite sides of the barricades that went up after the Kotsk (Polish, Kock)-Izhbitsa (Polish, Izbica) schism in 1839. Rabbi Abraham Bornstein of Sokhatchov (Polish, Sochaczew) was the son-in-law of the Kotsker Rebbe, Menahem Mendel Morgenstern. Rabbi Gershon Hanokh Leiner of Radzyn was the grandson of Rabbi Mordechai Joseph Leiner of Izbica, author *Mei ha-Shilo'ah*. Both the Kotsker and the Izhbitser had studied under Rabbi Simha Bunem of Peshiskha (Polish, Przysucha). It was in Peshiskha that this uniquely intellectual form of Polish Hasidism was born.

39. *Sod Yesharim*, *Sukkot*, 64a, end par. 39.
40. Psalms 50:1-2; *b. Yoma* 54b. In Lurianic Kabbalah, the beauty of Zion is associated with Joseph, of whom it was said, "And Joseph was handsome in form and handsome in appearance (*yephe to'ar vi-yphe mar'eh*)" (Genesis 39:6). See Rabbi Hayyim Vital, *'Ets Hayyim* 32:5 (=*Sha'ar He'arat ha-Mohin*, 5). There is Midrashic precedent for equating Zion with Joseph: "Whatever befell Joseph, befell Zion" (*Midrash Tanhuma*, *Vayyigash* 10). Astute commentators point out that both Joseph and Zion share the numerical value of 156.

An exploration of the esthetic dimension of the Biblical Joseph in Midrash and Kabbalah would make for a fascinating study. The famed Gaon of Rogatchov (1858-1936) dropped some tantalizing hints in this connection. See Rabbi Joseph Rosen, *Tsaphnat Pa'ne'ah*, *Bereshit* (Jerusalem, 1967), *Vayyeshev*, Genesis 39:2, 6 and *Haphtarat Vayyeshev* (pp. 143-147). In those spartan notes, the Rogatchover atypically references Lurianic Kabbalah, and sketches the features of an androgynous Joseph!

41. *b. Kiddushin* 49b.
42. See Reuben Margaliyot, *Mal'akhei 'Elyon* (Jerusalem, 1945), s.v. *Yophiel* (65-67) and s.v. *Yepheiphiyah* (68); Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1965), 12-13. In Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Deuteronomy 34:6, both Yophiel and Yepheiphiyah occur as "*rabbanei hokhmeta*" ("teachers of wisdom"). The enigmatic Galician kabbalist who perished in Siberian exile during the Second World War, Isaac Messer (1891-1942), lavished great attention on the Prince of Torah, Yophiel/Yepheiphiyah. See Isaac Messer, *U-Mi-Midbar Matanah*, ed. Moshe Hallamish (Jerusalem, 1985), 40, 43-44. Concerning this mysterious student of Hillel Zeitlin, see Bezalel Naor, *Kabbalah and the Holocaust* (Spring Valley, NY: 2001), 103-117.

    The Lithuanian Kabbalist, Rabbi Eizik Haver offered an explanation for the association of *yophi*, or beauty, with "*razin de-'oraita*" (mysteries of Torah). See Y.E. Haver (Wildman), *Afikei Yam*, Vol. I (Jerusalem, 1994), *Kiddushin* 49b, s.v. *'Assarah kabin yophi* (300). Note that his explanation differs from those of the Vilna Gaon (whom he quotes). See Elijah Gaon, *Yahel 'Or*, ed. Naphtali Herz Halevi [Weidenbaum] (Vilna, 1882), *Zohar* II, 247b (*Hekhalot*) (20d).
43. See Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1996), 64-65; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through A Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1994), 19-20; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), 168. Also Ithamar Gruenwald, "*Mekoman shel masorot kohaniyot bi-yetsiratah shel ha-mistikah shel ha-merkavah ve-shel shi'ur komah*" in *Early Jewish Mysticism*, ed. Joseph Dan (Jerusalem, 1987) [=*Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. 6, nos. 1-2], 65-120; Rachel Elior, "*Sifrut ha-heikhalot ve-ha-merkavah: zikatah la-mikdash, la-mikdash ha-shamaymi u-le-mikdash me'at,*" *Retsef u-Temurah* (2004), 107-142; idem, "The priestly nature of the mystical heritage in Heykalot literature," *Expérience et écriture mystiques dans les religions du livre*, ed. Fenton and Goetschel (2000), 41-54; idem, "The Merkavah tradition and the emergence of Jewish mysticism: from Temple to Merkavah, from Hekhal to Hekhalot, from priestly opposition to gazing upon the Merkavah," *Sino-Judaica* (1999), 101-158; idem, "*Bein ha-heikhal ha-artsi la-heikhalot ha-shamaymiyim: ha-tefilah ve-shirat ha-kodesh be-sifrut ha-heikhalot ve-zikatan la-masorot ha-keshurot ba-mikdash*," *Tarbiz* 64:3 (1995), 341-380.

    Inter alia, see Bezalel Naor, *The Limit of Intellectual Freedom: The Letters of Rav Kook* (Spring Valley, 2011), 109, concerning the focus of Talmud Yerushalmi on the Temple in Jerusalem.
44. *Tosephta*, *Sukkah* 3:2; *b. Sukkah* 45b. Though this passage occurs in some versions of the *Mishnah*, *Sukkah* 4:5 (not Maimonides', to be sure), it is actually not a *mishnah* but rather a *beraita*. See *Hagahot B[ayit] H[adash]*; N. N. Rabbinowicz, *Dikdukei Soferim*; S. Lieberman, *Tosephta ki-Pheshutah*; J. Kafah, *Peirush ha-Mishnah la-Rambam*. Though it should be obvious enough, my inclusion of the word "*Yophi*" in the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer [ben Jacob] is spelled out in Rabbenu Menahem ha-Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah*, *Sukkah*, ed. Liss (Jerusalem, 1966), 161 (col. a).

    Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger was perplexed why Maimonides omitted this farewell salutation from his *Mishneh Torah*, *Hil. Lulav* 7:23. His proffered solution that Maimonides restricts his remarks to legal obligations, omitting mere custom, is less than satisfactory. (In that very *halakhah*, Maimonides mentions a *minhag Yisrael*!) See Rabbi J. Ettlinger, *Arukh le-Ner*, *Sukkah* 45a. My own suspicion is that

Maimonides was squeamish about a formula that so readily lent itself to syncretistic interpretation. See the objection raised by the Talmud: *"Ve-ha ka meshatef shem shamayim ve-davar aher?"* "Is he not combining the name of Heaven and something else [i.e., combining *Yah* and the altar in a single salute]?" (*Sukkah* 45b). And though the Talmud reconciles the practice, Maimonides may have found the answer given to be forced, and being hypersensitive to any practices at all smacking of syncretism, saw fit to omit the custom from his code (for as *Arukh le-Ner* pointed out, it was but a custom, not an obligation). In *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, positive commandment 7, Maimonides quotes the *beraita* marshalled by the Talmud (ibid.): "Whoever combines the name of Heaven with something else, is uprooted from the world." (See further Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, ed. Michael Schwarz [2002], Vol. I, 142-143, n. 3.)

I surmise that deciding the *halakha* in favor of the *tanna kamma* over Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob was not an option for Maimonides, in view of the accepted principle of Talmudic jurisprudence that the *halakha* is in accordance with Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob, for "the Mishnah of Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob is trim and clean (*kav ve-naki*)" (*b. Yevamot* 49b, *Gittin* 67a).

Postscript: I once heard from Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik of Boston that his grandfather Rabbi Hayyim Soloveitchik of Brisk refused to utter the prayer *"Berikh Shemeh"* (a passage from *Zohar* II, 369a) before the open ark because he found syncretistic the passage *"sagidna kammeh u-mi-kamma di-ykar oraiteh"* ["I prostrate myself before Him and before the honor of His Torah"]. Evidently, from the perspective of Halakha, not only the altar, but the Torah too, is subject to syncretism.

45. Psalms 87:2.
46. *b. Berakhot* 8a.
47. See Rashi, *Shabbat* 145b, s.v. *metsuyyanin—mekushatin*. As Rabbi Nahman of Breslov expressed it in Yiddish: *"Ikh mein takeh dos Eretz Yisroel mit die shtieber, mit die heizer"* ["I mean literally this Land of Israel, with these homes, with these houses"].
48. However, Rabbi Joseph Engel noted that both the anonymous author of the *Halakhot Gedolot* and Maimonides (Introduction to the Commentary to the Mishnah) do not have in their text of the Talmud the words *"Mi-yom she-harav beit ha-mikdash"* ["From the day the Temple was destroyed"]. See Rabbi Joseph Engel, *Gilyonei ha-Shass*, *Berakhot* 8a.

SUSAN NASHMAN FRAIMAN

A Jewish Art

> *It was like coming to the end of the world with no more continents to discover. One must now begin to make habitable the only continents that there are. One must learn to live within the limits of the world. As I see it, this means returning art to the serving of largely human ends.*
>
> —Arthur C. Danto, in *The State of the Art* (1987)

IN THE BEGINNING, was there Jewish art?[1] The debate about the existence of Jewish art is an old one, starting in the nineteenth century, with the development of the study of art history, which started almost concurrently with the development of nationalist movements in Europe. Questions of whether each nation has a distinctive style were raised by art historians, and answered in the affirmative. Art historians, however, denied Jews the existence of an art form. Jews, they claimed, were constitutionally unable to produce art—the second commandment was too ingrained in Jewish consciousness.[2] This attitude even spilled over to the possibility of creation in other arts—the most notable proponent of this was Wagner, who claimed in "*Das Judenthum in der Musik*" (1850) that the Jews were not only incapable of producing real music, they were incapable of producing real art of any kind.[3]

This article will focus on some of artistic activity in the land of Israel, including the founding of Bezalel, offer some examples of artists in Israel working in the "Jewish vein" today, and conclude with a summary of a recent Biennale held in Jerusalem and the new and exciting directions artistic expression by self-defined observant Jews is taking.

Jewish Art – State of Study

The 1920s and 1930s brought to light exciting examples of ancient Jewish art in the Levant. First were the discoveries of the synagogue floors in Israel with

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their riveting iconography of the Sacrifice of Isaac as well as the signs of the zodiac, the heavenly chariot of Apollo, a Torah shrine, and Temple Implements;[4] secondly, the remarkable discovery of the synagogue frescos of Dura Europos,[5] an extinct community on the seam of Syria and the Fertile Crescent that was destroyed by the Persians in 256 CE, literally buried in the sands of time and virtually unknown. These discoveries strengthened the hand of those who would claim that art, at least in the service of religion, was always part of Jewish culture, and that in fact, the Jews were not an an-iconic culture (and therefore a lesser one) after all.

In the past, scholars were very involved in discussions of national styles, and as a result, art history's preoccupation with style and its definition characterizes many of the earlier discussions of what constitutes Jewish art.[6] This was even sometimes taken to strange directions. For example, on the basis of style, "Herman Struck went so far as to maintain that Rembrandt must have been of Jewish descent since the 'sentiment underlying his paintings is Jewish.'"[7] Style is a slippery slope that is no longer the focus of art discourse, since today's post-modern art world allows for a multiplicity of forms and styles. That doesn't mean that prominent scholars in the past haven't tried their hands at defining Jewish art, such as Franz Landsberger and Stephen Kayser.[8] Joseph Gutmann, another art historian known for his prolific writing on Jewish iconography, Hebrew manuscripts and customs, wrote an article which basically denied the existence of Jewish art as something unique and discrete.[9] The defensive stance towards Jewish art was still evident in the 1970 introduction to the revised edition of *Jewish Art*; for example, "Jewish life gained in warmth what the synagogue lost in artistic beauty."[10] Research done over these last forty years belies that statement. Suffice it to say that the nineteenth century marks the transition from Jewish artistic expression almost exclusively in the context of ritual observance, to Jewish artists who paint and sculpt, not necessarily in religious service.

Scholarly discussions today include the teaching of Jewish art,[11] Jewish art historians,[12] the exhibiting of Jewish art,[13] the depiction of Jews in art,[14] and contemporary Jewish artists.[15] Perhaps for the reasons cited above, there is no real textbook of Jewish art to this day—the large compendium published in 1970 by Bezalel Narkiss was superseded by Gabrielle Sed-Rajna's *Jewish Art* in 1996—and both of these books—anthologies of articles by experts in the different fields and periods of Jewish art—struggle with the contradiction of being both learned works and coffee table items. The earlier work in particular is characterized by description and is all-inclusive. It is also for this reason that many histories of Jewish art include Camille Pissarro, who was born to a

Sephardic Jewish family in St. Thomas, but who did not deal with Jewish themes in his works.[16] Two recent histories of Israeli Art have just been published, one by Yigal Zalmona,[17] former curator at the Israel Museum, and the other by Gideon Ofrat.[18]

The 1970s saw a renaissance of the making of Jewish ritual arts, exemplified by artist David Moss and his groundbreaking revival of the illuminated *Ketubbah*. His "The Lovely Art of *Ketubbah* Making" appeared in the [First] *Jewish Catalog*, a harbinger of Jewish renewal in all areas.[19] He has also written eloquently about how he came to the subject in the introduction to his book *Love Songs*.[20] Among the other traditional Jewish crafts that have been revived are manuscript illumination, Hebrew calligraphy, paper cutting, the design and embroidering of synagogue textiles, and woodcarving.[21] All of the artists working on objects of holiness or objects of mitzvah have revived and renewed the Talmudic idea of *Hiddur Mitzvah*—the traditional Jewish vehicle of artistic expression.[22] This is in no way meant to denigrate Jewish ritual art, but the expansion of Jewish expression to other forums of the visual arts is a newer phenomenon. Newer because, as Gutmann has pointed out, most artists of Jewish extraction in the past did not want to be defined as Jewish.[23]

Today's rich Jewish artistic scene belies earlier tightly held dogmas. At the same time, scholars have been less concerned with defining what is Jewish art, and have broadened the area of inquiry as Jewish visual culture: how ritual art, synagogue art, and works of art were produced by Jews, commissioned by Jews, used by Jews, exhibited by Jews, and studied by Jews.[24] This expanded range makes room for the both the study of objects not made by Jews but used in the synagogue as well as the Jewish influence on art, such as is seen in the works of German artist Anselm Kiefer. Kiefer quite consciously incorporates Kabbalistic ideas in his creations (for example: *Shevirat HaKelim*, and *Sefer HaHechalot* [2002]).[25]

Art and Zionism

The influence of Wagner on the thinking of Jewish philosophers was not negligible. In fact, the negative definition of Jewish artistic capability was actually adopted by Buber, who stated that the "Jew of antiquity was more of an aural person than a visual one and more a temporal than a spatial person."[26] In his speech at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901, Buber called for the regeneration of the Jewish people through art in the Land of Israel. This speech was also a promotion for the first ever exhibit of contemporary Jewish artists, held right there in Congress.[27] It was also a showcase for the

importance of art in the formation of the nation, and was part of an overriding plea of the cultural Zionists to the political Zionists. At that time, Buber stated: "a whole and complete Jewish Art will only be possible on Jewish soil."[28] A list of the artists exhibited shows the range, from the apostate Eduard Bendemann (1811-1889) to Jozef Israëls (1824-1911), whose Jewish content was limited to certain works done towards the end of his life,[29] to artists with more outward Jewish messages, like Alfred Nossig (1864-1943)[30] and Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874-1925).[31] No doubt, at least part of the purpose of this exhibit was in fact to show to the naysayers—yes, Jews are not constitutionally unable to produce worthy art, hence the inclusion of Bendemann. In fact, Buber succeeded in transmitting his message—at the Zionist Congress in 1903, Boris Schatz was able to convince Herzl of the idea of establishing the Bezalel School in Jerusalem, and thus Bezalel became one of the first Zionist institutions to be established.[32] The Bezalel School officially opened its doors in 1906, while Degania, the first kibbutz, was only to be established in 1910.

The notion of art as a healer and bringer of salvation to the Jewish people was espoused as well by none other than Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who wrote a letter to the founders of Bezalel in 1907, comparing the rebirth of Jewish artistic activity to the healing of a sick child.[33]

The two loci of Jewish artistic endeavor are currently the United States and Israel. This is not to say that there aren't artists elsewhere dealing with their Judaism via art. However, as Matthew Baigell has correctly noted, we are certainly living in a golden age of Jewish American art.[34] Two groups of American Jewish artists have been formed in the last ten years: the South California Jewish Artists' initiative, founded in 2004, and the New York Jewish Art Salon, founded in 2008.[35] In Israel, too, art with Jewish themes is moving from the sidelines to a more central place. For years the Israeli art scene was dominated by abstract art associated with the "New Horizons" movement. At least two of the artists to be discussed here were told in the past by Israeli curators that their work was "too Jewish." That bias has slowly changed, and today the Israeli art scene is characterized by a multiplicity of artistic languages and new players on the art scene.[36] Below, we will discuss some works by artists currently working in Israel.

Art and Personal Expression in the Religious Sector

The founding of Bezalel in 1906 as Israeli's premier art academy did not hinder the founding over time of other art schools in Israel. All of these art

schools used a traditional model that included painting from observation of the nude human body. However, in the 1970s, the Emunah Women's Organization founded an institute for young religious women where they could learn graphic design and become art teachers, a program which has developed over the years to include more art making, and requires studying the history of art from the ancient period until the modern period. Emunah later opened an arts high school, and they are have been joined by others. Emunah College also offers theatre arts, another form which was typically off limits to the religiously observant. Today, there are theatre groups for religiously observant men (*Aspeklaria*), theater groups of women who perform for all female audiences,[37] and dance troupes for men as well. This flowering of the use of art for self-expression among the religious is not limited to the *dati-leumi* community in Israel. An art academy for the ultra-Orthodox opened in 1992. Named "*Oman*" (artist) but spelled without the "vav," the name of the academy can also be read "Amen." This academy was recently taken under the wing of the veteran Bezalel School, returning Bezalel to one of its original functions of providing a profession for its graduates.[38] Rivka Vardi, the director of the school, mentions that it offers professional training as well as teaching art as a vehicle for self-expression without, for instance, depicting the human figure—in other words, within the permitted borders of *haredi* life.[39]

Besides personal expression—what can Jewish art do today? Below is just a sample of different artistic directions taken by artists active in Israel today.[40] As it turns out, all the artists interviewed and discussed are women. This does not mean that there are not Jewish men laboring in the vineyard of Jewish creation.[41] I rather see it a sign of the flowering of the role of Jewish women in both Jewish learning and art.

Jewish Art—Visual Midrash

The artist Chana Cromer of Jerusalem uses textiles in her works to create a visual midrash on Biblical texts. Since 1996, she has been working on a series entitled, "I Dreamed a Dream: textile works and sketches on the Joseph Story." For Esau's "Best Garments" (Gen. 27:14) (2004), Cromer took the fabric out to a field so it could absorb natural plant colorings and odors, to complement the verse: "The smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the Lord has blessed." (Gen. 27:26). Another work from the series that was recently displayed at the Jerusalem Biennale (see below) is "The Child is Not" (2004) (fig. 1), based on Genesis 37:29-30. An off-white garment, open at the sides like a *tallit katan*, is torn at the front in a kind of zig-zag. All

Fig. 1 Chana Cromer, The Child is Not, 2010, Hand dyed linen, 39" x 30" (100 x 75 cm), photo by Yair Medina.

of a sudden, we see and feel the implication of Joseph's disappearance at the hands of his brothers, through his brother Reuven's response, extrapolated to his father Jacob's response, and by extension to the loss of any child. The plain linen is also reminiscent of a shroud, so the piece signifies not only the mourner, but the mourned.

Art as Healing

The American-Israeli artist Judith Margolis is a prolific, multi-faceted artist who works in a myriad of media: paint, print, books, and textile. She is member of the Artist's Salon, lives in Israel, and works on multiple projects at once. For example, she is currently participating in a fascinating project entitled "Women of the Book,"[42] in which Jewish women artists choose one of the weekly Torah portions as a subject of a work. Judith, who writes and speaks eloquently about her own artistic activity, is also involved in artistic endeavors which are not directly related to Jewish issues. Just one example is an ongoing work she is doing with the poet C. S. Giscombe, in which both his black identity and her Jewish identity come up as part of their dialogue, but are by no means the focus of the project. Margolis calls her work "art in a Jewish context," which she explains is work done through the lens of her Judaism. Therefore, on the one hand, Margolis has created works specifically with a Jewish theme or purpose, and on the other hand, her Jewish identity could crop up in other works that are not necessarily defined in advance as having Jewish content. To illustrate this multivalence, one example of Judith's work is a beautiful Omer counter, *Countdown to Perfection: Meditations on the Sefirot*,[43] made in conjunction with the Jerusalem teacher, Sarah Yehudit Schneider. The counter, which is a book that can stand on its own as the pages are turned each day, incorporates beautiful meditative images with kabbalistic *kavanot* for each of the 49 days of counting, as well as texts by Margolis and Schneider.

On the other hand, a past and current focus has been the use of art to deal with her mother's prolonged illness, and more recently, her husband's premature death. Recently, Judith wrote about her healing experiences with her art.[44] Just one example of the Jewish lens can be seen from a work showing her mother connected to life support (fig. 2), and her father feeding her mother. On this sketch appears her mother's recipe for Passover rolls. Passover rolls are a uniquely Jewish food, and not an easy one to prepare successfully. The theme of food is here commented on also by including that recipe. Judith is sharing one of her mother's trademarks, something she was known for, even as she lay dying and incapacitated.

What is true about Margolis's work, and many works of art in general, is that as the context changes, meaning can change. "We change, and the art changes," as Margolis observes. So here, these works on healing can be viewed in many ways, both Jewishly as well as in the context of bringing healing to the artist and her viewers.

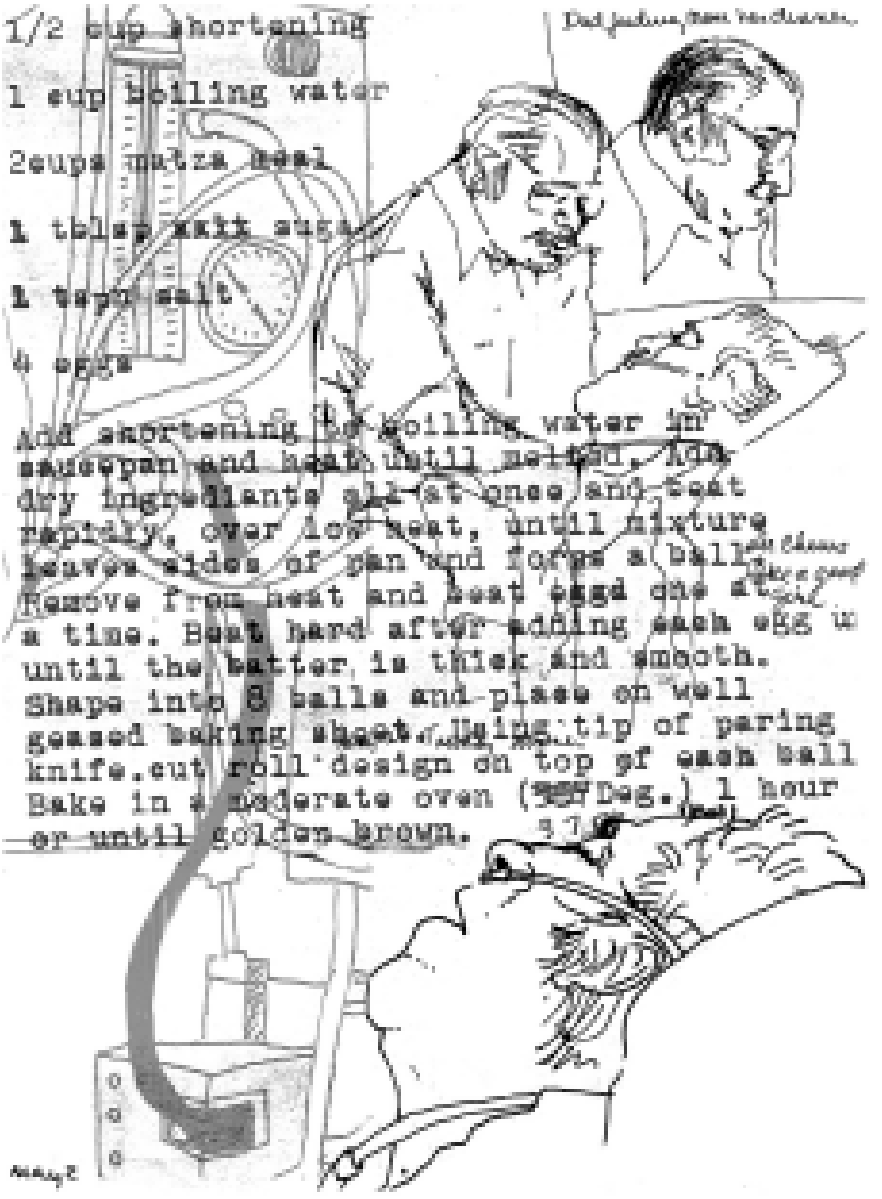

FIG. 2 JUDITH MARGOLIS, DAD FEEDING MOM, DRAWING 1985, DIGITAL MONTAGE 2000, DIGITAL GICLEÉ PRINT ON ARCHES WATERCOLOR PAPER 18" X 24" (46 X 61 CM), COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Art as Dealing with the Big Questions

Ruth Kestenbaum Ben Dov made aliya to Israel as a teenager, served in the army, and went on to study at Bezalel. Kestenbaum-Ben-Dov's art is wide-ranging—from a series on the changing landscape outside her studio, to the Warsaw Ghetto, to the political situation, and to her personal experience as a modern-Orthodox woman. Like Margolis, Kestenbaum-Ben Dov sees her art as also dealing with other themes besides Jewish ones, and is currently working on a series about the place of paintings and in art in the world.

FIG. 3 RUTH KESTENBAUM BEN-DOV, THE PAINTER AND THE HASSID, 2008, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 20" X 26" (50 X 65 CM), COURTESY OF THE ARTIST (LOST).

Several of her most powerful paintings depict uniquely Jewish experiences—for instance, dipping in the mikvah, an intimate experience, is depicted from an imaginary vantage point inside the mikvah. The artist sees this work as exploring the question of the body in Judaism, which is sanctified in a way that it is not in Catholicism, for instance. In another work, she depicts herself reciting the *Shema*, eyes covered. Herein lies another visual paradox—one can never see oneself saying *Shema*, because that is an intense

moment of concentration, but here is how one might appear to an outsider. Moving from the personal to the national, Kestenbaum Ben Dov has painted a series on the subject of creativity during the Holocaust. In this series of works, she incorporates two of the many figures who managed to remain creative during that time, the *Esh Kadosh*, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapiro of Piaseczno (1889-1943),[45] and the Czech artist Malva Schalek (1882-1944), who created art in the Terezin Ghetto. The series is entitled *The Painter and the Hasid*, and was worked on during the years 2007-2010 (fig. 3). Actual texts of the *Esh Kodesh* were found in the hidden Ringelblum archive in the remains of the Warsaw Ghetto, *Oneg Shabbat* (*Oyneg Shabes*), while some of Schalek's works were also discovered in Terezin after the war. In some of the paintings, Kestenbaum Ben-Dov has painted the *Esh Kodesh* writing, and in others she has painted him and then juxtaposed herself opposite his figure. She also paints herself alongside the artist Schalek. In both cases, the artist enters into her own dialogue with these two figures.

The Biennale

Does art in the Jewish vein deserve its own exhibit? The term "Jewish art" is sometimes associated with works which are easily understood, and often sweet and cloying—"enlisted art" of a certain kind, even kitsch. As we have seen, many serious artists today express and grapple with Jewish themes and questions in their works, and this has led to a true flowering. The above examples give just a taste of what is being done. However, in order to feel the scope and magnitude of this new artistic outpouring, a larger venue is needed. As such, a most welcome and recent development is that for the first time, Jerusalem was the site of a "Biennale" of art in dialogue with Jewish sources. The Biennale was the brain child of Ram Ozeri, originally a student at Bezalel. While certainly not of the size and scope of its famous namesake, the Venice Biennale, Jerusalem's, like Venice's, was spread over a few venues in the city, and each venue was curated separately. Each exhibit had a slightly different spin on the many aspects of contemporary Jewish art. Most of the art exhibited in the current Biennale related in some way to Jewish texts or to the Jewish experience, spiritual and historical. Many of the fifty artists represented by works came from the "religious" community, but not all.

This made for a refreshing (albeit for some, perhaps, overwhelming) blend of media and subject material. At the Hasid Brothers complex in the German Colony, there were two exhibits: "Now, Now," the other "Here and There." Both exhibits contained figurative, video, and conceptual art. The latter has come to the fore in recent years as a vehicle for expression among

religious artists, perhaps because it enables them to sidestep issues of representation, while at the same time allowing them to grapple with ideas and concepts—sometimes in a critical way, sometimes playfully.

Ruth Schreiber's video piece, "Creating Adam and Eve," was an attempt to reconcile the two creation stories in the book of Genesis by juxtaposing Jewish texts with animated clay figures as they are formed and then reshaped by the artist, whose (feminine) hand represents the "hand" of the Divine. It is interesting to note that traditionally, from the third century synagogue of Dura Europos through the arts of medieval Jewish manuscript illumination and up until the modern period, G-d's presence is often portrayed by Jewish artists as a hand. The artist's hand and its manipulation of the figures adds yet another *midrashic* layer to the texts quoted and depicted in the work, many of which are unfamiliar and even unsettling.

The same venue housed a fine example of conceptual art by Andi Arnovitz, "A Coat for Chicken Little," in which the artist conflates the American children's tale about an alarmist, worried chicken with the chicken used by many on Yom Kippur eve as a *kapparah*, an atonement to which one's sins are transferred, much as the biblical scapegoat. The intricately fashioned garment, a kind of diaphanous collar, is petalled with the artist's regrets, fears, and worries—worries that she hasn't been a good daughter or a good mother, to name two.

The "Now, Now" exhibit also included several intriguing video pieces. What happens, for instance, when a group of men transports an object bearing a strong resemblance to the Holy Ark near the Knesset (Guy Briller, "holy ark", 2010, video)?

The exhibit in Heichal Shlomo in downtown Jerusalem was entitled "My Soul Thirsts." Nurit Sirkis-Bank, curator of both the exhibit and of the Wolfson Museum of Jewish Art housed there, scoured the country to find works expressing a spiritual thirst, a yearning for the "dimension beyond"—whether in an attempt to approach the holy, to experience inner growth, or "to move beyond the here and now and the mundane"—in short, works that succeed in making the intangible tangible or visible in some way.

Many of the artists exhibited are well-known, including two already mentioned above: Chana Cromer, Belu-Simion Fainaru, Tobi Kahn, Judith Margolis, and Israel Rabinowitz; others less so. In the words of the curator, "I wanted to find works in all the media, of all kinds by all kinds of artists, religious and non-religious, teachers and students, men and women."

Sirkis-Bank succeeded in putting together textile art, painting, photography, and various other media; some works were exhibited in the entrance

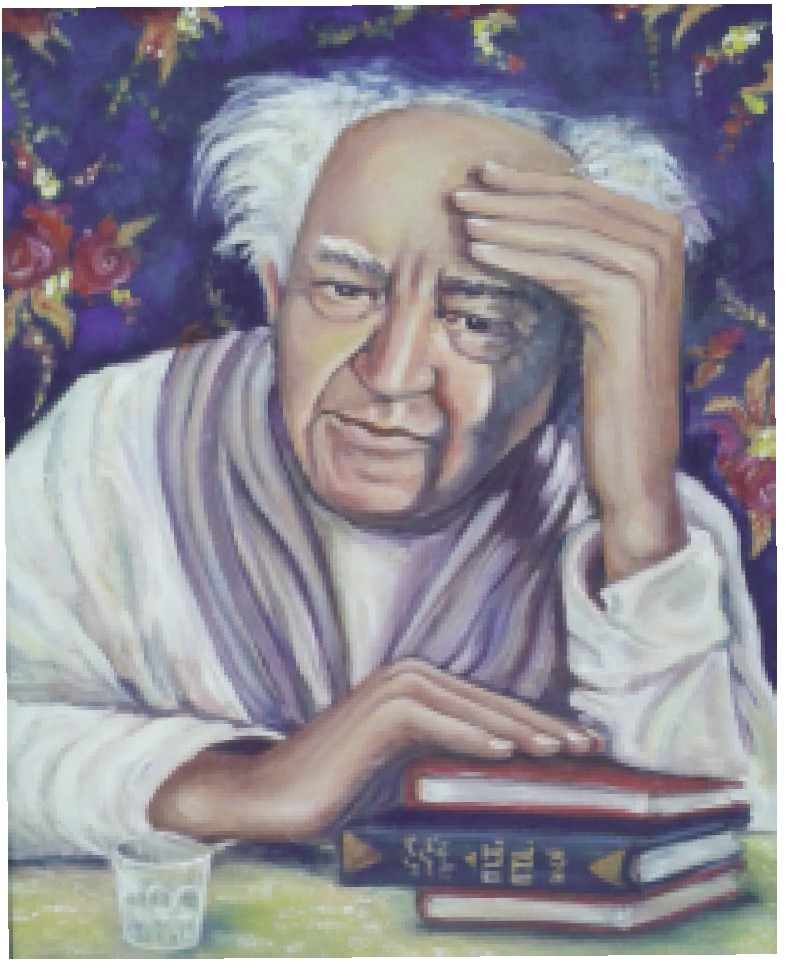

Fig. 4 Neta Elkayam, Baba Gurion, 2009-10, mixed media on panel, 31" x 28" (80 x 70 cm), photo by Susan Nashman Fraiman.

hall, others on the third floor among the Wolfson Museum's venerable collection of Jewish ritual objects.

A third venue of the Biennale was Beit Avi Chai, with the exhibit *Thread of Gold*. This exhibit—by a father, Michael Elkayam, and his daughter, Neta Elkayam—had strong unity: a father and daughter communicating through their art. While the father has consciously adopted the use of a naïve artistic language, the daughter combines a variety of media and techniques. By doing so, she built and commented on the hidden levels of her father's work.

The title *Thread of Gold* is not only a reference to the threads hanging from the ceiling, but also to the thread of their Moroccan tradition, symbolized by the beautiful gold thread sewn on the garments worn by Moroccan women or used for synagogue embroideries in those communities. Michael Elkayam sees joy and color and birds and fish even in his portrayal of Memorial Day, while Neta Elkayam takes these same symbols and uses them to comment on the difficulties of life in the development town of Netivot—the sacrifices made by the immigrants who came to Israel in the 1950s, and on other trials and traumas of Israel society, such as suicide bombings. In addition, she touches on the different status of men in Moroccan culture, as illustrated by "Self-portrait as a Bar Mitzvah Boy." She comments not only on the place of the Moroccans in Israeli society and social injustice, but also on the status of women in Moroccan Jewish society. Despite the seriousness of its subjects, the exhibit was not without humor. In the portrait of Ben-Gurion as the Baba Sali, "Baba Gurion" (fig. 4), is shown with a Hebrew-Arabic dictionary before him—a humorous and imaginative reworking of modern Jewish history.

Making Visible

From being a "nation without art," Israel has become a country with a very high per capita ratio of artists.[46] This article offers but a small sample of the rich outpouring of Jewish expression in the arts in Israel. To paraphrase the prophet Isaiah (9:20), "and their [the artists'] hands are outstretched still." The directions in which these works can go is limitless and exciting. Perhaps through these works, elucidation and commentary on text will expand visually and new understandings of tradition will emerge, and perhaps new groups of viewers will be exposed to and affected by Jewish texts and ideas in ways they never anticipated. This art will in fact be the embodiment of the words of Paul Klee: "art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible."[47]

NOTES

1. Parts of this article appeared previously as a guest blog entitled "Art-up Nation: Fringe Art on the Biennale Map," on Heddy Abramowitz's blog Golden Ochre and on *The Times of Israel* web site: http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/art-up-nation-fringe-art-on-the-biennale-map/.
2. Margaret Olin has dealt with this topic in "Nationalism, the Jews and Art History," *Judaism* 45 (1996): 461-482. See also the first two chapters of Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
3. http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFA-Archive/1998/Pages/The%20Wagner%20Controversy.aspx.
4. The mosaic floor at Beit Alpha was discovered in 1929. Michael Avi Yonah, "Bet Alfa," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), vol. 4, col. 710.
5. Dura Europos was an accidental find, made by the British in 1921, but the synagogue was only discovered in 1932. See Margaret Olin, "'Early Christian Synagogues' and 'Jewish Art Historians,' The Discovery of the Synagogue of Dura-Europos," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 27. Bd. (2000), 9.
6. A recent attempt at the same discussion was made by Richard Brilliant, "Looking in Vain For The Jewish Styleme," *Images* 3 (2009): 80-82.
7. Quoted in Joseph Gutmann, "Is there Jewish Art?," in Clare Moore, ed., *The Visual Dimension of Jewish Art* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993),13.
8. Fritz Landsberger, "The Problem of Jewish Art," in *A History of Jewish Art* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1946), 3-14; Stephen Kayser, "Defining Jewish Art," *Mordechai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1953), 457-467.
9. Gutmann, (note 7), 14-15.
10. Cecil Roth, "Introduction" Cecil Roth, ed., *Jewish Art*, revised by Bezalel Narkiss (Jerusalem: Massada Press, 1971), 19.
11. Catherine M. Soussloff, "The New Jewish Visual Studies: A Historiographical Review," *Images* 3:1 (2009): 102–118.
12. Paula Hyman, "Interpretive Contest—Art Critics and Jewish Historians," in *Text and context: essays in modern Jewish History And Historiography in Honor of Ismar Schorsch*, Eli Lederhendler, et al., ed.s, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2005), 74-94.
13. Richard I. Cohen, ed., *Visualizing and Exhibiting Jewish Space and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
14. See, e.g., Kathleen Adler, "John Singer Sargent's Portraits of the Wertheimer Family," *The Jew in the Text*, Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb, eds., (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 83-96.
15. See the recent writings of Matthew Baigell, e.g., "Spiritualism And Mysticism In Recent Jewish American Art," *Ars Judaica* 2 (2006): 135-150.
16. Ernest M. Namenyi, "Jewish Impressionists," in Roth (note 10), 207-208; on his Jewishness, see Stephanie Rachum, "Camille Pissarro's Jewish Identity," *Assaph* - B 5 (2000): 3-28.
17. (Now in English) Yigal Zalmona, *A Century of Israeli Art* (Farnham: Lund Humphries in association with the Israel Museum, Jerusalem), 2013.
18. *Ofakim Rehavim*, *120 years of Israeli Art* (Jerusalem: Keren Vienna-Jerusalem l'Omanut 2012-2013) (Hebrew); Ofrat also wrote *One Hundred Years of Art in*

Israel (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press in conjunction with the Mizel Museum of Judaica, 1998), now out of print.

19. David Moss, *"The Lovely Art of Ketubbah-making,"* in Richard Siegel, et al., *The Jewish Catalog* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1973), 195-201.
20. David Moss, *Love Songs* (Bet Alpha Editions, 2004).
21. Practitioners of these arts are too numerous to mention, but here are a few examples—calligraphy: Izzy Pludwinski and Sharon Binder; papercut: Yehudit Shadur and Archie Granot; carpentry: Noah Greenberg and Jeremy Kimchi—the list is fortunately very long.
22. Based on a commentary to Exodus 15:1-2: "'This is my G-d and I will glorify him—Adorn yourself before Him' [in the fulfillment of the precepts]; make a beautiful *sukkah* in his honor, a beautiful *lulav*, a beautiful shofar, beautiful fringes and a beautiful Scroll of the Law, and write it with fine ink, a fine reed and a skilled scribe, and wrap it about with beautiful silks." *b. Shabbat* 133b.
23. Gutmann (note 7), 14.
24. Catherine M. Soussloff, *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Catherine M. Soussloff, "The New Jewish Visual Studies: A Historiographical Review," *Images* 3:1 (2009): 102–118.
25. See http://www.tamuseum.org.il/en/about-the-exhibition/anselm-kiefer-shevirat-ha-kelim.
26. Martin Buber, "Jewish Artists," in *The First Buber Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber*, Gilya G. Schmidt, ed. and translator (Schmidt, trans.; Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 101.
27. Discussed in Gilya Gerda Schmidt, The *Art And Artists Of The Fifth Zionist Congress, 1901: Heralds Of A New Age* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003); on the use of art in these congresses, see Michael Berkowitz, "Art in Zionist popular culture and Jewish national self-consciousness, 1897-1914," in *Art and its uses; the visual image and modern Jewish society, Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 6 (1990), ed. Ezra Mendelsohn and Richard I. Cohen, 9-42.
28. Martin Buber, "Address on Jewish Art," in *The First Buber Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber*, in Schmidt, ibid., at 50.
29. Jill Storm, "From Zandvoort to Tangier : The Artistic and Religious Identities of Jozef Israëls," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 1:1 (2008): 67–88.
30. On Nossig, see, Richard Cohen, *Jewish Icons: Art and Society in Modern Europe*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 228-229.
31. There is much material on Lilien. For a monograph, see Lionel Gossman, "The Jewish Illustrator E. M. Lilien," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, LXVI, 1,(2004), 11-78.
32. For a first person account, see Arthur Ruppin, "The Picture in 1907," in *Three decades of Palestine: speeches and papers on the Upbuilding of the Jewish National Home* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1936), 11-12.
33. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Rav A.Y. Kook Selected Letters*, translated and annotated by Tzvi Feldman (Ma'aleh Adumim: Ma'aliot Publications, 1986), 191, and Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, *Igrot HaRay'a* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1962), Vol.1, letter 158, 204 (Hebrew).
34. Matthew Baigell, "We are living in a Golden Age of Jewish American Art and We Really Don't Know It," in *Jewish Cultural Aspirations; the Jewish Role in American Life*, ed. Bruce Zuckerman et al. (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2013), 25.

35. Ruth Weisberg, "Jewish Cultural Aspirations: An Introduction," ibid., *xviii*.
36. On Israeli artists see, e.g., *Holy Convocations—The Jewish Holidays and Contemporary Jewish Art* (Kiryat Ono: Bar Ilan University), 2009 (Hebrew).
37. Cf. www.raiseyourspirits.org.
38. Daniel K. Eisenbud, "Jerusalem mayor announced *haredi* branch of Bezalel campus," *The Jerusalem Post* (January 15, 2014), 4; Bezalel's first department was rug-weaving.
39. Rivka Vardi, "*The Center for Visual Arts for the Haredi Public*," Online Journal of the Ministry of Education, *Gadish*, edited by Ido Bassok, volume 14, Winter 2014, 110 (Hebrew); http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/AdultEducation/PirsumeiAgaf/ Gadish/Gdish14.htm.
40. The subject of Jewish Art and Tikkun Olam has been discussed by Matthew Baigell, "Social concern and "tikkun olam," in Jewish American art." *Ars Judaica* 8 (2012): 55-80.
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42. See http://www.womenofthebook.org/
43. http://www.judithmargolis.com/brightideabooks/personal-edition.html
44. Judith Margolis, "Creativity and Healing in a Jewish Context," in *Judaism and Health: A Handbook of Practical, Professional and Scholarly Resources* (ed.s Jeff Levin and Michele Prince; Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2013), 219-236.
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DALIA DAVIS

Beit Midrash in Motion

BEIT MIDRASH IN MOTION'S approach to Jewish learning was inspired by the phrase from the Friday night prayer, Lekhah Dodi, "*Rav Lakh Shevet*," "for too long have you been sitting." Perhaps we have been sitting while studying for too long and it is now time to arise within our batei midrashot, and move.

• • •

"*That* is precisely my dream!" exclaimed Rachel. "How were you able to discern and depict it so clearly for me?"

Rachel was in the midst of an alternative Jewish learning experience, a *Beit Midrash in Motion* workshop. This particular session was designed to invite participants to reflect deeply on their personal dreams and aspirations, hopes and fears, all through the clarifying lens of Jewish text study. Guided by the process, Rachel had experienced an epiphany about her innermost self—about her dreams that had been present all along but had never been understood or expressed.

What happened during that ninety-minute workshop?

Following a free-flowing warm up, Rachel and her fellow participants experienced a guided-meditation that challenged them to reflect upon their deepest desires without the distractions of any practical impediments. Initially, Rachel struggled. Getting in touch with herself proved vastly more challenging than she had anticipated. Rachel was subsequently asked to share her thoughts with a partner who would translate them into a series of movements to express the dream. Rachel was stumped and could barely complete the activity.

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However, as the workshop continued with movement, meditation, and text study, the pair developed a unique bond. This connection enabled Rachel's partner to perceive her dream and create a dance that resonated deeply with Rachel, bringing her to a place of raw emotion and self-awareness. Ultimately, Rachel would add her 'dream dance' to her morning routine as a reminder to recognize and pursue her dreams.

Although this experience may resemble something from a dance therapy studio, it actually occurred in a Beit Midrash, albeit an alternative Beit Midrash. There were no tables, no chairs, and little time engaged in the traditional posture of a yeshiva—sitting. *Yeshiva—place of sitting,* is a word used to connote a place of Jewish learning. Sitting with heads bowed over texts, interpreting and analyzing with our minds, are integral aspects of traditional Jewish learning. By calling our places of learning "sitting," we express a belief that the ideal way to learn is to put one's body to rest and to activate one's mind. Although this form of learning has been the mainstay of Jewish learning for centuries, it does not always achieve the goal of creating an emotional connection between the learner and the text. Alternative approaches are necessary for those who struggle to sit and focus for extended periods of time. Even those who are able to thrive in highly cerebral yeshiva environments are subject to inadvertently becoming emotionally detached from the texts they study. The challenges and thrills of *chopping* a *sugyah* (comprehending a text) may overwhelm other sentiments that ought to accompany such studies.

Beit midrash, like 'yeshiva,' connotes a place of Jewish study. However, its meaning, *house of interpretation*, leaves itself open to precisely that—interpretation. Beit Midrash in Motion is a house of interpretation that engages many of the same talmudic, midrashic, and biblical texts that one finds in a traditional yeshiva, but does so through movement and meditation alongside text study. The goal of approaching Jewish learning in this non-traditional way is to create a deeper connection with text by means of a fully embodied experience.

How does movement connect people with text? Movement allows us to muster latent feelings and ideas less prone to surfacing when our bodies are at rest. Our adrenaline flows, our heart pumps, our walls come down, and our soul opens as we express ourselves through movement. In the Aish Kodesh, which was written while in the Warsaw Ghetto, Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira discusses a similar phenomenon about the power of vocalization. He posits that the "the voice (is) more capable of arousing the soul than the intellect."[1] Beit Midrash in Motion is based on the premise that this is true not only of speech and song, but also of movement; that movement too can

arouse the soul in ways not necessarily possible by means of the intellect alone. With this goal of inviting the soul into one's learning, Beit Midrash in Motion creates movement explorations to express the specific themes of each text. These 'explorations' invite participants to create, play, express, or explore, placing them in particular situations that evoke emotions similar to those present in the text.

To illustrate, consider Rachel's discovery of a deeper personal connection with the workshop text, Sanhedrin 98a. The text features Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi inquiring hopefully, though not expectantly, of Elijah if he could ever meet the Messiah. Rabbi Yehoshua seems surprised when he is immediately granted the opportunity to fulfill his dream. Rachel was taken aback when given the opportunity to see her dream in movement. Rav Yehoshua then discovers the Messiah in a most unexpected place, among the lepers. Similarly, through study and movement, Rachel found her dream revealed in a most unexpected place—the interpretive movements of her workshop companion whom she had never met before. At the close of the workshop, Rachel remarked that she had learned this text before, but had never understood its relevance to her life. Now, however, the movement explorations and personal reflection opportunities afforded her a deeper connection with the text and a clearer understanding of herself.

In addition to Rachel's improved understanding of herself and ability to relate to the text, research indicates that Rachel's intellectual abilities were also stimulated by her movements. Current research in the field of education supports the notion that movement enhances the intellectual learning process.According to educator Eric Jensen:

> For decades, the educational and scientific communities seemed to believe that thinking was thinking and movement was movement, and each was as separate as could be. Maverick scientists envisioned links between thinking and movement. . . . [There are] strong connections between physical education, movement, breaks, recess, energizing activities, and improved cognition. It demonstrates that movement can be an effective cognitive strategy to (1) strengthen learning, (2) improve memory and retrieval, and (3) enhance learner motivation and morale.[2]

By including movement in the Torah learning process we have the opportunity to improve the quality of our information absorption and retention.

Although any type of movement can help stimulate the brain, Beit Midrash in Motion's approach to movement is quite intentional. It is not an exercise class. Rather, its movement explorations incorporate meditation and guided imagery. During these opportunities for personal reflection, par-

ticipants are invited to envision particular situations in their past, present or future lives pertinent to the text. These visions are the bases for the movement sequences they create. The sequences developed in the beit midrash are honest, thoughtful, and deeply personal interpretations of Jewish text. They are, essentially, visual commentaries on ancient texts.

Regardless of whether the movement created in such workshops becomes performance art or never leaves the beit midrash, the creative process can be a form of revelation. The movements function as a commentary on text in conversation with other traditional and alternative commentaries. As Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow writes in an article about experiential education:

> Revelation is not limited to something that might or might not have happened long ago at Sinai; it is something that is happening in the learning experience itself today. Textual learning is integrated in and is a manifestation of the relationships in our lives. In this context, all learners can access and feel ownership over Jewish Text.[3]

By allowing participants to create and interpret, they are integrated into the dynamic discussion of the text. Rachel had such a revelation during her workshop. She realized that Rabbi Yehoshua's experience need not seem foreign or antiquated. Rather, he was a teacher whose message was directly relevant to her life and from whom she could glean insight.

One final essential aspect of Beit Midrash in Motion is its communal nature. Workshops create bonds between participants who move, think, and bare their souls together. This experience can bring healing and comfort that is enhanced by the community of participants. One participant commented that she had come seeking an opportunity to learn Torah and exercise, but left with the addition of some wonderful parenting advice gleaned from other participants. Yeshivot and batei midrash are typically communal and noisy places, suffused with the din of discussion, debate, and communal study. The Beit Midrash in Motion din is one of clapping and stomping, music and breathing, bodies in motion and heartfelt discussions that build and nourish essential interpersonal bonds.

Rav lakh shevet b'emek habakhah—We sit too much. We sit for too long in the valley of tears—and the sitting does not seem to help. Perhaps if we can arise, if we could learn to move—to engage Torah with mind, body, and soul–perhaps we might achieve the *hemlah*, the merciful healing, that is mentioned in the conclusion of the sentence. *Rav Lach Shevet be'emek ha'backhah V'Hu yahamol alayikh hemlah*. For too long have you been sitting in the valley of tears, and He will mercifully bring you compassionate healing.

NOTES

1. HaGaon Rav Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, *Chovas HaTalmidim (The Students' Obligation)* (New York: Feldheim, 2010), 163-164 (found in *Ayeka* Facilitator Training resource guide).
2. Eric Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* (2nd ed.), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/104013/chapters/Movement-and-Learning.aspx.
3. Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow, "Excellence in Experiential Jewish Education," Foundation for Jewish Camp, 2, http://blog.jtsa.edu/reframe/2013/05/21/excellence-in-experiential-jewish-education/

RUTH HENDEL

What's Jewish About Fela!?

WE WERE WALKING along West 37th Street, leaving the theatre where the Off-Broadway production of *Fela!* just played its opening night performance. Rujeko Dumbutshena, a beautiful Zimbabwean dancer and *Fela*! cast member, haltingly asked me, "Why you, Ruth? Why would you be interested in producing a musical about Fela Kuti, a Nigerian?"

I was startled by the question. The only thing I could say was, "because I'm Jewish."

Looking at me, she saw a pale white woman. Why would I care about what happened to a Nigerian activist who ferociously defended his country until it killed him? All I knew was that Judaism had always informed me about who I am and what I care about most: family, community, humanity, and social justice. Fela Kuti and I have a lot in common when it comes to our priorities.

You might think that my family would be worlds away from Fela Kuti and his family. However, over the years, as my husband and I conceived and produced a musical about his life, we've gotten to know Fela's sons and daughters. We all agree that by introducing people to Fela's legacy, we can inspire them to do *tsedakah*—good deeds. With twenty-seven wives and a serious marijuana habit, Fela might not be your typical hero, but we fell in love with his music and the precepts he stood for: honesty, fortitude, compassion, and *rachmones* for his fellow countrymen. You could actually say he followed the basic principles of Judaism.

Being a producer means you have to be three things: optimistic, fierce, and *mashugana*. As can happen with powerful pieces of theatre, seeing *Fela!* often gave people a new perspective on their own beliefs, their morals, and

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the codes and principles by which they choose to live. Audience members felt inspired by what Fela tried to acheive for his country. Maybe those people will turn around and try, like Fela, to practice *tikkum olam*—to heal the world. He might not have had a *kippah* on his head, but Fela motivated people to do the kind of work our Rabbis inspire us to do.

Before opening night on Broadway (yes, the show made it to Broadway!), a Nigerian Yoruban priest blessed our show. To me, it was a Nigerian *Shehecheyanu,* with palm wine instead of Manischewitz. There's a scene where Fela is taken to the underworld by the Orishas (Yoruban deities of nature). He has a one-on-one spiritual connection with these gods, speaking with them directly. It has been suggested to us by a Jewish scholar that this mirrors how our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, communicated with G-d. I was amazed again and again by the way Fela's seemingly contrasting life story brought me closer to my own Jewish spirituality.

The types of people who made up our audience ran the gamut: Jay-Z, Beyonce, Will and Jada Smith, Denzel Washington, Sting, Kofi Annan, Janet Napolitano, Bruce Springsteen, and even the First Lady Michelle Obama; clergy members, both Jew and gentile; international tourists to New York, and young high school students, who would say to us, "if Fela can do that, I can, too." Our audience, despite their different walks of life, entered through the theatre doors together. There, they were united as one, sharing an experience that entertained and enlightened them. Even if it was produced by an unlikely team:

Two *Yiddles* from Connecticut.

L'chaim!

JAMES A. DIAMOND

The Torah as Song and the Rabbinic Sage as Troubadour

In gratitude to Eliezer (Leonard) HaKohen, the High Priest of Song

> *R. Hiya bar Abba said in the name of R. Yohanan, "In the future all the prophets are destined to sing in unison."*
>
> B. SANHEDRIN 91B

> *The prophet is human yet he employs notes one octave too high for our ears.*
>
> ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL[1]

The title track of Bob Dylan's (née Robert Zimmerman) 1965 album *Highway 61 Revisited* begins provocatively with a partial retelling of the opening lines in the binding of Isaac narrative (*akedah*) that originally appears in Genesis 22. The first stanza reads as follows:

> Oh God said to Abraham, "Kill me a son"
> Abe says, "Man, you must be puttin' me on"
> God say, "No." Abe say, "What?"
> God say, "You can do what you want Abe, but
> The next time you see me comin' you better run"
> Well Abe says, "Where do you want this killin' done?"
> God says, "Out on Highway 61"

A few years later, Leonard Cohen, another twentieth century Jewish musical icon and poet laureate of rock music in the Sixties and onward released his own version of that same biblical narrative in *The Story of Isaac*. Part of its message, similar to much of the folk and rock music of those decades, was a protest against the older generation's decisions to send their

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children to war.[2] Consider Cohen's rebuke:

> You who build these altars now, to sacrifice these children, you must not do it anymore.
> A scheme is not a vision, and you never have been tempted by a demon or a god.
> You who stand above them now, your hatchets blunt and bloody, you were not there before.
> When I lay upon a mountain and my father's hand was trembling with the beauty of the world.

The *akedah*-related themes of trial, sacrifice, martyrdom, and death (potential or actual) of the beloved son, which so critically informs and shapes subsequent Jewish, as well as Christian, theology,[3] have found their way into modern popular music. These songs cannot possibly be understood without their referent—one of the most powerful, shocking, problematic, and inspiring passages in the Hebrew Bible.[4] I return to these musical revisions of the *akeda*h further on, but the question which this paper addresses from a philosophical-theological perspective is how the secular and popular protest music and poetry of the Sixties is the logical culmination of a long biblical and rabbinic tradition regarding the centrality of music, and how that legacy consequently accounts for the Jewishness of some of contemporary popular music's greatest bards. As such, my goal is to offer a Jewish theologoumenon of music; I do not venture into the thorny halakhic issues regarding normative restrictions on music since the destruction of the second Temple.[5]

Although according to biblical chronology musical instruments were only introduced in the eighth generation of the annals of humanity (Gen. 4:21), there is of course a prior auditory dimension to existence that is a condition precedent to that innovation. There are those sounds that no one hears, the "sounds of silence," such as the primordial wind, which precedes creation per se, followed by the daily creative voice of God generating the various components of existence. Then there is the first sound heard by a human being, a divine "blessing" that ensures the independent perpetuation of human regeneration (פרו ורבו) and that transfers control of the environment (וכבשה) to humanity (1:28). These premiere instances of sound thus inaugurate the auditory future of human beings with the qualities of preservation, protection, and triumph.

That pristine sound of silence, the "divine wind"(רוח אלקים),[6] reverberates throughout all time with the protective sense of "hovering" (מרחפת) over the waters, which the Talmud analogizes to a "dove hovering over its nest."[7]

Once the idyllic social harmony of Eden is disturbed by the relational imbalance of domination and subservience and ultimately shattered by a fratricide, music enters the scene to repair and reharmonize human relations. And so, as if to compensate for the natural antagonism of brotherly professions between Cain and Abel—the rootless shepherd versus the rooted farmer—the next contrast between brothers occurs in the eighth generation, posing Yaval, the forerunner of all nomadic shepherds "dweller of tents among the herds" (אבי אהל יושב ומקנה), alongside his brother Yuval, the pioneer of musical instruments (אבי כל תפש כנור ועוגב)(Gen. 4:20-21)[8] and, according to later commentators, the inventor of music altogether.[9] With names that both assonate with the sound of their forebear *Hevel* and follow his shepherding lead, there is a literary resurrection of their murdered ancestor. Unlike that second generation, the two here do not present naturally competing occupations that encroach on each other's domain, but rather mutually beneficial ones. Yuval's product that enables musical sound can be utilized by Yaval to accompany and enhance his own interests and livelihood. Their near-identical names reflect the social harmony that music cultivates, thus retrieving the protective sense of that primordial soundless sound of the divine breath. Perhaps it is because of this dimension of music, the power of strengthening the bonds between diverse peoples, that Immanuel of Rome (c.1260—c. 1330) characterizes the science of music as a "wondrous art".[10]

It is no wonder then that when civilization deteriorates once again, societal fragmentation, alienation of disparate groups, and global disharmony find its dénouement in the aftermath of the Tower of Babel debacle of a myriad of languages where peoples are separated by babble, or insuperable barriers of incomprehensible sounds (אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת רעהו). The very word for God's *confounding* languages (11:7), *navla* (נבלה), resonating with the sound of both the names *Yuval* and *Yaval,* as well as the term for Yuval's lyre, *naval,* suggest a link between the two. Humanity became obsessed with material productivity (11:3), mining resources for stone and mortar (ותהי להם הלבנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחמר). The "same language and the same words" (שפה אחת ודברים אחדים) unique to that corrupt civilization held together a monotonous conformist world typical of the mass production line that had lost the sense of music that Yuval introduced. That single-minded obsession with the production of goods overcame the importance of aesthetic creativity signified by music that both traverses national boundaries in its appeal and preserves a space for individual expression.

Isaac Arama's musical depiction of the angels' relationship to the heavenly bodies precisely captures why this suppression of artistic individuation

in favour of materialistic conformity is so insidious. The planets and stars are the angels' musical instruments whose "sounds" in the form of their perpetual endless movements attest to "the infinite majesty and exaltedness of the Creator and the futility of absolutely emulating Him." As proof that music bears witness to sublimity, Arama cites Moses' motivation for composing the song at the Sea, *I will sing to the Lord for He is exalted* (אשירה לה' כי גאה גאה) (Exod. 15:1), meaning, "that the purpose of the song is to declare God's exaltedness above all others."[11] Absent the sensitivity of the song which points upward toward the sublime, the civilization that built the Tower revelled in their own exaltedness, which deluded them into thinking their material progress could place them in the same realm as God. The certainty and arrogance of their own unlimited creative ability, confined to building with stone and mortar, should have been tempered by what Abraham Joshua Heschel considered the sense of finitude conveyed by music, for "music is the language of mystery. But there is something greater than mystery. God is the meaning beyond all mystery."[12]

A life without mystery pointing to something beyond, a life without music, fuelled their delusions to "make for ourselves a name" rather than defer to the Other and proclaim the Name of God. Even one of the fathers of the modern study of Jewish history, Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891), drew an intrinsic connection between the Judaic notion of God and music, but in his version, music emerges from an auditory *weltanschauung* "which perceives its God in the alternatingly loud and soft sounds of the movement of the waves, in the rhythm of word sounds, the artistic drive, in harmony with this particular view of God, gave birth to music combined with religious poetry."[13] If we graft Graetz's historical insight onto Heschel's theological one, what results is a reciprocal relationship between music and the Jewish God, between mystery and history, where music directs the mind to God and God, in turn, inspires musical artistry.

As we plot the course of biblical history along a musical staff, we encounter a patriarch whose life can be particularly charted along an ebb and flow of music and whose life personifies the role of music in the religious life of the Jew. History repeats itself with a contrast between brotherly occupations—Esau "the skilled hunter, outdoorsman," and Jacob, "a mild man dweller of tents." Jacob thus is occupationally a descendant of *Yaval*, the ancestor of all "dwellers of tents," but, unlike their brotherly antecedents, there was no music to mediate their relationship, and so Jacob's and Esau's names and births portend the enmity and struggle that was to define their relationship. Consequently, that which paves the way for a brotherly kiss and

embrace, after many years of a poisoned relationship, is a name change from *Ya'aqov* the "deceiver," the one who stealthily exploits another's vulnerability or ignorance (Gen. 25:29-34; 27:18-24), the one who holds others back (25:26), who usurp another's rightful place (27:36), to *Yisra'el*, the one who advances openly by direct confrontation and struggle, and who triumphs by standing his own ground (32:29). Ya'aqov's encounter and transaction conducted with the angel is then a reversal of his first recorded exchange with Esau—a blessing previously obtained by dubious exploitation of another's physical impairment and hidden identity (Esau's fatigue and hunger; Isaac's blindness) is now acquired by sustained effort and open disclosure while he himself experiences physical disability: he wrestles alone all night (32:25); he admits his name when asked (32:28); and he strains his hip (32:26).

Yet here, too, Ya'aqov's ultimate victory over his angelic combatant is achieved, according to the midrash, by a suppression of music. Yaakov ignores the angel's plea for release to perform his designated function among the angelic retinue of singing for God. Ya'aqov persists in his insensitivity to the power of music, to that art which God Herself is portrayed as dependent on daily from His angelic consorts, and refuses to release the angel from his grip.[14] It is no coincidence then that the name Israel bears a midrashically etymological derivation from song (*shir*) and God (*el*)[15] which captures both the metaphysical bond between God and music, as well as the physical uniqueness of Israel as the national reflection of this integral bond, and signifies that a spiritual path to God can be found through music. In fact, Nahmanides goes as far as to consider the song at the end of Deuteronomy a précis of the entire Jewish historical experience in terms of its relationship with God: "Now this song, which is our true and faithful testimony, tells us clearly all that will happen to us."[16] Jewish experience and biography is a divine musical score. Thus, by renaming Jacob, the angel introduces music into his existence, an element sorely lacking until this point in his life.[17] Immediately afterward, the brothers reunite and, if only for a fleeting moment, join in a genuine mutual expression of love.[18]

Music, however, is not always appropriate, especially at a time of death and tragedy. Here too, the midrashically-constructed end to Jacob's life is instructive. Joseph's pain and self denial during the seven days of grieving for his father's demise (Gen. 50:10) so affects God that He guarantees a future transformation of that sorrow into the ultimate joy of messianic redemption and the "comfort" of Zion's ultimate reconstitution. Isaiah's prophetic vision corroborates this by assuring that God *comforted Zion, comforted all her ruins . . . gladness and joy shall abide there, thanksgiving and the sound of music* (51:3).[19]

The most prominent of midrashic collections on Genesis climaxes in its very last word of "music" (זמרה).[20] Jacob's death, a time when music stopped, signals a utopian future that is suffused with song. Even abstinence from music during periods of mourning itself portends further prospects of joy and music's reintroduction into the mourners' lives. Thus, the two extreme poles of human emotions, grief and happiness, are defined by the presence of song and music.

What Jacob had partially accomplished by the assimilation of music into his life, marked by his name change, is consummated by the national crystallization of that name in his descendants: Israel's Song at the Sea. The expression of joy over the ultimate defeat of the Egyptian slave-masters and a future of freedom and independence takes the form of spontaneous song. Ultimate reward is signalled by what the midrash considers a future tense of "sing" in the preface to the song "then Moses and the Israelites *will sing* (ישיר) this song" (Exod. 15:1). The rabbis consider this locution to be a biblical locus that substantiates the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead—that is, a song will be sung in the future.[21] In fact, if Ezekiel's resurrection of the dry bones (ch. 37) is the dress rehearsal for and concretizes the truth of resurrection, then one tradition ascribes the whole purpose of resurrection to the performance of one last song, after which the revived bodies lapse back into lifelessness.[22] Once again, just as the end of Genesis, music is the quintessential characteristic of ultimate reward, adding resurrection to messianic redemption is another instance of its occasioning.

Yet here, too, there is a vindication of the transfer of the role of spiritual music initiated by Jacob's defeat of his angelic combatant. Though the angels request divine leave to sing at the splitting of the sea, the future tense midrashically indicates Israel's pre-emption of the angels in song: "God said to them, *then Moses and the Israelites will sing* first and then you afterwards."[23] But music, in the flurry of midrashic exegesis inspired by the Song at the Sea, not only anticipates the ultimate in human perfection, it also perfects God himself, for the midrash attributes divine kingship established on earth to the power of the Song. Previously, God was merely the Creator, but the Song coronates Him as king.[24] Thus it is music that transforms the detached God of the philosophers into the providential God of the patriarchs who governs and forms relationship with Her subjects. Music therefore looks back retrospectively to the origin of all things and prospectively to the end of all things. Music is the nexus between creation and redemption and it is music that animates the Creator as the God of history as well. Without music there is no vital continuum between creation and redemption, but simply an indifferent,

and therefore directionless, sequence of events. Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) was wary of the danger of music, which is prone to creating "ideal time" at the expense of real time. These rabbinic traditions which view music as connecting all time and drawing down God's presence into time are the midrashic articulations of what Rosenzweig considers the neutralization of this danger by leading music "out of its next-worldliness into this world of time and incorporate its ideal time into the real."[25]

Just as God's presence as king is drawn into the orbit of human existence and history through music, the divine voice is heard only through the exhilarating effects of music. Sadness is a bar to prophecy, or that which constitutes the perceptual bridge between the divine and the human realms, the essential medium enabling religious life by disclosing divine will. The instrumental catalyst of prophetic inspiration is music, as exemplified by the travelling group of prophets Saul encounters prior to his installation as the first king of Israel. That group is described as being thrust into a prophetic mode to the accompaniment of "lyres, timbrels, flutes, and harps" (1 Sam. 10:5). Maimonides codifies this fundamental rule of joy through music in the cultivation of prophecy, the very highest form of engagement with the divine.[26] However he also makes it clear that music and the joy it inculcates on its own are not sufficient to trigger prophecy, but they are conditions precedent "on the way toward prophecy" after a process of "seeking" it.[27] Like Rosenzweig, and his tempering of musical ideal time to real time, Maimonides thus adds a sobering note to the unrestrained power of the aesthetic, of art, of music, and of poetry, as means that must be integrated with the whole person, intellectually and morally, in the quest for spiritual perfection. The musician poet needs the grounding of emotions, ethics, and mind in establishing a line of communication with what transcends all these single dimensions of human existence.

Considering the centrality of the imaginative faculty for prophecy in Maimonides[28] (who maintains that all prophecies occur in dreams and visions,[29] and that prophecy is often transmitted in cryptic parabolic language and images[30]), it is no wonder that an aesthetic sensibility attuned to the inventive, dreamlike, and imaginative cadences of music would be more prone to achieving prophecy.[31] Clearly, those who are "on the way toward prophecy" would count among those exceptional individuals whose music leads, according to Maimonides, "to prudence of the spirit and to nimbleness of [mental] activity to acquire intellect or submission to the divine commandments."[32] If those other facets of his being must complicate the musician in him to become an authentic prophet, then his audience must also

appreciate the prophecy beyond the music. The danger of the recipients of the prophetic message simply being seduced by the music is captured by God's assessment of Ezekiel's message to the community: "To them you are like a singer of erotic songs whose voice is melodious and who makes sweet music; they hear your words but do them they don't (33:32)."[33] His audience divorced the lyrics from the melody, transforming a sacred teaching into profane entertainment. The result is a spiritually catastrophic fracturing of what was forged at Sinai.[34] Ezekiel's adherents *hear* and *do not d*o, rupturing the resounding *hearing and doing* (*na'aseh venishma*) which underpins God's revelation to the entire community of Israel at Sinai.

Once individual revelation is understood as originating in song, the groundwork has been laid for viewing revelation on a national scale. The formal commandment that obligates Jews individually to write a Torah scroll is derived from a particular divine mandate addressed to Moses and Joshua to, in the consensus of both modern biblical scholars and classic traditional medieval exegetes, write one small segment of the Torah, the Song of Moses: "And now write you this song and teach it to the Israelites" (Deut. 31:19). The poem that is its direct referent follows in the next chapter and commences with the word *Ha'azinu,* "listen," and therefore is informed with an auditory sense. But the rabbinic rereading of the command transforms the entire Torah into an epic poem, a song. The minor poem of *Ha'azinu* mirrors the major "poem" of the Torah from Genesis to Deuteronomy in that, just as only nature heard the divine voice at Creation, the poem commences in kind with nature, the heaven and the earth, as God's audience. And just as the Torah moves from the universal story of creation to the particular story of a single people concluding with it and its leader on the cusp of establishing its own homeland, so too does the poem crescendo from its opening in creation to its climax in the people of Israel and its land: "And [God] will cleanse the land, His people" (32:43). But the Torah as song, as poetry, also captures the relationship between its devotees and its text in the classic Jewish enterprise of study and interpretation. R. Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, the Netziv (1816-1893), claimed that the poem captures the nature of the Torah much better than prose in its covert allusiveness, metaphor, symbolism, and acrostic clues that disclose meaning far beyond what he considers the simplicity and overt message of prose.[35] The profound discoveries and *hidushim* of the sage, the *talmid hakham,* are then artistic explications of poetry; they are expressions of keen listening to the tone and rhythm of the text that turns authentic learning into musicology. The sage becomes the Torah's troubadour.

Indeed, in the kabbalistic tradition, music, concretized by the cantillation notes that melodize and punctuate the words of the Torah, ontologically precedes the vowels and alphabet of language, opening a pathway into the inner recesses of the Godhead.[36] According to the Zohar the letters are actually informed with meaning by the musical intonations "whose melody is followed by the letters and vowels, undulating after them like troops behind their king. . . . All of them range in motion after the intonations and halt with them."[37] This sentiment is moderately echoed even in the rationalist school by Profiat Duran (Efodi) (c.1350–c.1415), who considered the "special melody with which we sing the phrases of this sacred Book," superior to all other nations' music "for by itself it almost provides the meaning intended by the phrases."[38] It is music that preserves the text.

Without their musical cadence, the Torah's words are lifeless and meaningless and therefore cannot invigorate those who are dedicated to living their lives by it. R. Johanan rules that the book of Ezekiel's odd divine pronouncement of "giving laws that are not good and rules by which they could not live" (20:25) applies to "anyone who reads Torah without a melody or repeats Mishnah without a tune."[39] Without music the study of both the texts of the written and oral laws is drained of any value, amounting to simply a collection of dead letter statutes which fail to perform their normal function of guiding life and behaviour. In this sense, the study in the *beit midrash* of Judaism's foundational texts are animated by the *baal qoreh's* weekly musical rendition of the parshah. Every Shabbat, the *leyning* performance jolts the listener into that preverbal transcendence that must animate the mundane engagements with the literary form of the canonical texts that consume her life and mind. The melodic phrasing accompanying the study of a talmudic *sugya* is not simply a practical aid for "increasing yearning and desire," or "strengthening the faculty of memory,"[40] for any moral or legal guidance the *sugya* might offer. Rather, it retrieves the "sweetness and joy" of the *tana* Ben Azzai's compositional midrashic weaving together of all the sections of the Hebrew Bible.[41] The flames his learning generated were decidedly not merely the result of the subject matter, of delving into the most esoteric realms of the Torah and the mysticism or metaphysics of the *ma'aseh merkabah*, but rather of the passionate intensity that imbued his ordinary rabbinic engagement with the Torah.[42]

If we return to the refrain with which we began this study and the "secular" music I myself was nurtured on outside the halls of the *shul* and the *yeshivah*, the outside and inside of those "four ells" are more blurred than clearly delineated. Dylan and Cohen, among others, emerge consciously and

subconsciously, out of a tradition in which song and Torah study, poetry and spiritual devotion, are intertwined in a sacred embrace. Their turns to Judaism's sacred texts are not sacrilegious but rather extensions of the profound role music has been shown to play within the tradition. In order to afford them their due, we need apply the Netziv's methodology of searching for meaning in the songs' allusions, which he would characterize as the *peshat* of poetry.[43]

Highway 61, the road that winds its way some 1400 miles across the USA, from the south in New Orleans to the north in Minnesota, symbolizes the spectrum of various genres of quintessential American music. Dylan anchors that route in the image of the *akedah*, which animates it with both the terror of encounters with God and the adventurous discovery of the lengthy road that traverses a wide swath of his own country disclosing the endless musical possibilities it encompasses. If the killing is to be done on that highway, then perhaps Dylan appropriates Abraham's encounter and trial as a paradigmatic symbol of breaking new ground in poetry and musical creativity. The music that deserves travelling this road needs to adopt the boldness, the moral shock, the risk taking, the offensiveness, and the suffering that must have informed Abraham's willingness to sacrifice that which he most loved. If the poet songwriter wants to play it safe and compose comfortable music, then she "better run," because for music to approach the realm of the transcendent, it requires the censure and moral outrage that novelty and pioneering in a field usually attract. The toll for the musical highway of meaningful inventiveness is sacrifice of the highest order.[44]

Cohen's treatment of Abraham, like Dylan's, is nuanced and tinged with both reverence and revulsion. Abraham's motivation in the trial and relationship with his son lies in stark contrast to those "over thirty" in Cohen's own time who fail to measure up to the tragic nobility of their biblical predecessor. The present child sacrificers are "schemers" and not driven by a "vision." Misguided or not, Abraham sets out sincerely to accomplish something much larger than himself, to pursue a vision that connotes ideals, that teaches, that leaves a sacred legacy. A scheme, on the other hand, colloquially conveys a sense of deviousness and of immoral plotting to exploit others for one's own benefit. Playing on the Midrash that Abraham's trial is prompted by Satan,[45] one can judge Abraham's test to have been invoked either negatively by a "demon" or positively by a "God," but his temptation to murder at least reflects a relationship with the Transcendent, with something beyond his own existence. The parents of Cohen's Vietnam era have no such excuse, no temptation other than their own self-interest.

Abraham's weapon in Cohen's hands is elegant, and is also reminiscent of the midrashic uniqueness of Abraham's knife signified by the rare and unusual term *ma'akhelet*. Earlier in the song, Abraham's axe is said to be "made of gold." It was neither "blunt,"[46] nor crafted to cause the most excruciating pain, nor "bloody", since at the end of the trial, Abraham in fact does not sacrifice his son. Axes used as weapons or tools are normally made of copper, bronze, iron, or steel, and so the preciousness of Abraham's axe of gold almost certainly indicates ornamental use rather than weaponry. Their willingness to sacrifice their children is no real test, for the love they feign for their children is superficial, and therefore effortlessly overcome. Their love bears no resemblance to Abraham's passionate and all consuming love for Isaac, as the midrash understands the implications of the heightened biblical multi-phrasing "your son, your only one, the one you love, Isaac." They "were not there before" and thus cannot hope to stand in Abraham's shoes. Though there is much more to be said, Cohen exquisitely blends the biblical narrative, rabbinic midrash, and his own midrashic accretions to evoke first the nightmarish terror in the murderous movement of Abraham's hand over Jacob's throat. But it also resonates paradoxically with a type of "beauty" in Abraham's gesture[47] that starkly contrasts to the cruel, crude, and barbaric drafting of Cohen's contemporary children to the foreign battlefield. Cohen's music itself annotates the "trembling" of the akedah with "beauty."

Now I understand what initiated one of the great Jewish master-disciple relationships of the twentieth century. After years of study, after extensive training in Greek and philosophy, after developing deep rabbinic expertise, and after searching for a teacher to whom he could indenture himself, R. David Cohen, known as the Nazir, was staying in the same place in Switzerland as R. Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook (1865-1935) when he heard R. Kook praying in the morning. He was so enraptured by R. Kook's musical rendition of the *akedah*, "with an exalted song and melody," that he immediately knew his quest had come to an end. He became R. Kook's devoted acolyte for the remainder of his life.[48] He captures R. Kook's melodiously overwhelming effect on his being by adopting the biblical description of Saul's own transformation as a result of joining the prophetic musical troupe mentioned earlier: "and I was turned into another man."[49] What is significant here is not simply the spirituality of the melody, but the text it accompanied. If the retelling of a horrifying narrative such as the *akedah*, imbued with what Kierkegaard called "fear and trembling," could by its chanting be spiritually transformative and inspire the kind of cathartic enlightenment Saul himself experienced, then one can be certain that the

singer, in this case R. Kook, is the one who knows how to extract beauty from every other part of the Torah. Leonard the *kohen* and his rendition of the *akedah*, follows the lead of these earlier *kohanim* in communicating its inner beauty through song.

The prophetic music of creativity and social justice, and the rabbinic euphonic interpretation of Judaism's foundational texts that preserves and perpetuates their relevance throughout history, reverberates in the Jewish exponents of contemporary music and poetry. Though we have only presented a preliminary sketch of the pervasiveness and importance of music in the Jewish tradition and omitted much, including its role in the ancient Temple, in liturgy and in the Psalms—and especially its elevation as a metaphysical crux in Hasidic theology[50]—we have certainly refuted Richard Wagner's vulgar canard that Jews and Judaism have no interest in aesthetics beyond a crass commercialism.[51] The music composed as resistance to what would later become the very demonic mass murder of Jews rendered possible by rants such as Wagner's attests to Wagner's insidious perverseness. What commercial profit ever motivated or accrued to the composers of such songs as Mordechai Gebirtig's *Es Brendt Briderlech Es Brent* [Its Burning Brothers, Its Burning!], which laments the apathy of the passive bystanders during the Shoah while "our poor *shtetl* pitifully burns"?[52]

The cruelty that evoked Gebirtig's song may never have occurred had the final tempestuous message of Job, the biblical paradigm of innocent suffering, been truly assimilated. It is the canonical text where one would least expect music to be heard. However, one of the first responses to Job's torturous search for a rationale behind his unbearable suffering from the divine voice from the tempest at the book's grand finale relates to music. Framed as a rhetorical question, Job is asked to contemplate the limits of that search: "[Where were you] when the morning stars sang together and all the divine beings shouted for joy?" (38:7).[53] Whatever else this may mean, there is the implication that the inability to appreciate the music and the song that accompanied the foundation of the universe lies at the very heart of Job's, and all human beings', confusion regarding the "why" of suffering. Job must restore the music that he agonizingly renounced from his life (Job 3:7). Perhaps what Job must consider is that suffering is partially the consequence of the absence of music, of the refusal to transcend nature and the purely material by remaining deaf to its chords of song and joy, since that music would sensitize to the needs of others. It is no coincidence then that Job is restored and made whole once he "prays on behalf of his friends" (42:10), and only ideal prayer, suffused with joy and song,[54] can successfully open the gates of heaven.

NOTES

Unless otherwise noted translations of Hebrew sources are my own.

1. Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (vol. 1; New York: Harper & Row, 1955), 10.
2. As he declares explicitly in his introduction to the song on side two of the album, *Leonard Cohen: Live Songs*, "It's about those who would sacrifice one generation on behalf of another." This sentiment assumes a particular poignancy by the place where it was recorded: Berlin.
3. The literature on the *akedah* is vast, but for one excellent study, see Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).
4. For a comprehensive list of the copious biblical allusions in Dylan's music, see Michael J. Gilmour's appendix to *Tangled up in the Bible* (New York: Continuum, 2004).
5. For a thorough overview and analysis of this topic, see Aharon Kahn, "Music in Halakhic Perspective," *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* (JJML) 9 (1986-1987): 55-72; 10 (87-88): 32-49; 11 (88-89): 65-75.
6. The Zohar (1:16a) identifies the wind (*ruah)* with sound/voice (*qol*), citing Ps. 29:3 ("*The voice of the Lord is over the waters*") as corroboration. That primordial divine sound conducts and empowers the void of *bohu*: רוח הוא קול דשארי על בהו ואתקיף ליה ואנהיג ליה בכל מה דאצטריך [Sound is the medium for shaping the world]. Daniel Matt, *The Pritzker Zohar* (vol. 1; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 120.
7. *b. Hagigah* 15a.
8. The two instruments, *kinor and ugav*, have been identified variously as reed or string instruments, but the consensus seems to be that *kinor* is a lyre and *ugav* is a reed pipe. See Bathya Bayer, "The Biblical Nebel," 1 *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Center* (1968): 89-131.
9. See Judith Cohen, "Jubal in the Middle Ages," 3 *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Center* (1974): 83-99, who demonstrates that Yuval's constructed image is as a figure who paves the way for all future musical developments by laying down the very foundations of the art of music.
10. חכמת הניגון היא חכמת נפלאה. See the text and introduction by Amnon Shiloah, "A Passage by Immanuel ha-Romi on the Science of Music," 10 *Italia* (1993): 9-18, at14. This text, according to Shiloah, evidences "the advent of a flourishing culture in Italy that save prominent place to music and its related science" (9).
11. *Akedat Yitzhaq* (vol. 1; Israel: 1973), 61a. אלה הכדורים הגדולים ככלי שיר וזמר ביד המלאכים המניעים אותם. להודות להכריז בתנועותיהם המפורסמות והתמדיות שאין סיף וקץ לגדולת רוממות הבורא אותם ית' שמו ושהרודף אחר השגת ההדמות אליו רודף אחר דבר שלא ינוח בו לעולם. ועל דרך שאמר אדון הנביאים אשירה לה' כי גאה גאה אמר כי ענין השיר הוא לומר כי גאה גאה מכל מיני הגאוה והרוממות. Arama composed a short mini-treatise titled *Nigun Olam* (*Music of the Cosmos*), which depicts the relationship between God and the world in terms of two identically tuned musical instruments that cause each other to vibrate. *Aqedat*, 113a-115b. For an analysis and a discussion of its influence on a major Hasidic master, see Chani Haran Smith, *Tuning the Soul: Music as a Spiritual Process in the Teachings of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 84-93.

Philo already notes the musical sounds of the planets as they revolve in perfect harmony but are humanly imperceptible—an idea that originates with the Greek Pythagoreans. See Louis Feldman, "Philo's Views on Music," 9 *JJML*, 46-54, at 44-45.

12. "The Vocation of the Cantor," in *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1966), 250. Heschel's writings abound with musical metaphors. For a short analysis of his use of music as an essential medium of religious experience, see Michael Heymel, "A Witness to the Existence of God: Music in the Work of Abraham Joshua Heschel," *Judaism* 49:4 (2000): 399-410.
13. Ismar Schorsch, ed., *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays* (Schorsch, trans.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1975), 68-69. See Kalman Bland's discussion of Graetz's binary distinction between Jewish hearing and pagan seeing, in *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 23-29.
14. *Bereshit Rabbah*, ed. Chaim Albeck (vol. II; Jerusalem: Shalem Books, 1996) 78:2, 918-919. See also Geoffrey Hartman's analysis of the midrash which claims that the amoraic argument regarding angelic singing is itself a musical performance: their midrashic ingenuity is their own version of singing in "competition" with the angels; Hartman, *The Third Pillar: Essays in Judaic Studies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 127.
15. *Zohar Hadash*, vol. II, *Megillat Shir HaShirim* 5b: חכמי האמת קבעו "שיר דא איהו ישראל", כוונתם לכך כי האותיות "ישראל" מכילות את שני הביטויים "שיר" ו"אל".
16. Commentary on Deut. 32:40 (Charles B. Chavel, trans.; vol. 5., 367):
והנה השירה הזאת אשר היא בנו לעד אמת ונאמן, תגיד בביאור כל המוצאות אותנו.
See also *Mekhilta deRabbi Ishmael* 116, which plots all the major turning points in Israel's history through a final utopian end that is yet to come along a continuum of song [*shirah*].
17. See the sources cited by Louis Ginzberg. *The Legends of the Jews* (vol. 5; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968), 307, n. 253, especially those explaining the name Israel as "trying to sing instead of the angels."
18. The Masoretic text has critical dots above the letters of the word "and he kissed him" in Gen. 33:4. It is as though the emotion expressed is punctuated as an exceptional occurrence. Though there is an argument about the sincerity of the kiss, one opinion sees this kiss as a momentary gesture of love in a normally hateful relationship; see *Sifrei, Beha'alotekh*a 69. Ibn Ezra asserts that, despite traditions to the contrary, the *peshat* upholds the sincerity of the kiss.
19. *Bereshit Rabbah*, 100:14, 1296.
20. For a detailed etymology of the root *zmr,* see John A. Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 40-43. Especially pertinent is his observation that forms of this root in the Hebrew Bible "appear only in contexts concerning cultic worship." (41) The future song generated by Jacob's death then elevates the mourning over it from personal grief to sorrow over the loss of some divine dimension as a result of the death of a righteous individual.
21. See *b. Sanhedrin* 91b
22. Ibid., 92b.
23. *Shemot Rabbah*, 23:8.- קדמו שרים **אלו** ישראל שעמדו על הים דכתיב אז ישיר משה, אחר **נוגנים אלו המלאכים**.

24. Shemot Rabbah, 23:1- באמת עד שלא בראת עולמך, היית אתה, משבראת אותו אתה הוא, אלא כביכול עומד אבל משעמדת בים ואמרנו שירה לפניך באז נתיישבה מלכותך וכסאך נכון הוי.
25. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (Barbara Galli, trans.; Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 382. See also Galli's commentary in *Cultural Writings of Franz Rosenzweig*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), who draws a connection between Rosenzweig's understanding of music and "redemption or the end of all suffering." (71)
26. For a comprehensive overview of joy (*simha)* in Maimonides' works, see Gerald Blidstein, "Joy in Maimonides' Ethical Thought" (Heb.), *Eshel Beer Sheva* 2 (1980): 45-163. The other locus classicus corroborating the idea that divine inspiration and prophecy are not acquired while in a state of sadness also involves music and its soothing effects in opening the channels of prophecy is 2*Kings* 15, as cited in *b. Shabbat* 30b.
27. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah* 7:4. See also *Guide of the Perplexed* (trans., S. Pines; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) (GP) II:36, 372-373, for sadness as an obstacle to prophecy and II:32 for the essential idea that prophecy arrives only after extensive "training and perfection" as well as natural disposition, and that those qualified "were always engaged in preparation" (362). The issue of prophecy in Maimonides has attracted voluminous scholarship and debate and cannot be given its full due in this paper. See, e.g., the bibliography compiled by Jacob Dienstag, "Prophecy in the Thought of the Rambam: a Bibliography," *Daat* 37 (1996): 193-238. Suffice it for the purposes of this study to state my agreement with the position that sees no essential difference between the opinion of the philosophers on the nature of prophecy and the Jewish Maimonidean one or, in other words, a thoroughgoing naturalist conception. For one cogently argued analysis in support of this, see Lawrence Kaplan, "Maimonides on the Miraculous Element in Prophecy," *HTR* 70 (1977): 233-256, who essentially collapses the distinction between what Maimonides lists as "that of the philosophers" and that of "our Law and the foundation of our doctrine."
28. GP, II:36, 369; see also II:45, 403, where he asserts that all prophets excluding Moses "hear speech only through the intermediary of an angel . . . the intermediary is the imaginative faculty."
29. Ibid., II:41, 386.
30. Ibid., II:43.
31. In this paper, I present music and its role as conceived in the post biblical rabbinic tradition. The question of the precise relationship between prophecy and poetry/music in the biblical tradition is another issue altogether. See, e.g., James Kugel's typically lucid analysis in "Poets and Prophets: An Overview," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (ed. James Kugel; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1-25.
32. See his responsum on music in *Teshuvot HaRambam,* (ed. Joshua Blau; Jerusalem: Mekizei Nirdamim, 1960), vol. 2, nos. 224, 269, 398-400; 515-516). See also Yitzhak Shilat, *Iggerot HaRambam* (Jerusalem: Maaliyot, 1987) vol.1, 425-431. Much has been written on Maimonides' attitude toward music and, again, I don't enter here into the halakhic complexities of the issue, but only intend to convey Maimonides' conceptual attitude, which is not as negative as it might seem. See Boaz Cohen, "The Responsum of Maimonides Concerning Music," in *Law and Tradition in Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1969), 167-181, and Fred Rosner's analysis

and English translation in "Moses Maimonides on Music Therapy and his Responsum on Music," *JJML* 16 (1993-1994): 1-16, and the literature cited therein. Jacob Levinger draws a suggestive inference that Maimonides might condone antinomian behavior for extraordinary individuals in their pursuit of personal perfection since halakhah generally prohibits music as injurious to the common man. See "Halakha and Individual Perfection According to Rambam" (Heb.), *Daat* 13 (1984): 61-65 at p.65.

33. Moshe Greenberg's translation, in *Ezekiel 21-37: A New Translation* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).
34. Perhaps it is this same reason that underlies the curse one rabbinic source expresses against King David's classification of Scripture as songs when he declared in Ps. 119:54, "Your statutes have been as songs to me…" (*b. Sotah* 35a). The aesthetic dimension must be in the service of the substance of the Law. In the same vein is R. Akiva's harsh denunciation of those who treat the Song of Songs as an ordinary song (*ke'min zemer*) in *Tosefta, Sanhedrin* 12:10.
35. *Ha'amek Davar* (vol. 1; Jerusalem: Yeshivat Volozhin, 2005), 2. See Isaac Hershkowitz, "The Melody of the Sages: Does God Really Have a Voice?", *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* (2011): 14:1, 120-128.
36. This kabbalistic view of the musical notations is in complete opposition to the common scholarly understanding of them as expressed for example by Israel Yeivin "This chant enhanced the beauty and solemnity of the reading, but because the purpose of the reading was to present the text clearly and intelligibly to the hearers, [emphasis added] *the chant is dependent on the text and emphasizes the logical relationship of the words*." in *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*, trans., E.J. Revell (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1980), 158. The Zohar reverses the dependency relationship- the words are dependent on the music. For a comprehensive treatment of the *ta'amei hamiqra* see Mordecai Breuer, *Ta'amei Ha-Mikra be-Khaf-Alef Sefarim u-ve-Sifrei Emet* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1989).
37. 1:15b; Matt, 114-115. כגוונא דתנועי דמנגני, ובנגונא דלהון אזלין המשכילים יזהירו כזהר הרקיע (דניאל י"ב) אבתרייהו אתוון ונקודי ומתנענען אבתרייהו כחיילין בתר מלכיהון. גופא אתוון ורוחא נקודי. כלהו נטלו במטלנייהון בתר תנועי וקיימי בקיומייהו. See Elliot Wolfson, "Biblical Accentuation in a Mystical Key: Kabbalistic Interpretations of the *Te'amim*," *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* XI (1988-89) Part 1: 1-16; Part 2, XII (1989-1990): 1-13. The thrust of the Zohar and other thirteenth and fourteenth-century kabbalistic texts he marshals demonstrates that "for the kabbalist, through the melodic chanting of the Torah, one can reach one of the highest stages within the divine process." (Part 1, 2).
38. J. Friedlander, J. Kohn, ed.s, *Ma'ase Efod*, (1865; repr. 1970), 11; see also Kalman Bland's discussion in *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual supra,* 86-91.
39. *b. Megillah* 32a- כל הקורא בלא נעימה ושונה בלא זמרה עליו הכתוב אומר וגם אני נתתי להם חוקים לא טובים.
40. See J. Friedlander, J. Kohn, ed.s, *Ma'ase Efod*, supra n. 38, at 11.
41. *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:10- שמחים ועריבים כנתינתם מסיני.
42. Indeed, Jacob Neusner constructs a theology of the Jewish encounter with God out of the metaphor of music. Since "the Torah is always sung, never merely said or read," his account is of "how those faithful to the Torah listen to the melody of the Torah." See *Judaism's Theological Voice: Melody of the Talmud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), xv.

43. "For the song is not as explicit as prose and requires glossing indicating what each poetic verse signifies and this is not considered *derush*." R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, *Ha'ameq Davar* (Vol. 1; Jerusalem: Yeshivat Volozhin, 1999), 2.
44. I follow Michael Gilmour's advice: "Bob Dylan's Bible is most often a unique rendition of Scripture because he shapes language for his own purposes, whether this means accommodating a rhyming pattern, introducing irony, or weaving images together." Gilmour, "Bob Dylan's Bible," in *The Oxford History of the Reception of the Bible*, http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/ 9780199204540.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199204540-e-25
45. *b. Sanhedrin* 89b.
46. See, e.g., the tradition that Abraham carefully inspected the knife beforehand, in *Tanhuma* 96:13.
47. As such, Cohen's appropriation of the *akedah* is another example of what Elliot Wolfson considers his "deep connection to his Jewish roots," as well as the transformation of a "traditional theological image by introducing a note of doubt that is distinctive to the modern predicament." See his extensive treatment of Cohen's engagement with kabbalistic themes in "New Jerusalem Glowing: Songs and Poems of Leonard Cohen in a Kabbalistic Key," *Kabbalah: A Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 15 (2006): 103-152, at 104.
48. *Orot HaQodesh* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1984), introduction, 18-19:
על משכבי לא שכב ליבי. גורל חיי היו על כפות המאזניים. והנה בוקר השכם ואשמע קול צעדים הנה והנה. בברכות השחר, תפילת העקידה, בשיר וניגון עליון, משמי שמי קדם, וזכור לנו אהבת הקדמונים, ואקשיב, והנה נהפכתי לאיש אחר. אחרי התפילה, מיהרתי לבשר במכתב, כי יותר מאשר פיללתי מצאתי, מצאתי לי רב.

    For an analysis of the critical role music plays in R. Kook's theology, see Dov Schwartz, "Aesthetics and the Limits of Understanding: Approaches in Twentieth Century Orthodox Thought" (Heb.), *Daat* 74:75 (2013): 403-432, at 403-414. Music is so important that "it is not just confined to one area but is the key to understanding all of existence." (404)
49. See 1Sam. 10:6.
50. See Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Theurgic Interpretation of Music in Jewish Sources from the Renaissance to Hassidism" (Heb.), *Yuval* 4 (1982): 33–63.
51. See Jacob Katz, *The Darker Side of Genius: Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986).
52. See Moshe Avital, "The Role of Song and Music During the Holocaust," JJML 31 (2011-2012): 51-60, and Josef Bor, *Terezin Requiem* (New York: Avon Books, 1978).
53. See also Ps. 148.
54. See. e.g., *b. Berakhot* 31a; *Sefer Hasidim* 18; and *Zohar* 73a.

DAVID MAHAN

Poetry and the Complexities of Remembrance: An Appeal

WHILE DOING MY DOCTORAL WORK in theology and poetry at Cambridge I attended a 'faculty seminar' that featured a conversation with a Holocaust survivor. I had been studying the poetic suite by Micheal O'Siadhail, *The Gossamer Wall: Poems in Witness to the Holocaust*, and along with it an array of other works, both fiction and non-fiction, about the Holocaust (Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, Anne Michael's *Fugitive Pieces*, Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies*, etc.). As a result, I was eager to hear this person's firsthand account of her experience. And I was curious; I wanted to *see* her, and—true confession—especially to see the 'mark' I knew she would bear. O'Siadhail writes of '*the tattooed arms*,' and here it would be in the flesh.

She was a lovely person—sharp, engaging, gentle, transparent. Her testimony and our interaction with her offered a brush with the reality of what it meant for a human being to go through . . . *that* (I found myself not wanting even to name it). And then there were the tattooed numbers, branded on the arm that extended from her sleeveless dress. I couldn't *not* look at it the entire time she spoke. I didn't think of it as a blemish or wound or hideous scar; nor did I regard it as some kind of badge of honor. But I was transfixed by it, as if I needed to have it emblazoned on my imagination in order to pay her the respect I felt her suffering warranted.

And what is even more embarrassing now—not to mention acutely ironic—is that I don't even remember that dear woman's name.

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For all of my awkwardness and fascination, that episode captures for me a central issue I encountered in my research then, and which continues to occupy my attention in my work on religion (particularly Christianity) and literature, and my inquiries into the place of the imagination and works of the imagination in theological studies. Put succinctly, why should we remember, and how? Are there things we must never forget, and if so, how do we do so in ways that honor the subject of our remembrance? How does faith inform our answers to these questions, not only our personal faith but the faith of other religious traditions?

Remembrance, of course, comprises one of the more obvious theological and scriptural resonances between Judaism and Christianity: "**Remember** this day in which you went out from Egypt"; you shall **remember** all the ways which the Lord your God has led you"; "you shall **remember** the Lord your God"; "Do this in **remembrance** of Me." God commits Himself to remember—His covenant, His promises—and commands His people to do likewise. Most of the remembrance in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures involves devotion to God. As an expression of that very commitment, I would suggest that one of the great acts of devotion to our *neighbor* may also be remembrance, and by this action may constitute one of the great prospects for ecumenical relationships between people of different faiths. But again, what forms are suitable? By this I do not mean which *media* only—literature, film, visual arts, architecture and monument, as well as ceremony and liturgies—but how do the formal elements of any act of remembrance adequately or *in*adequately do justice to those persons and events being remembered? In the case of literary acts, my own area of study, can we find speech that testifies to, bears witness to, memorializes one's own experience or that of others which somehow speaks truths about persons and events and, particularly when recalling experiences of grave suffering, does not romanticize or sentimentalize, and so 'make false' that remembrance? It is a question literary authors and critics have wrestled with for decades since the atrocities of the Holocaust, and which continues to provoke debate as other genocides have, tragically, followed.[1] If remembrance offers a way to love our neighbors, even—for some, especially—as an expression of one's love for God, then the language we use to remember is also a profoundly theological question. For 'people of the Book' who give great weight to the power of words and assign grave responsibility to the speakers of words, it seems an especially pressing theological matter.

To return to the questions raised above, the concerns noted and their theological implications have been for me matters of both spirit and song as I have undertaken to explore the topic of memory and remembrance through

the theological study of literature. Among other interests, it is a study which seeks to give an account for the formal, creative elements that combine to yield significant theological meaning. It is my own conviction that through their keen attention to words, works of the literary imagination bring an articulacy to the obligation to remember in all of its complexity, which enable us to bridge distances between ourselves and our neighbors, including and especially our suffering ones. The French philosophical theologian Paul Ricoeur concurs, stating even more forcefully,

> My deepest conviction is that poetic language alone restores to us that participation-in or belonging-to an order of things which precedes our capacity to oppose ourselves to things taken as objects opposed to a subject. Hence the function of poetic discourse is to bring about this emergence of a depth-structure of belonging-to amid the ruins of descriptive discourse.[2]

The effort to remember our neighbor the 'other,' which confronts this great challenge to address that other as subject rather than object, seeks those forms uniquely suited to effect a degree of identification with victims made manifest by what Ricoeur calls "a depth-structure of belonging-to." His confidence about the unique ability of poetic language to achieve such a level of identification-through-participation recalls what Robert Alter—referring to biblical poetry specifically—has appraised as poetry's "peculiar advantages," evident in its ability to "realize meanings" by virtue of its very form.[3]

Accordingly, in this essay I will examine two works of the imagination, two poems—"September Song" by Geoffrey Hill and "Summons" by Micheal O'Siadhail—which take up the obligation of remembrance of, and on behalf of, the other. Both poems direct this obligation to victims of the Holocaust. Both also acknowledge the grave difficulties that confront such acts of remembrance, not the least of which is the risk of presumption on the part of poets who would bear witness to the travesty of the Shoah while being neither survivors nor witnesses nor Jews themselves. There is also the risk, so familiar to Holocaust studies, that their art will fail, either by aestheticizing an atrocity or by attempting to put in words what defies speech. In both instances of potential failure, those for whom they write would remain un-remembered, or perhaps worse, *poorly* remembered, and so subject to yet further indignity. Lest the confidence I expressed about the capacity of poetry to remember well those who have suffered be construed as obvious or the effort to do so poetically straightforward, one of the remarkable qualities of these poems is not their avoidance of these hazards but their embrace of them. Of equal boldness to the writing of "poems in witness to the

Holocaust" (O'Siadhail's subtitle for *The Gossamer Wall* in which "Summons" appears) are the admissions of inadequacy in both poems to achieve what they intend. In my conclusion I will reflect on what these poems achieve and make appeal to how this instructs us in practices of remembrance as acts of love for our neighbor.

Before turning to the poems, a word about the poets. O'Siadhail, an Irish poet born after the Second World War and a Roman Catholic by confession, and Hill, a child during the war living in England and currently the Chair of Poetry at Oxford—as well as a practicing Anglican—share an earnest concern for memory and remembrance. Commenting on *The Gossamer Wall* sequence, for example, O'Siadhail writes in his essay "The Art of War," "I have attempted to trace and distil the story of the Holocaust which had stirred me deeply. . . . I thought as a poet I too should try to remember. What those who died cried out for was that at the very least their lives would be recalled: Never, never again. Pleading remembrance."[4] In a similar vein, Hill includes in his proposal of a theology of language the insistence "that the art and literature of the late twentieth century require a memorializing, a memorizing, of the dead. . . ."[5] The dedication of both poets to memory and remembrance, and their recognition of the complexities which attend such undertakings, commend these poems to our consideration as models of both effective and just speech of remembrance.

Geoffrey Hill's Poetic "Elegy"

September Song[6] © 2002

born 19.6.32—deported 24.9.42

Undesirable you may have been, untouchable
you were not. Not forgotten
or passed over at the proper time.

As estimated, you died. Things marched,
sufficient to that end.
Just so much Zyklon and leather, patented
terror, so many routine cries.

(I have made
an elegy for myself it
Is true)

September fattens on vines. Roses
flake from the wall. The smoke
of harmless fires drifts to my eyes.

This is plenty. This is more than enough.

In this poem the epigraph is an *epitaph*. It announces at the outset the brief life of a child, but telling neither the name nor the date of his or her death. We can, however, readily surmise from the word "deported" that this child's demise was imminent, and inevitable ("As estimated, you died"); though again, we do not know when or where. This 'September song' recalls a life, but recalls a life cut short, then lost beyond record. Still, the date of 24 September 1932 does record that the "patented terror" which took this life, and countless others, occurred; no matter how anonymous its victims, it happened, and the poem offers a musical re-inscription of the individual lives it had—*has*—erased. But what can this poem tell us? What facts does it know in the absence of the most basic and intimate details about this child? Only those few general facts we might assume, "Zyklon and leather," and the like. Its song of remembrance can only imagine the rest.

But the poem refuses this seemingly inexorable anonymity from the outset, addressing the child personally and from various perspectives. To those who hated and killed, "Undesirable you may have been"; but to those who loved, "untouchable you were not." By striking this contrast in the first two lines the poem assumes its own perspective and stance, and in this way its own act of inscribing a new epigraph: "Not forgotten." The enjambed line which extends and elaborates this declaration, "or passed over at the proper time," further situates the lost, anonymous child. "Passed over" invokes God's deliverance of His people, first from the plague of death rained down upon the Egyptians, then their subsequent exodus and escape from these oppressors. By also evoking the millennia-long practice of historical and liturgical remembrance and its pattern of timeless memorializing, the poem resists further the evisceration of this child's substantial identity. He or she remains *of* a people. Read one way, then, and particularly from the perspective of theistic faith, no matter how severe the suffering or extreme the atrocity, God does and will remember His people. They are not effaced from *Him*, and our own remembrance of them finds its substance in this very affirmation.

But even as they affirm, the words 'passed over,' and their reference simultaneously incite that problem so endemic to theological interpretations of the Shoah. God did not 'pass over' His people this time; and while Jews

are expected to remember God's act(s) of deliverance each year at Passover, how are they, or any theists, to account for God's own apparent act of forgetting? By inserting the phrase "passed over" the poem counteracts its own resistance by raising again the specter of the Deliverer's refusal to deliver *this time*. Here is where the rest of the line, "at the proper time," finds its complex orientation. The notion of 'proper time' bears a potent liturgical and scriptural sense in Judaism and Christianity alike; for Hill, the Anglican, 'propers' are the readings assigned for special celebrations in the liturgical calendar (each called the "Proper of the Season"). In such contexts *proper* can convey the sense of God's sovereign acts in time—in the vernacular of the Septuagint and the New Testament, of *kairos*, or special time, rather than the ordinary time of *chronos*—and with this, assurances to believers that God's good purposes and will ultimately overrule that of any human agency.

But again, as with the ambiguity of "passed over," Hill's choice of the phrase 'at the proper time' is double-edged. If it is the case, as the poem declares, that this child is 'not forgotten or passed over at the proper time,' how does such a claim jive with the theological affirmations evoked—which presumably guarantee that claim—when the eradication of an innocent child seems only to defy all sense of 'propriety'? The poem has not created these difficulties, but neither does it refuse them. In a remarkably deft economy of words it concentrates our attention on the summons to remember *by remembering* this wholly touchable "you," while subtly indicating the challenges of doing so, including for those whose religious faith is significantly constituted by practices of anamnesis.

The next stanza continues in this vein of time, though now it merely announces the fate of the child and of others, and does so in such a way as to foreclose the possibilities opened up in the first stanza. We are now in the realm of brute fact—"As estimated, you died"—with the pitch of the rhythm and phrasing matching this mood of historical inevitability and the banality of evil. "Things marched,/sufficient to that end." In this account, all personal agency now seems to have evaporated into the impersonal processes of history, the de-personalization and murder of millions achieved as the product of calculating efficiency, the "cries" announced at the end of the stanza already submerged by the line-endings that precede it: "Things marched," "to that end," "patented." The cries of victims have no voice, having been absorbed into this same "routine." (Is this Hill's own critique of views about history, that it marks the progression of 'forces'—an idea that may lead inevitably to comparable *in*humane results?) Furthermore, all sense of proportion has been flattened, the indifference of 'the efficient' reinforced by the flaccid measures

of the "sufficient" and "Just so much." The aural environment of the poetry, with its clipped rhythm and succinct, matter-of-fact phrasing, emphasizes the dimming prospects for remembrance and memorialization. All traces of the child to whom this song is dedicated have disappeared.

The third stanza then completes this spiral downward towards resignation; significantly, when the poet-persona introduces himself. This not Whitman's 'song of myself' but the poet's "elegy for myself." Rendered in parentheses, he also stands under erasure, bracketed by another kind of *dis*-proportion, between this child's experience and his effort to memorialize it. His attempted act of remembrance on behalf of the child repays only self-reflection, his song failing to find its true subject. At a pitch similar to that of the previous stanza, the mood here is one of mere fact. No revelation of Truth about the child or the travesty and 'terror' that consumed him/her, and no true restoration of the one lost can be achieved by this poet's hand, but only what "is true" about his more limited achievement.

Still, there is one possibility that opens up at this crucial point in the poem, found in the note of tragic lament in the phrase "an elegy for myself." All acts of remembrance prove inadequate to some degree, and to an even greater extent when those to be remembered have been lost to oblivion. But this is not to say that their death has no meaning or significance for us if it is understood that the tragedy which took them is *our* tragedy, if their death is also in some sense *our* death. We in no way compare their suffering to ours, but we do recognize their loss as one that implicates all humankind. The poem's parenthetical confession respects the difference, while suggesting that the poet's 'elegy for myself' fulfills the only obligation to remember that it can. It cannot restore the one lost; it cannot fully identify with the suffering that took these lost ones from us; it can, however, and must attempt to say that that life is significant and worthy of our recollection.

The penultimate stanza continues from the perspective of the poet, but shifts in mode to the lyrical. Time remains the central image, but here it is rendered in stark contrast to the more abstract 'proper time' of Stanza 1 or the mercantile 'marched,' 'sufficient, and 'routine' of Stanza 2. "September" is the season of harvest, of 'fattening' vines, of plenty. September also heralds a season of dying, but here portrayed gently: "Roses/flake from the wall." The poem conjures a scene typical of the season as well, the burning of chaff after the harvest; but these are "harmless fires"—not the fires of camp ovens—with smoke that "drifts to my eyes." The sequence of "fattens," "vines," "Roses," "flake," "harmless," and "drifts" reacts so powerfully against the "patented terror" of "Zyklon and leather" above that it threatens to dissipate, and subli-

mate, the impact of the former. Has the poem given up? Has it turned away from the child whose song it, presumably, sings, hence merely sentimentalizing rather than memorializing? The final line of the final stanza seems to reinforce that conclusion: "This is plenty. This is more than enough."

In response, it is important to recognize that this is the poet's perspective—"my eyes"—made prominent by placing the words at the end of the stanza. And what he sees is, once more, all he *can* see. The September that occurred while the child was being deported to die a horrible death in a concentration camp just hundreds of miles away is a season they *shared*, but in worlds apart. The images of autumn harvest and celebration reinforce this sense of distance, while simultaneously offering up (again, with remarkable gentleness) what they still have in common. Such experience is what the child *lost*, what was taken from him or her; but for the poet—who was born on June 18, 1932—*only one day earlier than the child*!—it is what he enjoyed. The impact of this dissonance in concord is acute. It is the poem's final act of tribute and resistance to situate the poet's own life and experience within the same space as the child's, as if the one could not be understood or conceived without the other. Hence, the poet's "elegy for myself" is both [necessarily] limited as an act of remembrance and profoundly intertwined with the 'other': figuratively, in the space of memory and imagination, and literally, in the very text of the poem.

But what, finally, are we to make of the final line, whose ambiguousness seems to strike a note, not of proximity but of ironic distance? "This is plenty. This is more than enough." The word "plenty" conveys both abundance and 'sufficiency'—a semantic echo with "sufficient" in Line 5, and possibly an equivalence with that measure: in this case of this poem's own worth. The phrase "more than enough" is also ambiguous, meaning either abundance or, colloquially, as a synonym for 'plenty,' as when one refuses a second helping at dinner. Of course, the multivalences of both statements emerge from the equally ambiguous point of reference "This." Does 'this' refer to the immediately preceding image of September harvest, to the poet's memory of it, to the atrocity of the Holocaust, to the entire poem and its own performance of memorialization? Or does the poem now, finally, announce its own resignation, its own departure from its task of remembrance, with the phrase 'more than enough' softening any presumption about the poem achieving plentitude?

We are not meant to choose between these possibilities, but to include all of them in our consideration of what this line signifies . . . and what the poem as a whole indicates. The ambiguousness of these final statements reit-

erates the ambiguity that haunts the entire act of remembrance that this poem attempts. Indeed, it returns us to the problem of anonymity in the face of the poem's expressed pledge on behalf of the child: *Not forgotten*. And we feel the tension, and are meant to. Whatever measure of sympathy or identification that this poem or any act of remembrance may achieve, our efforts are limited. But they are not for this reason to be discouraged or condemned. By admitting the same, when seen in this light, the poem *does* achieve plentitude with respect to its own maximum capacity; and to profess to achieve more would be 'more than enough': it *would* be an excess that would deprive the one remembered of his or her own due: that his/her life, and not the poem's overreach, is the true surplus, the ultimate plenitude here. So the poem does commit an act of resignation and departure, leaving off its own enterprise at the boundary between what can be said and the unsayable, with what finally can only be met with silence.

Micheal O'Siadhail's 'Summons' to Imagine the Dead

Silence and silences provide a natural segué to Micheal O'Siadhail's poem "Summons" with its "stifled cries," "gaunt silences" and "muted dead." Indeed, the poem's invocation from the outset is not a summons to speak, but to "*meditate*." Here is the text in full:

> Summons[7] © 2002
>
> *Meditate that this came about*. Imagine.
> Pyjama ghosts tramp the shadow of a chimney.
> Shorn and nameless. Desolation's mad machine
> With endless counts and selections. *Try to see!*
> For each who survived, every numbered
> Arm that tries to hold the wedding guest,
> A thousand urgent stories forever unheard;
> In each testimony a thousand more suppressed.
> A Polish horizon glows with stifled cries:
> Who'll wake us from this infinite nightmare?
> Out of the cone of Vesuvius their lives rise
> To sky-write gaunt silences in the frozen air.
> A summons to *try to look, to try to see*.
> A muted dead demand their debt of memory.

Like "September Song," "Summons" also is a fourteen line sonnet, though not in the broken, fragmented pattern that Hill employs. For both poems, the

choice of the sonnet form, as well as what they do with it, is significant. With "September Song" we barely know that we have a sonnet. Its dilapidation of the traditional pattern is so pronounced that the original is masked, conveying by that very structure the ultimate inadequacy and collapse of its enterprise to sing the memory of the lost and murdered Jewish child. "Summons," however, follows the traditional pattern of the Shakespearean sonnet in its alternating rhyme scheme, rhythm and meter (with significant variations). This is the form also most familiar to the love poem—a grave irony, as the setting of "Summons" is a Nazi concentration camp. Although O'Siadhail's poem, like Hill's, will likewise pronounce its own inadequacy, the traditional pattern and our associations with it immediately attract the risk of presumption. But, we still may ask, is this nonetheless a love poem of sorts? Is Hill's?

"Summons" is the first of a sequence of fourteen, fourteen-line sonnets titled "Figures," which stands in the middle of *The Gossamer Wall*. The 'suite' as a whole follows a chiastic structure of five sections; the first two, "Landscapes" and "Descent," depicting the events and motives that led to the destruction of the camps, and the last two, "Refusals" and "Prisoners of Hope," depicting noble acts of resistance and, finally, the prospects for hope. Like the Holocaust itself, then, where the heart of darkness and evil and much of the human devastation finds its center in the camps, so too does O'Siadhail situate his 'meditations' on those experiences in the center of his long poem. The sequence title "Figures" also announces the method by which these sonnets will proceed: the effort to recover in images what has been lost, but which we somehow must never forget.

The opening admonition of "Summons," "*Meditate that this came about*," both addresses the reader and, by italicizing the sentence, announces a general summons to all. No patent appeal merely to think about, consider, or mull over these events will suffice; they require our focused attention. And they require the use of the only faculty we and most others have to access the experiences of the camps: so the admonition continues, "Imagine." The necessity of this is obvious; the capacity to do so is not. But in this way the poem establishes its own task, which is not only to summon our attention but to enable us to *see* something we have not witnessed, and more: to fulfill an obligation towards these now distant others: not our but "*their* debt of memory" (Line 14).

"Summons" proceeds to this task with a series of carefully choreographed and powerful images, brought to even greater intensity by those prosodic elements of rhythm and rhyme typical of the sonnet form. The discipline of following that pattern, however—even with the numerous variations that this poem includes—must also generate its own resistance to the effects of orderliness and containment, which typify the effect of the traditional pattern.

Intensity without in any way suggesting capture or control of its subject, then, marks the fine line that this poem must navigate if it is to avoid the hazards of mis-remembering the dead by presuming to bring order to or grasp what ultimately eludes our comprehension and exceeds our capacity to classify.

"Summons" achieves that poise with the development of its first image: "Pyjama ghosts" who "tramp the shadow of a chimney." The image of human beings in Nazi concentration camps who resemble the dead more than the living is of course familiar—perhaps all *too* familiar. From photographs, newsreels, and films we have seen the images before, and we have reacted with horror. But therein lies the challenge, here un-refused, to bring before us the familiar in a way that subverts our own acquaintance with such scenes and awakens renewed vigilance to 'meditate' on its significance. The poem effects that transformation in these three lines by attaching the principal image to variations of rhythm and the use of other musical devices.

To return first to the image of pyjama ghosts, we notice already a departure from the familiar. These figures are without bodies, not people who *look* like specters but who *are* specters; deprived of flesh they are known only by the 'uniforms' they were forced to wear. They are, moreover, "shorn"—like sheep, not humans—and "nameless," recalling the anonymity of the child of "September Song." And yet these figures "tramp": the experience that we cannot see we hear as the visual slides to the verbal and aural. And it is that vocality which animates the figures of these anonymous specters, specifically the assonance in the repeated 'o' sounds ("gh**o**sts"-"shad**o**w"-"Sh**o**rn"-"Des**o**lation's"-"c**ou**nts"), the consonance of repeated 's' endings ("gho**sts**"-"namele**ss**"-"De**s**olation'**s**"-"endle**ss**"-"selection**s**"), and the alliteration of "**sh**adow"-"**Sh**orn"-"Desola**tion**'s"-"selec**tion**s." Together with the use of the present tense of this section's only verb, "tramp," the aural effect, working *with* the image of pyjama ghosts and *against* the inhumanity of their treatment as well as the historic distance of their demise, is to re-awaken the experience of these people, as if it is occurring *now*. The verbal-musical environment of the poem thus performs a further act of summons: summoning the dead to new life, and so resisting the relegation of these events to a distant and inaccessible past.

Furthermore, though spectral, shorn, and nameless, it is not the victims who ultimately appear impersonal here, but their perpetrators. Again recalling the pitch of Hill's poem, collectively they are "Desolation's mad machine," capable only of "endless counts and selections." That contrast deepens as the poem continues to elaborate a second dominant image, that of numbers and numbering. Of note is the expansive range of this imagery,

from the "numbered/Arm" of Lines 5–6 to the "infinite nightmare" of Line 10. The scope from the particular to the infinite designates the scale of the Holocaust as well as its significance, and demarcates one of the great challenges of remembrance: to acknowledge the staggering loss in numbers of people without losing the real person among those millions. Line 5 undertakes this work directly, beginning "For *each* who survived," recognizing the individuality of the prisoners, then confirming that fact, ironically, by the very device that was meant to further deprive them of their humanity: "*every* numbered arm." In the camps, these individuals were branded (literally) as anonymous chattel, as objects, and the horror of this dehumanizing must be acknowledged, or remembrance would ring false and naïve. But in the re-setting of that experience in this poem the murdered and those who survived begin to reacquire what had been taken from them. What we are meant to 'imagine,' to "*try to see*," is not only what happened and that it happened, but the humanity of those to *whom* it happened. As the imagery of numbers and numbering develops between the "endless counts" of 'Desolation's mad machine' and the "infinite nightmare" of the camps and their genocide (Line 10), the momentum towards this recovery of lost humanity builds, from 'each' and 'every' to the "thousand urgent stories forever unheard/In each testimony a thousand more suppressed." Again, the doubling of what, on the one hand, was taken and lost ('suppressed' and 'unheard'), and on the other hand is still meant to be esteemed—is still 'urgent' though 'forever' gone—deftly defines the prevailing conditions of remembrance. The summons to remember [well] includes the recognition of both.

The allusion of the arm "that tries to hold the wedding guest" to Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" reinforces the plea for this kind of remembrance. In Coleridge's poem, the Mariner prevents the wedding guest from attending the festivities by pleading with him to hear his "tale of woe." In one of the most dramatic and yet subtle moments in O'Siadhail's sonnet, the outstretched arm of the survivor means to arrest the attention of the *reader*! The summons to us issued by the poem is ultimately the summons of these to whom the poem bears witness.

The theme of stories and testimonies also reiterates the oral element in the kind of remembrance that the sonnet attempts to enact, and deepens the process of recovering by re-humanizing. People have stories, whether told or "forever unheard." And they have a voice of testimony, neither vague nor fictional, however many thousands were "suppressed." The use of *testimony* registers the sense of historical and legal record. Once more, the declaration of what victims were denied, and which remembrance must include, undergoes

a reversal in the poem, as that act of denial perpetrated against them is returned to them as a positive attribute in the poem's own witness.

From this imagery of numbers and numbering the third and fourth images—the "Polish horizon" (Line 9) and the volcano "Vesuvius" (Line 11), a figure in the suite for the strata of buried history—generate a paradoxical moment that ultimately suspends the reach of the poem's witness while confirming once more its ultimate aim to summon our attention. "A Polish horizon" also appears in the *volta*, or point of rhetorical shift or dramatic change in thought or emotion in a sonnet, traditionally at this point in the Shakespearean form. The change here involves a confusion of the senses—a horizon that "*glows* with stifled *cries*," "frozen air"—and the mingling of inscription with the unsayable as "lives rise/To sky-write gaunt silences." The dead are not gone, and they remain, somehow, articulate. It is as if, having reached its climax, the poem abandons any effort at coherence, but is instead overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of what happened and the "infinite nightmare" it left in its wake. The familiar shadow-casting chimney of Line 2 is itself overshadowed by the epic "cone of Vesuvius"; the one disgorging the ash of human bodies, the other releasing the lives of victims who are no longer the vacant figures of 'pyjama ghosts' but testifiers.

There is also a grammatical shift to the second person plural—"Who'll wake *us*"—and with this, the only use of the interrogative in the poem. 'Us' signals both the perspective of victims and our own identification with their plight: in this case not with their suffering *per se*, which we cannot know, but with their demand to be remembered, "their debt of memory." The reissuing of the "summons to *try to look*, *to try to see*" capitalizes on this shift. As the paradoxical imagery of the sestet conveys disorientation and incoherence, befitting our own incapacity to do what the poem itself commands, we are nonetheless summoned to discern from these figures—the victims and survivors as well as the literary images—this now receding testimony. The 'urgency' of their stories becomes our urgency not to forget. But the price of this is high. "[T]heir debt of memory" involves memories we cannot even recover, let alone repay.

As this sequence of sonnets in *The Gossamer Wall* proceeds and its subsequent sections form an ascent from the depths explored in these meditations on the experiences of the concentration camps, O'Siadhail will refine further what it means to fulfill this obligation. Ultimately, the suite arrives at the point where the demands of hope intersect vitally with acts of remembrance. But from this opening sonnet in "Figures," emphasis falls on the *obstacles* to remembrance as well as the obligation to do so. But what debt can

we fulfill, and in what way, given the intractability of the experiences that remain so obscure, a condition the poem goes to such great pains to display? What are we meant 'to see'? Or are we only meant 'to try'? That appeal is made to our imagination throughout underscores, again, the only vehicle available to us. But as we have observed, the poem's own deployment of imagery that ultimately unravels in paradoxes and so defies the promise of its own devices seems only to undermine any clear direction for our response. As with "September Song," O'Siadhail's poem feels as bereft of its aim to bear witness and remember as it is insistent upon the obligation to do so.

As is the case with Hill's poem, however, the task of remembering well those who have suffered unspeakable evil involves re-personalizing the other who remains at a distant remove from our own experience. Hill's poem achieves this by insisting that the child whose song it sings inhabits the same world as the poet-persona, refusing to relinquish that connection to the effacement perpetrated by "patented terror." While admitting the same intractability of distance into the very textures of its imagery, "Summons" likewise effects our personal engagement with the sufferers by re-awakening them to our imagination. The effort to meditate, to try to see these others and to imagine their experience, finds its capacity and its force neither through a facile recapitulation of that experience of the concentration camps nor our own determination of will ('just look harder!'), but through the re-presentation of the dead as if they still lived. As I have written elsewhere about this poem,

> The unnamed, and not their murderous un-naming, are given their song, the poet's song of remembrance. The 'living-dead' introduced at the beginning of "Summons"are now the 'dead living', memorialized in the imagination. That debt of memory abides, however, as living memory requires—here paid not as if it were an economic transaction or a form of absolution, but paid through the musical economy of poetry as a revitalizing witness to the enduring humanity of Holocaust victims.[8]

The poem's final transaction, then, is our transformation into witnesses, not of the dead but, by means of this poem's effects, of the *living*.

Final Reflections: An Appeal

In my introduction, I suggested that remembrance can be a form of loving one's neighbor, and in this respect a form of loving God when practiced within a religious framework. I then contended that forms of remembrance

involving speech are afforded 'peculiar advantages' by works of the literary imagination because of their keen attention to form, and to words and to how we use words. This quality of attentiveness seems especially relevant to "Holocaust literature" or, more broadly, a "literature of atrocity," as Lawrence Langer calls it, where the depth of human depravity and suffering and the dire complexities of the events remembered seem to defy efforts to find any suitable speech whatsoever. To be sure, appeals to silence in the face of 'unspeakable' suffering are just, and it is noteworthy that both of our poems direct our attention there. (Significantly, the final word in O'Siadhail's fourteen-sonnet sequence "Figures" *is* "silence.") Efforts to remember, to memorialize with speech bear equal gravity, as well as graver risk, as we have noted. My own effort has been to demonstrate through close reading of these two poems how poetic speech can achieve acts of remembrance that respect the complexities and intractability of remembering victims of atrocity. In the face of such a challenge, Hill and O'Siadhail prove most forceful in their ability to realize a personal encounter with the human face of suffering, and do so without sentimentality or presumption.

I would further contend from this study that the capacity to achieve this poise results from literary form and the poetic skill to realize that form's potential in ways that are not readily available to other discursive forms of remembrance. This is not to privilege literary works of the imagination as the *only* suitable means of memorialization, but to insist that, in recognizing these qualities of sensitivity and skill in speech, we at least submit our discursive practices, including the remembrance of others, to the same level of attention and attentiveness that characterizes the disciplined speech of poets such as Hill and O'Siadhail. The Catholic theologian Nicholas Lash makes a similar appeal to the Christian church when he calls for "education in attentiveness or reverence, and in alertness to the languages we use," and for serious engagement with "the unending *discipline* in learning how to speak."[9] In effect, poets and literary artists can serve as guides and tutors who provide that education, and whose works teach us to see more clearly the 'other' and the situation of others—an ability we require in earnest when their condition and their fate stand at a remove from our own field of vision, as is the case with the traumatized people memorialized in Hill's and O'Siadhail's poems. Cambridge theologian David Ford puts a fine point on my appeal when he writes, "To be just in our seeing requires a long apprenticeship, learning from those with practised (sic) eyes. . . . Artists can draw us into the complexities of this apprenticeship."[10]

We seek this sensitivity and discipline from literary artists, of course, not for the sake of brandishing the skills of able rememberers—which would reject the very lesson these poems teach us!—but for the sake of those whose life and suffering we remember. It is, indeed, another feature of the literary poise of these poets that they do not permit their poetry to overshadow its true subject, but instead reveal it.[11] And here we return once more to the command to love our neighbor. For people of religious faith this obligation finds all manner of expression. Our remembrance of others who have suffered is one way to enter into that experience with them—albeit from a distance—and to join hands with those who still suffer because of the grief and loss that abides. When we declare "never forget" and "never again," we pronounce our shared determination both to remember and to reject the atrocities of the Holocaust and other brutal acts of affliction. When we participate in acts of commemoration across religious, denominational, and ideological lines, we effect 'boundary crossings' that make concrete this resolve.

By appealing to the disciplined speech of literary artists, I in no way wish to diminish the remarkable efforts of, for example, 'remembrance days', and the care given to the forms of commemoration those ceremonies display, which often include the reading of poetry. Rather, my appeal seeks to confirm what continues to inspire these acts of neighborly love, and to offer another resource to heighten our sensitivity to the complexities explored through these poems, and in this way to enhance our capacity to remember well. My own courses at Yale in 'reading literature theologically' provide opportunities for this same kind of 'apprenticeship.'

That said, I do not contend that the contribution made by these poems, or by the wealth of other literature of memory of the same quality available for our tutelage, requires a theological framework. For all of their theological sensitivity, and in whatever ways their faith may inform their commitment to remembrance, neither Hill nor O'Siadhail would insist, nor do these poems insist, that religious faith is necessary to appreciate the impact of their art. Their "gift of speech," to quote Eliot, is for any who would read them seriously. I do contend, however, that theological reflection and religious acts of remembrance require the sensitivity manifested in these poems when remembrance is understood as an act of love for one's neighbors. They both call attention to the 'summons' to remember and refine our comprehension of what it means to remember, which we do well when we do so more fully. In the words of "September Song," '*This is plenty*.'

NOTES

1. One of the most frequently cited statements in this regard is Theodor Adorno's "*To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric*"; a statement often misquoted or misunderstood from its context, as pointed out by Brian Oard in his "Poetry After Auschwitz: What Adorno Really Said, and Where He said It" (Blog "Mindful Pleasures," Saturday, March 12, 2011, http://mindfulpleasures.blogspot.com/2011/03/poetry-after-auschwitz-what-adorno.html). Oard also cites a later, less harsh statement by the critic, from his last work *Negative Dialectics*, where Adorno writes: "*Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems*."
2. Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, Lewis Mudge, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 101. Elsewhere Ricoeur applies this insight to the Holocaust specifically. In his Shoah memorial homily "The Memory of Suffering" (1989), for example, he avers that "remembering is a *moral* duty. We owe a *debt* to the victims" (his italics); a debt paid, he adds, by the offer "to give [victims] a voice, the voice that was denied them" (*Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, David Pellauer, trans. , Mark Wallace, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 290.
3. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 205. The full sentence reads, "In manifold ways . . . poetry is a special way of imagining the world or, to put this in more cognitive terms, a special mode of thinking with its own momentum and its own peculiar advantages."
4. Micheal O'Siadhail, "The Art of War," *Insight* (September 28, 2002), 26.
5. Geoffrey Hill, "Language, Suffering, and Silence" in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 405; hereafter cited as *CCW* in the text.
6. Geoffrey Hill, *Geoffrey Hill: Selected Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Used by permission of the publisher, Yale University Press.
7. Micheal O'Siadhail, *The Gossamer Wall: Poems in Witness to the Holocaust* (Highgreen: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2002). Used by permission of the publisher, Bloodaxe Books.
8. In *Musics of Belonging: The Poetry of Micheal O'Siadhail*, ed.s Mark Caball and David Ford (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2007), 128–29.
9. Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 110, 127.
10. David Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 22.
11. As Micheal O'Siadhail has stated, "Poetry has a special way to cut through history with images"; and like all art it "can help us to remember" by adding "a different dimension to our remembrance" (a point advanced in a seminar discussion at the University of Cambridge, 23 January 2003).

JOSEPH LOWIN

Mount Moriah and the Labyrinth: Back to the Sources in A. B. Yehoshua's Mr. Mani

> *My novel,* Mr. Mani, *concludes with the confession of Abraham Mani, its protagonist. But what does Abraham want to tell his Rabbi? He recounts the story of the akedah—the binding and sacrifice of Isaac—at the true site where it was meant to be carried out, that is, on* Mt. Moriah. *In sacrificing his son [. . .], Abraham Mani returns matters to square one. From that point, he [. . .] returns all the way to his origins and the beginnings of Judaism with Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees.*
>
> — Abraham B. Yehoshua, "*Mr. Mani and the Akedah*".[1]

WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE of A. B. Yehoshua's definition of the biblical *akedah* as not only the binding of Isaac but also his sacrifice? Surely, Yehoshua knows that the Hebrew root *ayin, kof, dalet*, from which the word *akedah* derives, means only "to bind" (and not "to sacrifice"), and that in Jewish tradition, the philosophical meaning of the *akedah* lies in the "detail" that in the end Isaac was not sacrificed.

Cynthia Ozick has warned us to be skeptical of novelists' extra-textual elucidations, asserting that prefaces are nothing more than pieces of fiction and should be taken as just one more fiction in a book of fictions.[2]

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Are we not, therefore, to take A. B. Yehoshua's essay, "*Mr Mani* and the *Akedah*," as a fiction as well? In this extra-textual commentary, Yehoshua "explains" that in writing the novel's ending (which is the beginning of the Mani family saga, about which more later), he wanted to free himself and the Jewish people of the *Akedah* myth—"a powerful and terrible myth," he calls it, "morally insupportable"—and to "annul," by its fulfillment in the novel, the *Akedah* that hovers menacingly over the heads of the Jewish people.[3] The problem with this essay, however challenging its formulations and its message, is that, as it relates to Yehoshua's novel, it is also a fiction, no less a fiction than the novel itself. For, as we shall see, while the novel does allude obliquely to several biblical stories in general and to the biblical story of the binding of Isaac in particular, nowhere in the narrative of the murder of Yosef Mani on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem in 1847 is there the slightest hint that he is being sacrificed by his father Abraham, responding to a call from God. In fact, within the novel itself there are two competing versions of the murder of Yosef Mani. In the first version,[4] Yosef had gone out at night without a lantern. Stopped for this infraction by a watchman, he flees, ending up on the *Haram-el-Sharif* (Mount Moriah), where he is slaughtered not by his father but, in Avraham Mani's own words, "by our Ishmaelite cousins." In a somewhat more ambiguous second version of the story told by the father (361), the son has a lantern, which the father and his son's "murderer" take from his hand and cause him to flee. In this case, the son is chased not only by "Ishmaelites" but also by a band of Russian pilgrims celebrating Christmas Eve and the birth of their Savior. The father and his Ishmaelite companion—the murderer—seek explicitly not to kill Yosef but rather to save him from the Christian mob.[5]

Interesting as literary gossip or as a back-story to the novel, Yehoshua's extra-literary fiction-making does not detract from the exquisite artistry that pervades the literary masterpiece that is *Mr. Mani*, the novel. If anything, Yehoshua's willful "interference" in the reader's reading of his novel—his distortion of it, misrepresenting what he has written—ought perhaps be perceived as a fiction-writer's primal impulse to create fictions, inviting us to move from consideration of what "actually" happens in the novel to a much more interesting question: What is going on here?

Yehoshua's English translator, Hillel Halkin, makes an insightful comment on *Mr. Mani* that unpacks the duality of the novel: "As always in Yehoshua's work," Halkin suggests, "one must look for a second, submerged novel beneath the first one."[6]

The idea of inexactly parallel and contradicting stories is a leitmotif of the novel. One of the novel's five narrators, while telling a story to his father

in the downstairs salon of his father's estate, is sure that his sister, upstairs, is telling her version of the story to their mother. "Let there be two stories," he pronounces, "an upstairs and a downstairs. As for the truth, it can run up and down between them" (214). In another episode, having learned that the birth of Moshe Mani was the result of an illicit coupling of Avraham Mani with his daughter-in-law, we are told a contradictory version of that story. "Our defendant's father, Moshe Hayyim Mani, was conceived to his mother Tamara and his father Joseph Mani, who died before his son was born" (165). At issue here are two "facts": 1) that Joseph Mani did not merely die but was murdered; and 2) that Joseph Mani did not father Moshe but rather that Avraham was the progenitor.

What is instructive about these alternative stories is that they lead to another leitmotif in the novel, the urge by the various narrators to tell their stories, and to tell them "correctly." Thus, we find statements like "my goal is to tell you my story in the order and way it should be told" (82); or, confident reassurances that despite many loose ends "everything will fit together in the end" (169); or, assertions that, contrary to appearances, "in the end I always manage to get to the point" (216). No less instructive is the declaration that the very act of telling the story is somehow therapeutic, "a balm for my weary soul" (229).

The theme of alternative narratives is closely paralleled by another *dédoublement*, this time enlarging the artistic space by the use of mirrors. These mirrors appear most prominently in a birthing clinic founded in Jerusalem by the gynecologist Dr. Moshe Mani. As another Mani physician, Dr. Ephrayim Mani, explains to his father back in Poland after attending a Zionist Congress with his sister in Vienna, "Wherever we looked we saw reflections—ghostly apparitions—images within images" (254). And then, seeing a womb, he remarks, "this was doubled and redoubled all around us—behind us, before us, overhead and underneath—yes, even the tears that glittered in the eyes of Linka, who was enraptured by the mystery of birth, were increased exponentially" (255). What is implied by these mirrors is that it is possible to enlarge the space of a specific work and to break beyond the work of art's frame into real life.

In the novel's first Conversation, which takes place on a kibbutz in 1982, during the first Lebanon war, Hagar Shiloh tells her mother that she believes that she has stumbled into a story that is much larger than her own. Believing that she has become an integral part of the Mani story, Hagar attaches herself to Judge Gavriel Mani who, she surmises, is intent on committing suicide. Later, returned to Tel Aviv, she copulates with Efi Mani and

becomes pregnant. Despite Efi's refusal to marry her, she has the baby, Roni Mani (1983-), and brings him up on her mother's kibbutz. Judge Mani comes regularly to visit his grandson (another in an ambiguous string of "illegitimate" Manis) and a relationship between him and Hagar's mother, Ya'el, starts up. Attacked in his car by Arab terrorists on one of his frequent trips to the kibbutz, Gavriel Mani, far from being interested in committing suicide, having survived the attack, vows to be more careful, and henceforth will take safer routes from Jerusalem to the kibbutz. The story's plot, having skirted tragedy at every turn, ends almost pastorally in the comic mode with the promise that there will indeed be a future for the Mani line. Hagar's story becomes a sort of detective novel in which she endeavors to find out what the "bigger story" in which her story is imbricated consists of. "I keep trying to explain this new feeling . . . that I've never had before, which is that I'm not so alone anymore but part of a much bigger story that I don't know anything about yet because it's only beginning" (43). In another Conversation, the British-Jewish prosecutor, Ivor Horowitz, is bitten by the same bug as Hagar Shiloh. "The knowledge turns in me like a knife," he says, "that there's another story here" (195). He believes that Mani is engaged in a bit of playacting.

In the end, what Yehoshua is attempting here is to create a theatrical frame around his story in which the Manis must put on a play they are destined to perform. "Mani had finished writing his drama—had added the stage directions—had cast the lead—had even picked his audience—and was now only looking for a place to set up a theater and put on the play" (282). Not only is the play the thing, it is the eternal, DNA-coded thing. "It flashed through my mind . . . that the curtain had already risen—that before me no longer stood a doctor from Jerusalem but an actor forced to recite a script that he cannot revise—one drummed into him immemorial ages ago—which—although he was the director and the theater owner too—he was not at liberty to leave unperformed and must stage to the bitter end" (284).

It can be no coincidence that Yehoshua's five narrators tell their stories in five languages—Hebrew, German, English, Yiddish, and Ladino—and tell them at five different sites in five different time frames—at a contemporary Israeli kibbutz; on the Greek island of Crete during World War II; in Mandatory Palestine in 1918; at a Jewish country estate at the time of the Zionist Congress at the turn of the century; and in Athens, Greece, in 1848. What they have in common is the need to tell a story in his or her own way. This is also a trait they share with their novelist, the author of this version of "Judaism and the Art of the Novel."

The art of *Mr. Mani* has much to do with Yehoshua's three most obvious efforts at stylistic pyrotechnics. Like Yehoshua's previously-published novel, *Molkho* (1987, published in English as *Five Seasons*, 1989), parts of which were written contemporaneously with *Mr. Mani*, the latter novel is written in five parts and can be read quite easily—if "wrongly"—as five different novellas.[7] Like Martin Amis's 1991 Holocaust novel, *Time's Arrow*, *Mr. Mani's* chapters are presented in reverse chronological order, calling for what Arnold Band terms an "archeological reading."[8] Like a chapter of Yehoshua's 1984 novel, *A Late Divorce*, each part of the novel is presented dramatically, as a dialogue of which we hear only one speaker's voice.[9] The plot of the novel is, therefore, difficult to follow and to retain in the extreme.[10]

The plot reveals what happens in the novel. To get at an understanding of what is truly going on there, we must first ask what to make of the novel's stylistic quirk that Yehoshua calls in Hebrew *ha-kivvun ha-negdi*, the contrary direction.[11] In adopting this technique, Yehoshua flouts not only the norms of chronological story-telling but, perhaps more importantly, flies in the face of conventional morality, both Jewish and Western. Nevertheless, Yehoshua's apparent artifice is realistic in the extreme. In life, he seems to be saying, we must recognize that things do not happen idyllically.

As we have noted, Arnold Band likens the novel suggestively to an archeological dig, peeling back the layers of a civilization to get at its source. He then finds a parallel in psychoanalysis, whose process follows a similar pattern. There is also the idea latent in the novel that, by going backwards to the source of a disaster we might somehow repair it and therefore change the course of history. All three elements are indeed present in *Mr. Mani*.

If one peels back the layers, as Band suggests Yehoshua is doing, the reader will be disabused of any romantic notions of smooth transitions from one generation to the next (and to the next, and so on) and will not fail to see that national histories, no less than family sagas, are unstable, filled with surprising turns and, to say the least, with ambiguous developments.

It is more than merely curious that each of the narrators of the five parts of the novel is to be considered a misfit or even a rebel in his or her society and is also acutely aware that somehow, perhaps mysteriously, he or she is going back in time. Thus, Hagar, the young kibbutznik who uses the sperm of Efrayim Mani to insert herself in the Mani story, asks herself, "am I going back in time?" (47) and has a feeling that the *kivvun ha-negdi* is "pulling me like a magnet" (48).

Another Efrayim, the young Polish pediatrician, considers himself a "reverse Jew." His report to his father on the Basel Zionist Congress describes

Dr. Mani as one who did not look "like a man bound for a country that was our common goal, but rather like one being sent back to some starting line" (242-43). The patrician pediatrician interrupts his narrative of his trip to Basel and Jerusalem to retell to his father a Jewish legend, "a story about the dead. . . about how, at the End of Days, at the Resurrection, the Christians would rise from their graves where they were, but we Jews would crawl through the underground caverns and come out in the Land of Israel." He adds a telling commentary to his story: "which is just about what I've been doing these past few days, but in the opposite direction—from there to here" (208-09), i.e., in the *kivvun ha-negdi*, from Israel to the Diaspora.

Avraham, the incestuous primogenitor of the Mani race, also takes a trip "*à rebours*." In his Sefardi *sihah* (Conversation) with "Dona Flora" and "Rabbi Heddayah," he narrates how his son put together an extra-legal *minyan* (prayer quorum) of ten "Ishmaelites" to satisfy the father's urge to say a prayer in honor of his dead parents. And not only that, this paterfamilias in the extreme explains, "all this was . . . to enable the father to satisfy his craving to chant the *kaddish*, not only for the souls of his parents, but also for those of his grand—and great-grand—and even greater-grand-parents than that, until the first father of us all must have heard in heaven that Avraham Mani had arrived in Israel." Thus does Avraham go back in time and somehow "become"—though not in the way Yehoshua would have us believe in his essay—the Avraham of Mount Moriah.

What is interesting here is that in Yehoshua's voyage "back to the sources," he insists on juxtaposing the Jewish cultural experience with that of Western civilization. He does so by focusing on geography, specifically on the place where each civilization supposedly began. Thus, on the one hand, he takes the story back to Mount Moriah, the site of the biblical *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac, and, on the other, to the Labyrinth at Knossos on the Greek island of Crete, site of the palace of the legendary King Minos, which according to another myth is the source of Greek and, therefore, Western civilization.

What exactly is the meaning of ancient Greece in this Jewish novel? Is it to serve superficially as a sort of Western, secular, juxtaposition to the Jewish civilization that pervades the novel? The Western-Jewish polarity unquestionably exists here. It is certainly not a coincidence that the first "Conversation" of the novel takes place at "7:00 p.m. on Friday, December 31, 1982," that is, on a New Year's Eve that is also a Shabbat.

While the novel is lightly seeded with grains of allusions to Greek civilization per se, it is in the second "Conversation" that the theme of Greece gives off in abundance both its fruit and flowers. Egon Brenner, a young Nazi

soldier stationed in the recently conquered Greek island of Crete, was brought up in an upper-class German household and has studied both Latin and Greek and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Egon reports to the interlocutor of his Conversation—his mother—the story of his encounter with a "Greek" guide, one Mr. Mani. For Mr. Mani, apparently a spellbinding narrator in his own right, "Sir Arthur Evans and his English archeologists who came here at the turn of the century, and King Minos and his royal court who lived here three and a half millennia ago, . . . were all one big family" (102). In what his mother will surely see as a perversion of German identity and the German ethos, he articulates his hope that one day soon, "Germans would come to the ruins of the Labyrinth from all over the Reich to study their own history and be solaced by another ancient civilization for the sorrow and disillusionment of our own" (201-02).

For Egon, Greece, and especially Crete, is a *locus amoenus*, "a wonderful special island, between the sun and the sea" (117), a place whose significance . . . I sensed immediately" (95). Even more specifically, the ruins of Knossos to which he has been introduced on Crete are perceived by him as "an ancient civilization that stirred and enchanted my soul" (102).

In Egon's mind, Greece is nothing less than the very source of Western Civilization, "the warm, true blue womb of the German genius" (88).[12] But what Egon is doing goes far beyond looking to Greece as a source of what Germany has become. Rather, Yehoshua places in Egon's psyche the idea, if not precisely the term, of *hakivvun hanegdi* to explain why—deep down—the Germans chose to conquer Crete. "[T]o drive south, . . . to ancient Hellas, to this island of Crete, this most wonderful place that has been from the start . . . the true grace of our German soul, whose deepest desire . . . is, simply *to exit from history* [. . .], if not forward then backward." Egon's theory of Europe as the cradle of European Civilization is therefore an indictment of German history. Going backward is apparently the trace followed by *all* the narrators of the novel.

What, specifically is it that Egon Bruner finds so attractive in the ancient civilization he finds on Crete? From his "Greek" guide, Mr. Mani, he learns—and accepts as his own—the patently absurd assertion that "this particular prehistoric culture had no gods at all, which was why he was so fond of it" (108). Furthermore, as long as he is rewriting both Greek mythology and even the historical lessons learned from British archeology, Yehoshua expands the fiction to make of ancient Knossos an ancient civilization that, in contrast to Jewish civilization, he says, "knew neither guilt nor fear" (130). Egon tells his mother how, shortly after the conquest of Crete, Egon was him-

self appointed as a guide for German visitors to the new German province. "I would convince them to come along with me to Knossos for a look at its ancient Labyrinth, which I tried getting them to see not just as an ancient ruin repainted to suit the whims of a fanatical British archeologist but as a possible goal, a holy grail for all Europe, for the European of the future, who will be free of fear and guilt" (130). It would appear, therefore, that for Yehoshua, Greece is the quintessential anti-Moriah, site of the event in Jewish history that provided to the world—including a guilty Germany—the idea of "fear and trembling."

But what is the place of the Jews in this womb of civilization? After all, implies Yehoshua, since prehistoric Knossos existed "before the Jews invented themselves," they were not even part of the equation. For the anti-Semites among his characters, Egon Bruner, for example, the Jew is a possible contaminant. That is why when Efrayim Mani declares to the German, "I was Jewish, but I am not anymore. . . . I've canceled it," Egon is happy to remark, "the infection had already cured itself, so that the blue womb that we had returned to was as pure and as uncontaminated as ever" (123). Egon is doubly happy because, in his belief that the Germans in history have themselves veered away from the purity represented by Greece, he comes to believe that if the Jews can cancel themselves, so too can the Germans. But Egon, suspecting that Efrayim's cancellation of his Jewishness is nothing more than a subterfuge, goes about searching the Mani house "for something they took out at night, something that might refute his declaration." He is appeased when he learns "that there is nothing Jewish a Jew can't do without" (127).

In this, the anti-Semite is wrong.

For many years, A. B. Yehoshua has been arguing against what he perceives as a Diaspora malady; namely, that the essence of a Diaspora Jew's identity is the centrality of the Jewish textual tradition. Yehoshua is adamantly fighting against assertions by those such as George Steiner, author of an essay entitled, "Our Homeland, the Text."[13] Although he doesn't mention Steiner by name, Yehoshua repeatedly criticizes the idea that "Jewish identity can feed itself on the study of texts." He almost makes textual study the cause of the Diaspora malaise he perceives and of the alienation between American Jews and Israelis. He calls the study of "old texts" a way to escape from reality, and he asserts, "I am incensed by the increasingly dangerous and irresponsible disconnection between the glorification of the texts and the mundane matters of daily life."

And yet, Yehoshua would be the last one to deny that he himself is immersed in the Jewish textual tradition. In fact, while the novel is divided

into five "Conversations" in which we hear only the voice of one of the participants, there is definitely a sixth "Conversation" going on in the novel, and that is a conversation that Yehoshua is having with the Jewish textual tradition. As with the "silent," unreported speech of the interlocutors in the five "Conversations," which the reader is playfully being asked to elucidate, the reader is also challenged to make sense of Yehoshua's conversations with Jewish texts.

It is obviously not for nothing that biblical names are sown all over the soil of the novel, taking root there with various levels of success. The names of the Israeli mother and daughter of the first Conversation are Biblical, not "Israeli": Ya'el and Hagar, the latter, according to the author, a name "fitting for a girl born in the desert." It is instructive that although the novel is named "Mr. Mani," there are no fewer than ten Manis named in the book, nine of them with biblical names, including one Eliyahu Mani, three Yosef Manis, two Efrayim Manis, one Avraham Mani (presented as the family patriarch), and even one Moshe Mani, of whom Avraham Mani says, "I had my fill of Genesis and went on to Exodus, from which I took the name of Moses in all simplicity" (306). In the episode where Avraham Mani, against all Jewish morality, chooses to impregnate his daughter-in-law, can there be a doubt that she is named Tamara specifically to mirror the episode in Genesis where Judah impregnates his daughter-in-law, Tamar—at her initiative, to be sure, thus assuring family and tribal continuity? Interestingly, for all his use of the *Akedah* motif in the novel, Yehoshua does not name any of his characters Isaac but rather skips to the biblical hero Joseph, whom he rewrites into another Isaac. "Has my master and teacher forgotten," Avraham Mani asks the silent Rabbi Heddaya, "the only son I offered up to him, my Yosef?" (316). The reader attentive to euphony will not fail to hear an echo of God's commandment in Genesis, in which God leaves the name of Abraham's sacrifice to the end of the sequence, "your son, your only son, Isaac." There is also an uncanny resemblance of Yosef Mani to the biblical Joseph. For what other reason is he introduced into the marriage bed of Rabbi Heddayah and Dona Flora, if not to raise the specter of the biblical episode of Joseph with Potiphar's wife? The Hebrew vocabulary of this novelistic episode is surely revelatory. When Yehoshua uses the Hebrew verb "*lehit'apek*," to restrain oneself, he is recalling the biblical moment that uses the same verb to describe Joseph's inability to hold back his tears when confronting his brothers in Egypt for the first time. That expression is mixed artfully with two others taken whole from the story of the *Akedah* itself, including not only the verb "*la'akod*," to bind, but also the noun "*ma'akhelet*," the

carving knife not used on the biblical Joseph but used to slaughter Yosef Mani on Mount Moriah.

And if Yosef Mani can be the biblical Joseph and the biblical Isaac at the same time, why can Avraham Mani not also be the biblical David when he sublimates his love for Flora into a love for his mentor Rabbi Heddaya, "who commands my loyalty more than my love of woman" (309), an echo of David's declaration to Jonathan.

Arnold Band, as we have noted above, has called Avraham Mani "the most unreliable narrator in the novel." But perhaps there is a deeper meaning to Avraham Mani's mythomania, especially when it is linked to his propensity to quote—and to misquote or, more accurately, to rewrite—Jewish Scripture and Rabbinic sayings. He demonstrates that he is at home in Scripture when he utters a prayer for the restoration of his Rabbi's health by taking the biblical verse used by Moses to pray for the healing of his sister Miriam and twists it ever so slightly so that the pronoun turns from the feminine to the masculine. Referring to *Pirkei Avot* (Sayings of the Fathers), Avraham Mani does not hesitate to rewrite one of that tractate's many aphorisms. "Ben Ha Ha says," he quotes, "'according to the sorrow shall be the reward.' But I . . . make bold to say: according to the reward shall be the sorrow" (347). Even more suggestively, one might ask whether Avraham Mani is referring to the reworded Torah or to the art of the novel when he says, "It was then that I thought of the words of Ben Bag Bag, 'turn it and turn it, for all is in it and in it you shall find all'" (352). In conflating several biblical stories into one, and in calling the stories of these ten Manis "*Mr. Mani*," Yehoshua is declaring in essence that the global story of Jewish identity, however flawed, while it may wind up in Israel, passes through the several Diaspora lives of a man named Mr. Mani.

One of the aesthetic lessons embedded in *Mr. Mani* is that a novel is a complicated, labyrinthine piece of work that is easy enough to get inside and even easier to get lost in when moving around from one compartment to the next. But how is one to get out of the labyrinth that is the novel without Ariadne's complaisant thread to guide us, like Theseus, back out?

We have asked whether the *fil conducteur* of the novel is the theme of the *kivvun hanegdi*, the backward flow of time that the novel takes in its itinerary "back to the sources," or whether it is the confrontation between Hebraism and Hellenism that is depicted here in the spatial polarity of Mount Moriah and the palace of Minos at Knossos. Perhaps we should be asking whether this book embodies a metaphysical point of view that we have been overlooking.

As constant as the two themes listed above is a third commonplace that is found to a greater or lesser degree in all five conversations. All of the conversations can be viewed as "trials" of the various narrators, all of whom either have a guilty conscience or feel—since they are aware that they are *à rebours* types—that they are being accused of some criminal activity. It is certainly no coincidence that the very center of the book—the third of the five conversations—is a judicial trial, the trial of a Jewish spy in Mandate Palestine. Here, a Jewish prosecutor's special pleading averts a death sentence for the guilty Mani and therefore winds up serving not Justice but Jewish continuity. True, neither Hagar Shiloh, nor Ephraim Shapiro, nor for that matter Egon Bruner has much of a guilty conscience about his or her deviations from the norms of their respective societies. Nevertheless, all three of them feel that they are being judged by their interlocutor, a parent who plays the accusatory role of the super ego. In fact, at one point during his narration, Egon erupts at his mother by saying, "You're not Minos, the great-grandson of Zeus. . . . You can't judge me" (139).

Still, one might rightly be inclined to state that this is a novel about the necessity of judging and being judged. One who *can* be judged, who *demands* to be judged, is Avraham Mani, who, in a religious filiation, takes up a literary position alongside Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, and Camus's judge-penitent Jean-Baptiste Clamence in *The Fall*. What Avraham wants is not earthly judgment but the judgment of heaven. All throughout his panegyric with Rabbi Heddayah, Avraham Mani comes back to one theme: the necessity for judgment. "I have not come to amuse myself with your Grace," he tells his mentor, "but to ask for judgment" (355). He demands that his judgment come with all the legal trappings of traditional Judaism, asking the rabbi to convene a rabbinical court. So strong is his need to confess that he is unaware that the old Rabbi has already died in his presence when he admits that it was his own seed that was responsible for the conception of his son's son. He reminds the stricken Rabbi that "the case is not at all difficult. The defendant has already brought in a verdict of guilty and given himself the maximum sentence. He simply does not know if this will atone for the crime or if it will only compound it. Or to put it differently: "Will I have a share in the World to Come" (348)?

Avraham Mani, at the beginning of the saga, and Hagar Shiloh, at its conclusion (but certainly not its end), both know that due to their sexual misdeeds there will be future Manis in this world. Like Hagar, who sees her life as being played out in a film, Avraham Mani also expands the physical space of the story and takes it, not onto the screen, of which he has no

inkling, but into another realm. For Avraham Mani, the *locus amoenus* is not a physical place—neither Jerusalem nor Greece—but a metaphysical one. Taking us back into the world of Jewish texts, Avraham Mani wishes to go beyond the realm of the *pesak*—the verdict—that he already knows, and into the realm of the *gezar din*—the sentence. In so doing, he takes the novel into the realm of eternity—a place, need we be reminded, where all Jewish texts eventually must reside.

NOTES

1. *Judaism* 50 (Winter 2001), 61-65.
2. Cynthia Ozick, "Writers and Critics," *Commentary* 62 (September 1976), 10-12. In making this argument, Ozick gives us an insight into the mind of the prose writer as quintessential fabulist.
3. Cf. Haim Gouri's powerful poem on the same subject, *Yerushah*, in his *Shoshanat ha-ruhot* (1960), translated from the Hebrew as "Inheritance" by Stanley F. Chyet, in Gouri's *Words in My Lovesick Blood* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1996). Several verses of Gouri's poem are cited by Yehoshua in his "essay."
4. A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (1989), translated from the Hebrew by Hillel Halkin (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 318. Further references to Yehoshua's novel will be to the English translation; page numbers will be found within the text.]
5. Arnold J. Band, in a footnote to his article,"*Mr. Mani*: The Archeology of Self-Deception," *Prooftexts* 2, 3 (1992), 244, writes, rather politely, "I state that the first Yosef Mani was 'apparently' killed by one of his Arab lovers since the agency of his death is by no means unambiguous. Yehoshua himself has informed me both in written and oral communication that the father, Avraham, actually killed his own son and admits it on page 341, paragraph 3, last sentence. When one examines that sentence, however, one finds it artfully obscure. The narrator, Avraham, is, to say the least, beside himself here, and is certainly the most unreliable narrator in the novel. Yehoshua was, perhaps, unwilling to portray so heinous a deed more clearly. The overwhelming of Yosef Mani by the Arab mob is much clearer. That so crucial an act is left so opaque leaves me uncertain."
6. Hillel Halkin, "Politics and the Israeli Novel," *Commentary* (April 2004), 33.
7. Indeed, the third part of *Mr. Mani* was published as a short story, entitled "Conversation in Jerusalem." *The New Yorker* (December 30, 1991), 28-61.
8. Op. cit., 236.
9. Is it going too far to speculate that this technique was inspired by Jean Cocteau's innovative 1930 play, *La Voix humaine (The Human Voice)*?
10. An account of the plot, presented chronologically, from the "beginning," of what happens in the novel—leaving aside for the moment what is "going on" within its pages—can be found in Alan Mintz, "The Counterlives," *The New Republic* (June 29, 1992), 42-43.
11. Students of French literature, with which Yehoshua, who lived and taught in Paris for some four years in the nineteen-sixties, is conversant, will recognize in the term *ha-kivvun ha-negdi* an allusion to the title of the classic text of the French Decadent

movement in the late nineteenth century, Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours*, translated as "Against the Grain," connoting something that is both "against nature" and tends to take a "reverse tack."

12. For a study of the metaphorical use of the womb in *Mr. Mani*, see Anne Golomb Hoffman, "In the Womb of Culture: A. B. Yehoshua's *Mar Mani*," *Prooftexts* 12 (September 1992), 245-63.
13. George Steiner, *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1996*, 312; first printed in *Salmagundi* 1986. "The Meaning of Homeland" is the title of an essay Yehoshua published in *Ha'aretz Magazine*, May 13, 2006.

MARC ZVI BRETTLER

Some Personal Reflections on Literary Artistry in the Bible[1]

I AM WRITING THIS ESSAY, with some nostalgia, from Jerusalem, from the Judaica Reading Room in the National Library (*hasifriyah hale'umit*) at Hebrew University. It was here over thirty-five years ago, in August 1978, that I discovered the topic of the Bible as literature, and it has confounded me ever since.

While reading through journals that late summer, I found a reference to J. P. Fokkelman's *Narrative Art in Genesis*, which had been published in 1975.[2] It had not yet arrived at the National Library, so I trekked to East Jerusalem, to the library of the École Biblique—one of the very best biblical studies libraries in the world—to read it there. It was a jaw-dropping experience. If memory serves me properly, the École in those days was open to non-Christian readers only from 9-12 each morning, and I spent several consecutive mornings reading the book, frustrated and sad when noon arrived. I was trained in the standard historical-critical diachronic methods of biblical study, and the book opened my eyes to using synchronic methods to read the Bible, turning it into a different kind of book for me—for a while.

Fokkelman was not the first study of the Bible as literature. Aside from the very outdated and problematic 1896 *The Literary Study of the Bible* by Richard Green Moulton,[3] I had read the article of one of my teachers, Michael Fishbane, on the Jacob cycle in *The Journal of Jewish Studies* (1975),[4] and the essays of Robert Alter in *Commentary*[5]—articles that would later appear, respectively, in *Text and Texture* (1979) and *The Art of Biblical*

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Narrative (1981).[6] For a course in Psalms with Nahum Sarna, I had read sections of Meir Weiss's magisterial *Ha-Miqra' Kidmuto* (much later translated as *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation*),[7] and eventually I found my way to the 1968 Society of Biblical Literature presidential address of James Muilenberg, published in 1969 as "Form Criticism and Beyond."[8] This address claims clearly and unapologetically that the Hebrew Bible "offer[s] us literature of a very high quality"[9]—a statement that might seem banal now, but was revolutionary then.

These studies of Muilenberg, Fokkelman, Fishbane, Alter and others began the modern study—especially in the United States and Israel—of the Bible as literature. During my thirty plus year career as a professor of biblical studies, almost every sort of literary device has been catalogued, analyzed and documented. I now find this tendency distressing.

Some of these studies suggest, either explicitly or implicitly, that the Bible is the best book ever written, sometimes citing intricate patterns as proof. These patterns are frequently in the eye of the study's author only. Most biblical writers were not Shakespeare—or comparable to the author of the Gilgamesh epic, a most moving work in English, which is even more remarkable in Akkadian. Finding these esthetically wonderful literary patterns may partake in an outdated polemic that goes back to Jewish scholars in the medieval Muslim orbit, who answered the claim that the Qur'an was the finest piece of literature, and that Arabic was the finest language, with the counterclaim that the Tanakh surpassed the Qur'an, and biblical Hebrew surpassed classical Arabic.[10] This mode of thinking may even go back to Josephus, who in *Antiquities* presents the incipient Bible as being as meritorious as any Greek writing.[11]

The idea that the Tanakh is the greatest story ever told[12] is related in some people's mind to the notion of a divine Bible—can the perfect God be present in anything other than a perfectly beautiful and esthetic text? (This assumes that the Bible, and later Judaism, presume a perfect God; I will leave this issue to philosophers and historians of religion.) For some, the idea of a highly esthetic Bible is thus a corollary of *Torah min hashamayim*, divine Torah; for others I believe it is a type of surrogate for that notion. But I remain unconvinced by this perspective that downplays the human element in the development and the transmission of biblical books.[13]

To my mind, the most insightful exploration of whether or not the Bible is literature at all remains the largely forgotten debate between two fine scholars, James Kugel and Adele Berlin, that appeared in the initial volumes of the premier English-language journal of Jewish literature, *Prooftexts*, in

1981-1982.[14] Kugel, starting the debate, claims that "in some important ways, the Bible is *not* literature, and that, more precisely, 'literary analysis' is not, simply because it exists, an operation to be performed on any text that comes along."[15] He critiques, for example, one of Fokkelman's chiastic structures by observing: "True enough, his diagram is symmetrical—but is the text? And to what end?"[16] He continues by asking "And, still more relevantly, what's so great about symmetry?"[17] In much of the article, he contrasts Scripture and literature.

In her critique, Berlin notes that "[i]f we cannot read the Bible as literature, we cannot read it at all";[18] Kugel clarifies in response that he was complaining about the tendency of many literary scholars to read the Bible as "the theological book par excellence minus its theology, the Literary Bible."[19]

Both positions have merit. I agree with Kugel's critique of the excesses and subjectivity and anachronistic nature of many modern studies of the Bible as literature—a tendency that has increased in the last three decades. Berlin is correct to note that the Bible, like any literature, has certain conventions that we must understand so that it makes sense. Discerning these conventions, however, does not make the Bible an esthetic text. This point was subsequently presented clearly and decisively by John Barton in *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, where he develops the idea of understanding ancient Israelite literary competence.[20] As I would put it, the Bible is certainly literature, and uses literary rhetorical devices, but is not comprised entirely of Literature.

The "Bible as literature" movement troubles me for several reasons. Practioners of this method have claimed that they have found patterns in particular texts that can only be the work of an original author (or Author), and thus various historical-critical conclusions that suggest that different biblical books are composite, the work of several authors, are wrong. I do not see many of these patterns, and believe that they are created by the modern scholar; the patterns that do exist can sometimes be the work of an editor or a redactor, rather than an original author/Author.

Many of these literary studies are new-critical in nature, and treat the text as an artifact, disengaged from its original historical context.[21] I do not mean to *confine* the meaning of the biblical text to its original context—Judaism has not done this—but I believe that context is important, and as such I find problematic most literary readings that decontextualize biblical passages, and pay only lip-service, if that, to the Bible as an ancient Near Eastern text. (This lip service is seen in the expression "The Bible and [rather than 'in'] the Ancient Near East" which to my mind is comparable to "The

U.S. and the Modern World"—the Bible is just as much a part of the ancient Near East as the U.S. is part of the modern world.)

Others have criticized historical-critical methods of studying the Hebrew Bible, which favor looking at the Bible's prehistory, as opposed to literary study of the Bible, which studies the Bible only in its final form. The historical-critical methods are critiqued as "hypotheses" only, in contrast to the "fact" of the final text—but this point ignores that hypotheses and competing methods must be chosen and evaluated as well to read the text in its final form—no text, including the Bible, may be read without any method.[22] Furthermore, in a post Dead Sea Scrolls world, we have clear evidence for the development of biblical texts before they became stabilized. In discussing the prehistory of the Bible, the observation of the anthropologist Sir Edmund Leach, who claimed many of the methods of modern biblical scholarship are like "unscrambling the omelette,"[23] are sometimes cited approvingly. To my mind, however, the Bible is not an omelet, but more like sunny-side up eggs, with clearly distinguishable layers, comparable to the yolk and the white, and this guides my interpretation. There may be people who can convince themselves that the sunny-side up eggs that the waiter brought them erroneously really are an omelet, just as some to my mind convince themselves that complex and composite texts are really unified by some variety of "literary" devices, ignoring all the markers that suggest otherwise. Finally, as I have written elsewhere, I believe that viewing biblical texts as composite, thereby emphasizing the Bible's polyphony, is constructive for contemporary Jewish belief, and helps bring the Bible closer to rabbinic literature.[24]

Stated differently, too many people believe that the Bible must be studied either as a composite text, or as literature, typically in its final form. But is this a valid dichotomy? Is it not possible to study how components of the final text use literary-rhetorical devices to shape their messages, and how different layers within a text have different styles? And is it not equally valid to explore whether a particular structure is the result of redaction rather than composition?

A well-known biblical literary device is the inclusio, also called the inclusion or an envelope structure, where the limits of a unit are defined by an ending that returns to the beginning. Like other "literary" principles, this was also known in medieval Jewish interpretation, where it was described as *chatimah me'ein petichah*—a conclusion that is similar to a beginning. I would like to use this ancient form to "round out" my essay. I would first note that I no longer find Fokkelman to be jaw-dropping, but instead over-detailed and overly subjective; I find it distressing that so many of the Bible students sur-

rounding me in this library are working in his footsteps on dissertations that highlight the Bible as literature. I find more compelling Muilenberg's 1969 manifesto, where he notes:

> In the Scriptures, we have a literary deposit of those who were confronted by the ultimate questions of life and human destiny, of God and man, of the past out of which the historical people has come and of the future into which it is moving, a speech which seeks to be commensurate with man's ultimate concerns, a raid on the ultimate, if you will.[25]

Muilenberg claims that understanding the Bible as literature helps us better understand these "ultimate concerns," a term taken from the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich. I agree with Muilenberg, but I feel that the Bible as literature movement has sometimes forgotten this. Almost all of the Bible is highly ideological literature[26]—and much of it is theological, a subcategory of ideological. (Song of Songs may be the only exception.) As such, it is not best analyzed as *belles lettres*, as so many Bible as literature studies seem to do, and inclusios, or chiasms, or word-plays, or phonological plays should not be counted and catalogued to impress readers with the Bible's great artistry. Instead, it is crucial to remember that the Bible is literature with a purpose;[27] we should thus not merely highlight literary devices as esthetic patterns, but should see how they function to further the messages of the Bible, how they contribute to making the Bible Torah—"instruction."[28]

NOTES

1. This essay is meant to be suggestive rather than definitive. Some of the points made below may be found, with supporting documentation, in my *The Book of Judges* (London: Routledge, 2002), 9-21 ("Reading Judges as Literature").
2. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975).
3. Richard G. Moulton, *The Literary Study of the Bible* (London: Isbister, 1896).
4. Michael Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen 25:19-35:22)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26 (1975): 15-38.
5. These began with Robert Alter, "Joseph and His Brothers," *Commentary* 70 (Nov. 1980): 59-69.
6. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (rev. and upd. ed.; New York: Basic Books, 2011); Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979).
7. Meir Weiss, *Ha-Mikra' Kidmuto* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1962); Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984).

8. James Muilenberg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18.
9. Ibid., 7.
10. See Jonathan Decter, "Literatures of Medieval Sepharad," *Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times*, ed. Zion Zohar (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 80.
11. This is a major theme in the work of Louis H. Feldman on Josephus; see esp. his *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 374-442 (on Moses).
12. This is the title of a 1965 movie about the New Testament.
13. On prophecy, see e.g. Moshe Greenberg, "Jewish Conceptions of the Human Factor in Biblical Prophecy," in his *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 405-419; on the human element in the transmission of the Bible, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).
14. James Kugel, "On the Bible and Literary Criticism," *Prooftexts* 3 (1981), 217-236, with a response by Adele Berlin and a counter-response by James Kugel in "Controversy," in *Prooftexts* 2 (1982), 323-332.
15. Ibid., 219.
16. Kugel, "On the Bible," 225.
17. Ibid.
18. Adele Berlin, "Controversy: On the Bible as Literature," *Prooftexts* 2 (1982), 324.
19. James Kugel, "Controversy: James Kugel Responds" *Prooftexts* 2 (1982), 329.
20. John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996), esp. 8-19.
21. An excellent discussion and critique of new-critical readings and the Bible is in Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 140-179.
22. In addition to Barton's book in the previous note, see Edward L. Greenstein, *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation* (Brown Judaica Series 92; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).
23. *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth*, ed. Edmund Leach and D. Alan Aycock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3.
24. Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Marc Zvi Brettler, "Biblical History and Jewish Biblical Theology," *Journal of Religion* 77 (1997), 563-83.
25. Muilenberg, 18.
26. See my *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. 12-14.
27. This was properly appreciated by the (Orthodox) literary critic Harold Fisch in *Poetry With a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1990).
28. For more on Torah as instruction, see Marc Zvi Brettler, "Torah" in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

DANIEL ROSS GOODMAN

"Fear Not": 'Our Man' Robert Redford in J. C. Chandor's "All Is Lost"

THE ART OF FILM is inherently interdisciplinary. Film draws upon every artistic discipline—literature for its narrative and characterization, theatre for its acting, painting for its cinematography and mise-en-scène, and music for its score. To write about film and to truly appreciate film, one must have a basic familiarity with all of the artistic disciplines. Similarly, I have found that a religious sensibility and a basic understanding of theology are also necessary in writing about and appreciating film, for film consistently uses theological motifs—sometimes overtly, and sometimes in veiled forms—and often utilizes religious themes in its storytelling.

And just as Jewish Studies is an inherently interdisciplinary field—it utilizes methodologies from all of the humanities disciplines, in addition to an array of disciplines from other fields—a proper understanding of and appreciation for the arts is highly beneficial in the attempt to fully understand Judaism.

In the spirit of this interdisciplinary dialogue between Judaism and the arts, I present the following essay on J. C. Chandor's *All Is Lost* (2013) as a brief demonstration of the ways in which Judaism can engage with film, and as a simple illustration of the ways in which Jewish themes can adumbrate a film's underlying motifs.

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All Is Lost *(2013)*

"Fear not:" considering that this imperative is repeated an astounding seventy-five times in the Hebrew Bible, it is arguably the most significant biblical message.[1] The Hasidic sage Rabbi Nahman of Breslov famously explicated this biblical principle with his adage "the entire world is a very narrow bridge, and the main thing is not to be afraid at all." Our Man, the unnamed character played by Robert Redford in J. C. Chandor's remarkable, virtually wordless *All Is Lost*, is a filmic epitome of this maxim. "Our Man"—a name evocative of the primordial biblical "*Adam*" (lit., "Man," in Hebrew) of the Bible[2]—is on a small sailboat, dozing in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, when a stray cargo container of sneakers collides with his boat. Quickly realizing that the container has punctured his sailboat, Our Man devises a makeshift sealant for the hole. All alone on a wrecked sailboat in the middle of the Indian Ocean, Our Man improvises a host of other ersatz solutions and utilizes every ounce of his resourcefulness in his ensuing struggle to survive.

The qualities that are uncanny about Our Man are many, but perhaps the uncanniest quality of them all is his utter lack of fear. He is at times agitated, perturbed, and occasionally extremely frustrated—witness the one-word imprecation he utters during one crucial scene—but he remarkably evinces no fear whatsoever. And neither does he express any degree of self-pity.

In a 2013 film season in which the predominant theme has been survival—*Gravity*, *Captain Phillips*, and *All Is Lost* have all revolved around characters who are compelled to use every ounce of energy in order to survive in extreme circumstances—Redford's Our Man is the character tasked with perhaps the most extreme survival trial of them all. Unlike Tom Hanks in *Captain Phillips* and Sandra Bullock in *Gravity*, Redford is truly all alone: he did not embark upon his mission with other crew members, and never establishes genuine radio contact with another soul once disaster strikes his vessel.

In some respects, *All Is Lost* is in dialogue with *Gravity*—it is, intentionally or not, a companion film to *Gravity*, and these films almost beg to be viewed in tandem. The preferable order would be to view *All Is Lost* subsequent to *Gravity*. *Gravity*'s posture toward silences verges on the hypocritical: Bullock preaches a love of silence, but along with her co-star, George Clooney, she engages in a near-incessant stream of dialogue.

All Is Lost's genuine silence is a subtle rebuke to *Gravity*'s loquacity. And Redford's Our Man is a character with no known backstory, with no words, and most significantly, with no discernible fear—a stark contrast to Bullock's

fearful Ryan Stone in *Gravity*. While neither character should be harshly condemned for their particular reactions to the extreme circumstances that befall them—after all, one should not judge another person "until you have stood in his place" (Mishnah, *Avot* 2:5)—Redford's taciturn Our Man is a welcome contrast to Bullock's melodramatic Ryan Stone.

Redford's performance itself is uncanny. Redford *is* the entire film—it is literally a cast of one. And even though he does not speak but a few words during the film, his performance is anything but one-key: it is modulated and nuanced. Each movement has a purpose, each gesture an aim, and his eyes speak much more profoundly than his mouth ever could; indeed, if one carefully watches Redford's eyes, one will notice a discernable progression in Our Man over the course of the film. That Redford can communicate veritable character development with his eyes alone speaks wonders as to the type of performance he delivers.

Most viewers will come to *All Is Lost* with the knowledge that Redford's character utters perhaps one word of dialogue over the course of the entire hour-and-forty minute film, but like most viewers, I was not truly ready to experience this dialogue-free performance until it was actually occurring in front of us on the screen. *All Is Lost* differs from any other film in recent memory in that it provides us with the visuals but no words, not even via subtitles or title-cards—and is thus even *more* silent than "silent films"—and, like a novel in which we are provided with the words but not the pictures and are invited to stage the visual of the story in our heads, *All Is Lost* compels us to sit back (or, more precisely, due to the story's intensity, to lean forward) and silently script our own versions of Redford's hidden inner monologue.

Redford's Our Man also differs from Bullock's Stone in that Our Man, unlike Stone, expresses no need or desire to pray. Perhaps Our Man prays in his head; perhaps, like Stone, he is frustrated that he does not know how to pray. But he never mentions the word "God," even as an exclamation. Our Man is a hardy soul—after all, one must be supremely self-confident to venture out into the ocean all alone on a sailboat in an attempt to circumnavigate the globe—and one senses that this is not the type of man who would cry out to a higher power as do the sailors in The Book of Jonah. Our Man embodies the maxim of "the matter is dependent upon me alone."[3] He uses the raw materials God has provided him in an attempt to effectuate a miracle of his own making.

While *All Is Lost* is in dialogue with the survival films of this year like *Gravity* and *Captain Phillips*, the survival film it most closely resembles is Robert Bresson's minimalist masterpiece *A Man Escaped* (1956). In Bresson's

film, a French POW condemned to death by the Nazis meticulously plots an escape from a prison camp. *A Man Escaped,* like *All Is Lost,* is "unadorned"—there is no score, no subplot, and no hijinks. There is only a man, and all that matters is what he must do to survive. No segment in *A Man Escaped* is superfluous—"I can't think of a single unnecessary shot in *A Man Escaped,*" Roger Ebert wrote—and neither is there an unnecessary shot in *All is Lost*. Both *A Man Escaped* and *All Is Lost* are "lesson[s] in cinema."[4]

If one changes "Bresson" to "Chandor," Ebert's description of *A Man Escaped* can easily be applied to *All Is Lost*:

> Robert Bresson's films are often about people confronting certain despair. His subject is how they try to prevail in the face of unbearable circumstances. His plots are not about whether they succeed, but how they endure. He tells these stories in an unadorned style, without movie stars, special effects, contrived thrills and elevated tension. His films, seemingly devoid of audience-pleasing elements, hold many people in a hypnotic grip. There are no "entertainment values" to distract us, only the actual events of the stories themselves. They demonstrate how many films contain only diversions for the eyes and mind, and use only the superficial qualities of their characters.[5]

At a surface level, Chandor's talky *Margin Call,* one of the most underrated films of 2011, seems diametrically opposed to *All Is Lost*'s über-laconic atmosphere, but one should not conflate dialogue with excess. Every line of dialogue in *Margin Call* was delivered with a purpose, and its method of storytelling is just as spare and simple (but far from simplistic) as the method Chandor employs in *All Is Lost*.

Perceptive viewers will notice overt religious visual motifs at the end of *All Is Lost*. (Readers who have yet to see the film are advised to skip this paragraph.) The exact nature of these visuals is ambiguous and open to interpretation, but one possible interpretation is that Our Man is being ushered into an afterlife. Within this interpretation, the title "All Is Lost" may mean that all is in fact never lost—even at death—for those who believe in an afterlife.

With *All Is Lost,* Chandor has suddenly become one of the most interesting directors working today, and his career trajectory indicates that he could become a modern-day Bresson. In an era in which we are subject to an unremitting barrage of audio-sensory stimuli, Chandor's entrance into the small, selective cadre of the directorial elite is a development that should be welcomed by any lover of quality filmmaking.

NOTES

1. Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically & Religiously* (New York: Oxford, 2012), 166.
2. Cf. the tannaitic "our rabbis," a metonym for the rabbinic collective, and "Our Man," a symbol for the human collective will to survive against all odds: "even when the sword is suspended upon your neck, do not despair from salvation," urges the Talmud (*b. Berakhot* 10a), and Our Man never despairs.
3. *b. Avodah Zarah* 17a.
4. Roger Ebert, "A Man Escaped," *Chicago Sun-Times* (Nov. 21, 2011), accessed Dec. 16, 2013. http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-a-man-escaped-1956
5. Ibid.

DANIEL ROSS GOODMAN

Some Notes on Religion and the Arts

THE PROJECT OF BRINGING Judaism into discussion with the arts is part of the larger project of bringing Judaism ("Torah") and the wisdom of the world ("*hokhmah*") into mutual discussion.[1] Judaism must engage with the arts, and the arts must engage with Judaism: both need each other.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has consistently shown how the arts can illuminate Judaism, and how Jewish thought can illuminate the arts. Lord Sacks begins his 2013 Yom Kippur message not with a quote from the Talmud or midrash, but with this sentence: "I vividly remember the surprise and delight I had when I first read Jane Austen's *Emma*." To begin a discourse upon *teshuvah* [repentance] with such a literary reference implies that it is through the arts—through literature, poetry, art, film, dance, and theater—that we may come to truly appreciate Judaism. Reading *Emma*, writes Rabbi Sacks, enabled him to understand what it means to change through *teshuvah* in the context of Yom Kippur: "It was the first time I have read a novel in which you see a character changing over time."[2] Jane Austen's *Emma*, Lord Sacks demonstrates, can broaden our understanding of *teshuvah*; without the *hokhmah* of literary fiction, our understanding of key concepts of Torah may not be complete.

In his Yom Kippur mahzor, Lord Sacks shows how the progression of movements in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony can clarify the progression of movements in a *piyut* (a liturgical poem),[3] and utilizes examples from the lives of composer Arnold Schoenberg and painter Marc Chagall in order to explicate the Kol Nidrei service.[4] And in discussing the value of persistence (what we in Yeshiva may call "*hasmadah*"), Rabbi Sacks presents examples from the lives of Stravinsky, Van Gogh, and the Impressionists.[5]

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Rabbi Dr. J. J. Schachter likewise shows how the arts can enrich Judaism in his essay "Halakhic Authority in a World of Personal Autonomy." Schachter writes that a quotation from Henri Matisse that he glimpsed in a Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibit helped him elucidate the experiential dimension of halakhah. [6]

God, the Creator, is creative, and human beings are created in the image of God, which means that we are also endowed with some of the capacities of God.[7] One of these capacities is the creative capacity: just as God is the Creator, so too, human beings are the creative species. In *Halakhic Man*, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik ("the Rav") famously emphasized the importance of creativity as a human trait that, when exercised in the realm of Torah, is a fulfillment of our need to partner with God in creating the world, for when human beings create, they imitate God, the Creator par excellence:

> Halakhic Man received the Torah from Sinai not as a simple recipient but as a creator of worlds, as a partner with the Almighty in the act of creation. The power of creative interpretation (*hiddush*) is the very foundation of the received tradition. . . . The essence of Torah is intellectual creativity.[8]

If creativity is an essential trait—the "essence of Torah"—[and, as Rabbi Yisrael Salanter said, we need to know how to exercise each character trait] the creative disciplines—the arts—can, and perhaps should be drawn upon, in order to understand the creative process, in order to learn how creativity can be applied to Talmud Torah (Torah study), and in order to see models of how creativity may be introduced into the process of interpreting our tradition.

For those of us who are engaged in the arts, or who appreciate the arts in various ways, our artistic appreciation can be greatly enhanced by infusing our artistic encounters with a Jewish theological perspective. Knowing that God can be found in more places today—in locales that had never been previously considered as conducive for encounters with divinity—helps us bring an element of holiness to the arts. And indeed, for many, God *is* in the arts; to read a beautifully crafted sentence, to gaze at an extraordinarily colored painting, to hear a transcendent musical composition, and to view a revelatory film, is to receive a glimpse of God in this world.

The nineteenth century German Romanticist E. T. A. Hoffmann, a polymathic writer and critic, wrote of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, "Every passion—love—hate—anger—despair etc., such as we encounter in opera, is clothed by music in the purple shimmer of romanticism, and even that which we experience in life leads us out beyond life into kingdom of the infinite."[9]

In his Yale Open Course series, "Listening to Music," Professor Craig Wright dubbed Mozart "Mozart the divine": we may have experiences of the divine in our lives that occur "in association with art, and it may come with the music of Mozart." According to Professor Wright, it is possible to "take art and turn it into religion," and it is also possible to see "visions of the divine working with art." And "isn't this what art is all about? It gives us something better than this stupid, mundane 'crap' we have to deal with on a quotidian basis. There *could* be something better, bigger and better" than what we normally experience. Professor Wright states that he experienced such a sublime moment of transcendence when standing at the Chartres Cathedral, and discusses how he receives intimations of this sublimity when listening to Mozart on account of the music's "crystalline clarity, balance, and proportion." At the same time, though, he believes that there are even occasional intimations of "hell" in Mozart's music.[10]

Just as the arts can be enriched by introducing religious perspectives into the varied artistic disciplines, our Jewish praxis can be tremendously enriched by integrating artistic sentiments and sensibilities into our Jewish studies.

At Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, rabbinical students work on developing a halakhic sensibility, a pastoral sensibility, a theological sensibility, and an ethical sensibility. I would venture that an artistic sensibility—and a literary sensibility in particular—must be added to the range of sensibilities we must cultivate in order to become multi-dimensional, well-rounded, complete Jews.

A literary sensibility supplements—and perhaps is essential to—the ethical sensibility, because literature helps us understand other people in ways that have yet to be duplicated by any other discipline or manner of discourse. According to recent scientific studies, readers of literary fiction tend to be more empathetic than those who do not read literary fiction.[11]

Last year, we at YCT had the privilege of participating in a Beginning of Life Issues Medical Ethics Conference (March 31-April 3). Infertility was one of the major topics addressed, and we explored the subject from halakhic, bioethical, and pastoral angles. But it would not be too far-fetched to suggest that the halakhic, bioethical, and pastoral counseling of an infertile couple would be far different—and more empathetic—if we could inhabit the mental space of a person suffering from infertility. A literary sensibility, perhaps bolstered by reading literary novels such as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*[12] that address infertility, can help us become more conscious of and more sensitive to those for whom biological generativity has not yet been (or may never be) a feasible option.

And regarding the issue of generativity itself, the arts can help us understand that having children isn't the only way of being fruitful and multiplying. The infertile are no less in the image of God than the fertile; merely because God removed the biological capacity of generativity from certain individuals does not mean that that such individuals possess any less infinite value, equality, or uniqueness than biologically generative individuals. Non-biologically generative individuals may avail themselves of other means of generativity. Creating lasting objects of art that beautify the world and enrich the lives of others is a magnificent method of exercising the human creative capacity.[13]

The thrust of the normative Jewish tradition teaches that a human being can only be completely whole when married.[14] However, we are not yet living in the World State of *Brave New World*—we are not yet living in a world in which "people never are alone now." We are not yet living in a world in which "we arrange [people's] lives so that it's almost impossible for them ever to have [solitude]."[15] We are living in a world in which, for a variety of reasons, many individuals live alone. In such a world, we would do well to resuscitate the minority tradition which teaches that each human being—regardless of whether he or she is blessed to be married and living with another person—is a whole, complete being who is just as much of an individual created *b'tselem Elokim* [in the image of God] as a married individual. In their empathy-raising capacities, the arts can help us see all individuals—even the unmarried—as individuals who are *b'tselem Elokim*. The arts teach us that being married isn't the only way of being whole. And the arts teach us that physical gatherings are not the only way of experiencing community. As Fernandoa Pessoa stated,

> With such a deficiency of literature as there is today, what can a man of genius do but convert himself, on his own, into a literature? With such a deficiency of coexistable people as there is today, what can a man of sensibility do but invent his own friends, or at least his intellectual companions?[16]

Community can be found in literature, and company can be sought amongst the great books. This does not mean to suggest that books can replace people; it is to suggest that the arts—and great literature in particular—offer other avenues for communal support that may not be found solely within one's contemporary community.

Literature expands our empathic powers in ways that halakha and theology—and even ethical analysis—cannot. Practicing the *middah* [value, character trait] of *noseh b'ol im haveiro* [sharing another's burden] and the mitzvah of *v'ahavta l'rey'akha kamokha* [love your fellow as yourself] necessi-

tates an awareness of the varieties of human experience, and this awareness can be gained perhaps only in literature. Literary fiction allows us to encounter individuals from societies not our own who possess temperaments and perspectives that are not are own; and great writers actually let us spend some time inside these other individuals' heads. We are not living in a world in which "there's always *soma* to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering,"[17] and to make you empathetic. But we are living in a world in which—as long as we continue to read—there will always be a realm of human endeavor in which these experiences can be had: literary fiction.

The remainder of this essay does not offer any programmatic statement about the place of the arts in Jewish learning. Rather, inspired by Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp," it presents a series of reflections concerning the value of the arts in Jewish learning.

— For many years, painters, novelists, filmmakers, and musicians have incorporated Jewish themes and motifs into their work. Unfortunately, Jewish learning has yet to fully integrate the arts into Jewish studies; thus, this promising opportunity for an enriching cross-disciplinary interchange has largely remained unfulfilled. Much as historians of religion once maintained "some puritanical or bourgeois prejudices against literature" until interdisciplinary scholars such as Mircea Eliade argued that "it was precisely in such efforts to analyze and elucidate the structures, modalities, and meanings of literary universes, that historians of religions could have found the help or inspiration they vainly sought in sociology, anthropology, or psychology,"[18] scholars of Jewish learning would do well to purge the vestigial prejudices they retain against the arts, for it is precisely in the inventive tools, innovative techniques, and creative insights the arts provide where scholars of Jewish learning can find the assistance they seek in philosophy, history, economics, or political science.

— The arts in general, and film in particular, offer excellent tools for illustrating theology.[19] Film, perhaps more than the other art forms, functions most similarly to religion; thus, to understand the effect that movies have upon us is to understand the effect that religion has upon us.[20]

— Literature supports the Jewish scholar's and Jewish learner's effort to understand the way in which Judaism sees and structures the external world, and simultaneously assists efforts to understand the inner workings of the internal Jewish world. Mircea Eliade's words about the potential of literature (and *littérature fantastique* in particular) to elucidate theological concepts and

to adumbrate religious world-views hold true for the inner religious world of Judaism:

> Each tale creates its own proper universe, and the creation of such imaginary universes through literary means can be compared with mythical processes. For any myth relates a story or tale of a creation, tells how something came into being—the world, life, or animals, man, and social institutions. In this sense, one can speak of a certain continuity between myth and literary fiction, since the one as well as the other recounts the creation (or the "revelation") of a universe parallel to the everyday world. . . . [A] *literary creation can likewise reveal unexpected and forgotten meanings even to a contemporary, sophisticated reader*.
>
> [S]uch types of literary creativity may also constitute authentic instruments of knowledge. *The imaginary universes brought to light in* littérature fantastique *disclose some dimensions of reality that are inaccessible to other approaches*. [21]

∽ What can intensive Torah study and academic Jewish studies gain from the arts? Can we daresay that the arts, and the methodologies, techniques, and stylistic devices utilized in various artistic disciplines, are necessary for a full, deeper, and dynamic engagement with Jewish texts? According to the art historian Matthew Baigell, the answer is a resounding yes: "art can be an important educational tool" in its capacity to "help sustain Judaism as a living, evolving religion."[22] If we say that a sine qua non of both Talmud Torah and Jewish studies is interpretation and *hiddush* [creative interpretation],[23] then the creative disciplines are crucial in allowing us to understand how we can be creative in Talmud Torah and Jewish studies. Baigell reminds us that just as *midrashim* [rabbinic exegetical homiletics] interpret, "artists interpret," and while these interpretations "should not be considered as a pretext for" academic, scholarly interpretations—"at least not initially"—these visual interpretations do implicitly beckon us to become visually literate.[24] Concomitantly, gaining a familiarity with different modes of interpretation, such as visual methods of interpretation, can aid the study of midrash as well. Baigell thereby goads us to approach artists and the arts with a great level of respect, since the arts are disciplines which require just as much expertise, training, and skill as other disciplines.

∽ Art can form the basis of a personal—if not a communal—theology. Dante believed that the Divine was revealed in art. *The Divine Comedy* illustrates how the sacred is not only found in texts, but can be glimpsed in the beauty of the arts as well.[25]

— Cultivating an artistic sensibility may bolster our spiritual, ethical, *and* ecological sensibilities, writes Moshe Halbertal:

> [T]he aesthetic qualities of the Spinozistic universe resemble the features that make a work of art beautiful and arresting. Any change in color or line in a great painting will affect its totality; every feature in it is intrinsically necessary. When the beauty of a painting dawns on us, it has a compelling power of inevitability; it arrests our will. If, as I believe, what distinguishes the religious sensibility from the strictly secular is not the concept of God but the category of the holy, such works of art are like the sacred. Their integrity and inevitability are inherent to them; they are not ours to mess with. It is for this reason that the destruction of a work of art feels sacrilegious, and that certain aspects of modern technological hubris are, for the ecological sensibility, not only wrong but sinful.[26]

Within the halakhic system, the rabbinic authority to regulate all matters of Jewish life—from speech etiquette to food preparation to even sexual behavior—and to rule upon not only ritual law but civil law as well, is embedded in the underlying assumption that Judaism believes the "sacred" is found "within the secular." As Jacob Neusner has observed regarding the theology of *hazal* [the talmudic-era rabbis]:

> [The Mishnah] expresses a deeply embedded ontology and methodology of the sacred, *specifically of the sacred within the secular*, and of capacity for regulation, *therefore sanctification, within the ordinary*: All things in order, all things then hallowed by God who orders all things."[27]

The arts, then, are secular disciplines that are ripe to be engaged in for the purpose of attaining their spiritual, religious, and holy fruits.

May the discussion continue, and may we go *me'hay'il le'hay'il* [from strength to strength] in our engagement with the wisdom of Torah and the *hokhmah* of the arts.

NOTES

1. See Jonathan Sacks, *A Judaism Engaged with the World* (United Kingdom: Exco DPS Ltd., 2013), esp. 28 and 18 ("In place of assimilation and segregation we need to argue the case for a Judaism that engages with the world").
2. Sacks, "The Courage to Grow—A message for Yom Kippur," Sept. 11, 2013; accessed Sept. 13, 2013, http://www.rabbisacks.org/?utm_source=Office+of+Rabbi

+Sacks+Subscriber+List&utm_campaign=a8dfdca64a-The_Power_of_Change_YK_5774&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3fee45c1ad-a8dfdca64a-45962529.

3. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Yom Kippur Mahzor* (trans. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; Jerusalem: Koren, 2012), 804.
4. Ibid., at 68. I am grateful to my father, Alan Goodman, for bringing these passages to my attention.
5. Sacks, "Overcoming Setbacks," *Covenant & Conversation* 5774 (Vaera, Dec. 28, 2013).
6. *Radical Responsibility: Celebrating the Thought of Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks* (ed.s Michael J. Harris, Daniel Ryhnhold, & Tamra Wright; New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2012), 155-176, at 170.
7. See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (trans. Lawrence Kaplan; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 99. Cf. idem, "Agency [*Sh'lihut*]," in *Yemei Zikaron* (Aliner Library; WZO, Dept. of Torah Education & Culture; Jerusalem: Orot, 1986), 9-28, and Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1934; repr. Philadelphia: JPS, 2010), 316 (citations from the 2010 edition).
8. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, at 82; cf. ibid. at 164; idem, "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah," *Tradition* 17:2 (1978) 55-72, at 64; Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Carl Stern's Interview with Dr. Heschel," *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays* (ed. Susannah Heschel; New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), 412; and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Schocken, 2011), 216: "[*T*]*he Creator made creation creative*….The God who chose to create our universe is one who delights in creativity." (emphasis in original)
9. In *Alllgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, quoted in Matthew Guerrieri, *The First Four Notes: Beethoven's Fifth and the Human Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 99.
10. Craig Wright, *Yale Open Courses*, MUSI 112: Listening to Music, Lecture 15; accessed Oct 2013.
11. "For Better Social Skills, Scientists Recommend a Little Chekhov," Pam Belluck, *New York Times* (Oct. 4, 2013), A1, discussing "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind," David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, *Science* 342:6156 (October 2013): 377-380.
12. See, e.g., "Trudier Harris on Lorain, Ohio: A Wasteland," 67-71, at 68, in Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (ed. Harold Bloom; New York: Infobase, 2010).
13. Cf. Menachem Kellner's essay in this volume, entitled "Judaism and Artistic Creativity: Despite Maimonides and Thanks to Him"; and Daniel Ross Goodman, "'Be Fruitful and Multiply:' The Imperative of Creativity in Art and Religion," *Public Discourse* (Apr. 17, 2014), http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/ 2014/04/ 12950/
14. See *b. Yevamot* 63a, 62b, *Yoma* 12a.
15. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932; New York: Harper, 2006), 235.
16. Fernandoa Pessoa, quoted in Harold Bloom, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (New York: Warner Books, 2002), 600.
17. Huxley, *Brave New World*, 239.
18. Mircea Eliade, *Two Strange Tales* (introduction to English trans.; Boston: Shambhala, 1986), xiii.
19. See Jonathan Brant, *Paul Tillich and the Possibility of Revelation through Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. 36, 38; cf. Daniel Ross Goodman, "The

Great Gatsby: A Biblical Theology Illuminated," *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin* 42:1-2 (2014): 79-84.

20. See John Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals* (London: New York University Press, 2003).
21. Eliade, *Two Strange Tales*, xii-xiii (emphasis added).
22. Matthew Baigell, "Art and Religion" (unpublished paper: 2013).
23. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 82.
24. Baigell, "Art and Religion."
25. See Giuseppe Mazzota, *Yale Open Courses*, ITAL 310: Dante in Translation, Lecture 24: http://oyc.yale.edu/italian-language-and-literature/ital-310/lecture-24 accessed Jan. 1, 2014.
26. Moshe Halbertal, "Beyond Naturalism: A Higher Authority for Secularists," in *The New Republic* (Oct. 12, 2013), 60-63, at 62, review essay of Ronald Dworkin, *Religion Without God* (Harvard: 2013).
27. Jacob Neusner, "The Mishnah Viewed Whole," in *The Mishnah in Contemporary Perspective* (ed. Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner; Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2002), 10 (emphasis added); quoted in Moshe Simon-Shoshan, *Stories of the Law: Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford, 2012), 61.

DAVID FRIED

The Relationship Between Tisha B'av and the Book of Job

Introduction

THE TALMUD BAVLI in Masechet Taanit 30a cites a *baraita* outlining the laws of Tisha B'av:

> Our Rabbis taught: All obligations that are observed by a mourner are observed on Tisha B'av: one is forbidden in eating and drinking, in anointing and the wearing of shoes, and in sexual relations, and it is forbidden to read from the Torah, Nevi'im, or Ketuvim, or to learn Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, Halachot, or Aggadot. But . . . one may read the books of Lamentations, Job, and the sad parts of Jeremiah.[1]

One can readily understand why Lamentations and the sad parts of Jeremiah would be appropriate for Tisha B'av, for they recount and lament the very destruction of the Temple that Tisha B'av commemorates.[2] Job, however, seems to be out of place. It is true that Job deals with events of a tragic nature, but Tanach is replete with tragedies, so this is insufficient to explain why Job alone was singled out to be added to the list of permitted learning on Tisha B'av.[3] However, a literary comparison between the book of Job and the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations[4] will reveal that Job, in fact, does provide a way of relating to the Jewish exile which is complementary to Jeremiah and Lamentations, making it uniquely appropriate for inclusion in the list of permissible study on Tisha B'av.

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Job and Jeremiah

The most well-known place to begin comparing Job with Jeremiah is the cursing of the day of their birth[5]. Not only do both Job and Jeremiah curse the day of their birth, but they are the only two characters in Tanach to do so. In chapter 3 of the book of Job, Job states:

> 3Perish the day on which I was born, and the night it was announced,
> "A male has been conceived!" 4May that day be darkness; May God
> above have no concern for it; May light not shine on it; 5May darkness
> and deep gloom reclaim it; May a pall lie over it; May what blackens the
> day terrify it. 6May obscurity carry off that night; May it not be counted
> among the days of the year; May it not appear in any of its months; 7May
> that night be desolate; May no sound of joy be heard in it; 8May those
> who cast spells upon the day damn it, Those prepared to disable
> Leviathan; 9May its twilight stars remain dark; May it hope for light and
> have none; May it not see the glimmerings of the dawn— 10Because it
> did not block my womb, And hide trouble from my eyes. 11Why did I
> not die at birth, expire as I came forth from the womb? 12Why were
> there knees to receive me, Or breasts for me to suck?[6]

Compare this with chapter 20 of the book of Jeremiah:

> 14Accursed be the day that I was born! Let not the day be blessed when
> my mother bore me! 15Accursed be the man who brought my father the
> news and said, "A boy is born to you," And gave him such joy! 16Let
> that man become like the cities which the Lord overthrew without
> relenting! Let him hear shrieks in the morning and battle shouts at
> noontide— 17Because he did not kill me before birth so that my moth-
> er might be my grave, and her womb big [with me] for all time. 18Why
> did I ever issue from the womb, to see misery and woe, to spend all my
> days in shame!

The two speeches are strikingly similar, and yet with a significant difference. In Jeremiah's story, there are several characters. In addition to himself, there are his father, his mother, and the man who brought his father the news that a male had been born. In Job, there is no mention of such a messenger. Though the news is brought, it is brought passively. Instead of referring to his mother and father as people, Job tells only of a womb, knees and breasts. In addition, while Jeremiah wishes to undo his birth and thereby his own existence, Job goes a step further and seems to be attempting to uproot the entire day from the calendar.[7]

The impersonality of the story of Job cursing the day of his birth is characteristic of the entire book. The book tells very little about Job. It does not give any dates or other historical events with which to identify when he lived. There is no indication of his being Jewish. The only identifying information given about him is that he lived in the land of Uts.[8] The Land of Uts is mentioned only two other places in Tanach: Jeremiah and Lamentations. It occurs in the exact same context in both places. In Jeremiah, it is in Chapter 25, in the midst of the "Grapes of Wrath," prophecy, as it lists all the nations that persecuted Israel, which G-d will cause to drink from the metaphorical cup of poisoned wine at the end of days.

> [15]For thus said the Lord, the God of Israel, to me: "Take from My hand this cup of wine—of wrath—and make all the nations to whom I send you drink of it. [16]Let them drink and retch and act crazy, because of the sword that I am sending among them."
>
> [17]So I took the cup from the hand of the Lord and gave drink to all the nations to whom the Lord had sent me: [18]Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, and its kings and officials, to make them a desolate ruin, an object of hissing and a curse—as is now the case; [19]Pharaoh king of Egypt, his courtiers, his officials, and all his people; [20]all the mixed peoples; all the kings of the land of Uts; all the kings of the land of the Philistines—Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and what is left of Ashdod; [21]Edom, Moab, and Ammon; [22]all the kings of Tyre and all the kings of Sidon, and all the kings of the coastland across the sea; [23]Dedan, Tema, and Buz, and all those who have their hair clipped; [24]all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mixed peoples who live in the desert; [25]all the kings of Zimri and all the kings of Elam and all the kings of Media; [26]all the kings of the north, whether far from or close to each other—all the royal lands which are on the earth. And last of all, the king of She-shach shall drink.

The same context is formulated concisely in Lamentations 4:21, "Rejoice and exult, O daugther of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uts! To you, too, the cup shall pass, you shall get drunk and expose your nakedness." We will say more about this later.

In Chapter 12, Jeremiah enters into, or at least fantasizes about entering into, a *Riv* with G-d.

> [1]You will win (*tzadik*), O Lord, if I make claim (*Riv*) against You, yet I shall present charges against You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease? [2]You have planted them,

> and they have taken root, they spread, they even bear fruit. You are present in their mouths, But far from their thoughts.[9] **3**Yet You, Lord, have noted and observed me; You have tested my heart, and found it with You. Drive them out like sheep to the slaughter, Prepare them for the day of slaying! **4**How long must the land languish, And the grass of all the countryside dry up? Must beasts and birds perish, Because of the evil of its inhabitants, who say, "He will not look upon our future"?

The word *Riv* can mean a fight, but in Biblical Hebrew, it is usually found in the judicial context, a fight in court, a lawsuit.[10] Particularly, in Nevi'im Aharonim (the latter prophets), there are a number of *Rivim*, usually with G-d as the plaintiff, suing, so to speak, Bnei Yisrael for breach of contract, i.e., not keeping the Torah.[11] Here Jeremiah, seeks to reverse that motif and initiate a lawsuit against G-d. He first acknowledges that G-d is righteous and that of course he, Jeremiah, would not win if this lawsuit were to be made real, but he still must give voice to his feelings. In Chapter 9, Job, too, fantasizes about entering into a *Riv* with G-d.

> **2**Indeed I know that it is so: man cannot win (*Yitzdak*) a suit against God. **3**If he insisted on a trial (*Riv*) with Him, He would not answer one charge in a thousand. . . . **15**Though I were in the right, I could not speak out, But I would plead for mercy with my judge. **16**If I summoned Him and He responded, I do not believe He would lend me His ear. **17**For He crushes me for a hair; He wounds me much for no cause. **18**He does not let me catch my breath, but sates me with bitterness. **19**If a trial of strength—He is the strong one; if a trial in court—who will summon Him for me? **20**Though I were innocent, my mouth would condemn me; though I were blameless, He would prove me crooked. **21**I am blameless—I am distraught; I am sick of life. **22**It is all one; therefore I say, "He destroys the blameless and the guilty."

With very similar language to Jeremiah, using the same root, צ.ד.ק., he starts out with an acknowledgement that he knows he cannot win. However, in what reads almost as a parody of Jeremiah, he then goes on a long tirade about why he could not win, bringing every possible reason other than G-d's ultimate righteousness: G-d would not bother to respond to the charges. He is strong and there is no one to subpoena Him. If He were to come to the trial, He would lie and distort justice, and there is no objective arbiter to hold Him accountable. Once again we see Job taking a motif from Jeremiah and taking it a step further. Jeremiah gives voice to frustration, while maintaining belief in G-d's ultimate righteousness. Job, on the hand, has no such compunctions. He comes out and downright challenges any sense of Divine justice.[12]

Let us now return to the Land of Uts. The books of Jeremiah and Lamentations assure us that ultimately, the *Yayin Hema*, the wine of G-d's wrath, will turn to the Land of Uts. And in the book of Job, it does just that. However, instead of turning on the wicked people who persecuted the Jews, it turns on the completely innocent Job. Looking at the suffering of an anonymous man in a place to which Jews would feel no connection enables the Jewish people to give voice to emotions they could not express when the suffering is personal. When it is personal suffering, one has no choice but to beat one's chest and recite *mea culpas*, for deep down each believing Jew knows the prophets have told them over and over again that it is their sins that have brought this upon them. However, the book of Job gives the Jew vehicle to scream out about God's injustice, the injustice that the Rabbis certainly must have felt looking upon the children dying from starvation in the streets of Jerusalem, or the blood running in the streets after the massacre at Beitar[13]; the feelings that Jews throughout the centuries must have felt looking upon the crusades, the inquisition, or the gas chambers of the Holocaust. "We know we've sinned, G-d, but there is nothing, NOTHING, we could have done to deserve *this*."

Job and Lamentations

The linguistic parallels between Job and Lamentations are not as obvious as those with Jeremiah, but there are nevertheless some striking parallels in the overall structure of the books. They both begin with a declaration of a simple faith in G-d. In Job, chapter 1, is Job's famous initial response to his first round of suffering:

> [20]Then Job arose, tore his robe, cut off his hair, and threw himself on the ground and worshiped. [21]He said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Likewise, Lamentations begins its first chapter with a declaration of the simple faith that Israel's suffering is a result of her sins:

> [8]Jerusalem has greatly sinned, therefore she is become a mockery. All who admired her despise her, for they have seen her disgraced; and she can only sigh and shrink back. [9]Her uncleanness clings to her skirts. She gave no thought to her future; she has sunk appallingly, with none to comfort her.— See, O Lord, my misery; how the enemy jeers!

By the middle of the books, both are complaining of the excessive nature of

their suffering. A good example is chapter 7, where Job accuses G-d of making him a target, singling him out for punishment from which G-d derives no gain:

> [20]If I have sinned, what have I done to You, watcher of men? Why make of me Your target, and a burden to myself? [21]Why do You not pardon my transgression and forgive my iniquity? For soon I shall lie down in the dust; when You seek me, I shall be gone.

Lamentations, in chapter 2, accuses G-d of becoming an enemy, a stark change from the just punishments of chapter 1:

> [4]He bent His bow like an enemy, poised His right hand like a foe; He slew all who delighted the eye. He poured out His wrath like fire in the Tent of Fair Zion.

Lamentations and Job also both have uncertain endings.[14] The poet of Lamentations[15] ends by begging for G-d to restart His relationship with the Jewish people, but has no sense of certainty about it:

> [20]Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time? [21]Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself, and let us come back; renew our days as of old! [22]For truly, You have rejected us, bitterly raged against us. (Chapter 5)

Job, in the end, admits his mistake in speaking ill of G-d and is ready to hear for what sin he deserved his suffering:

> [2]I know that You can do everything, that nothing you propose is impossible for You. [3]Who is this who obscures counsel without knowledge? Indeed, I spoke without understanding of things beyond me, which I did not know. [4]Hear now, and I will speak; I will ask, and You will inform me. [5]I had heard You with my ears, but now I see You with my eyes; [6]Therefore, I recant and relent, being but dust and ashes. (Chapter 42)

Yet G-d never answers him.

Another striking parallel between Lamentations and Job is the role of the friends. The very beginning of Lamentations talks about how all of Israel's friends turned against her:

> [2]Bitterly she weeps in the night, her cheek wet with tears. There is none to comfort her of all her friends. All her allies have betrayed her; they have become her foes.

The examples are far too numerous to quote here, but one need only read a few of the middle chapters of the book of Job to see why he, too, is famous for friends not behaving in the way friends should.[16]

There are also important differences between Job and Lamentations. Even in his initial declaration of faith, Job never admits any fault on his own part. And why should he? The reader knows what perhaps Job himself can never know: Job really is innocent. The very first verse of the book states in no uncertain terms that Job was "blameless and upright; he feared G-d and shunned evil." Though Job never learns the cause of his suffering, the reader knows that as well: a foolish bet that G-d made with Satan.[17] If it weren't in Tanach, such a claim would probably be called heretical, bordering on the absurd, but that is why the book of Job says that Job suffered:

> 6One day the divine beings presented themselves before the Lord, and Satan came along with them. 7The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you been?" Satan answered the Lord, "I have been roaming all over the earth." 8The Lord said to Satan, "Have you noticed My servant Job? There is no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil!" 9Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job not have good reason to fear God? 10Why, it is You who have fenced him round, him and his household and all that he has. You have blessed his efforts so that his possessions spread out in the land. 11But lay Your hand upon all that he has and he will surely blaspheme You to Your face." 12The Lord replied to Satan, "See, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on him." Satan departed from the presence of the Lord. (Chapter 1)

Yet, in chapter 40, G-d criticizes Job with language that echoes Job's friends about Job having no right to challenge divine justice:

> 6Then the Lord replied to Job out of the tempest and said: 7Gird your loins like a man; I will ask, and you will inform Me. 8Would you impugn My justice? Would you condemn Me that you may be right? . . .

From the omniscient perspective of G-d or the reader, what basis can there possibly be for criticizing Job? The answer is that when dealing with personal suffering, no matter how absurd and unfair it seems, no individual can ever be sufficiently confident in his or her own righteousness to be able to level accusations against G-d. However, for the reader, the book of Job gives him or her the opportunity to think, just for a second, that maybe it all really is absurd. Maybe there really is no justice in the world. Maybe all the prophecies are just G-d covering up for His bad bet with Satan.

But the book of Job does not end with G-d's rebuke of Job. In chapter 42, G-d turns to Job's friends and makes them beg Job for forgiveness for mistreating him, even though they say mostly the same things G-d ultimately does:

> [7]After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am incensed at you and your two friends, for you have not spoken the truth about Me as did My servant Job. [8]Now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to My servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. And let Job, My servant, pray for you; for to him I will show favor and not treat you vilely, since you have not spoken the truth about Me as did My servant Job."

After initially criticizing him for questioning His justice, G-d praises Job for speaking properly about Him and, two verses later, returns to Job everything that he had lost, "The Lord restored Job's fortunes when he prayed on behalf of his friends, and the Lord gave Job twice what he had before." Medieval and modern commentators have debated the ultimate theological message of the book of Job endlessly,[18] and whether his friends were right or wrong. The best answer, though, is that it does not matter. The response to someone's suffering isn't theology. To the person suffering, it's equally painful whether they understand why it's happening or not.[19] The response to suffering is comfort and love. And in that, the friends were certainly wrong. G-d ultimately vindicates Job because even G-d has to acknowledge that in the midst of so much suffering, we need to be able to express grief and anger.[20]

Unlike Lamentations which leaves the reader uncertain as to whether there will be any future relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, Job does not end with such uncertainly. Though Job never does find out why he suffered, we know that G-d ultimately restores him to his previous grandeur. This makes Job a book of great faith that G-d will, in the end, restore the sense of order and justice in the world. And perhaps it is the very absurdity of Job that gives rise to this faith. When in the book of Lamentations, the Jewish people are mired in their sin, the punishment may feel excessive, but they always know they are ultimately responsible. In such a context, it would be of supreme hubris to claim to know that the suffering will ultimately end. However, giving voice to the feelings that it really might be absurd and unfair, enables one to have the faith that G-d, whom the believing Jew does believe is ultimately just and fair, will have to redeem the Jews and restore their grandeur. This makes Job the ultimate metaphor for Jews looking for a way to relate to suffering in exile, and the ultimate compliment to Jeremiah and Lamentations for learning on Tisha B'av.

NOTES

1. This translation and all other translations of Talmudic passages quoted in this article are my own.
2. Mishnah, *Taanit* 4:6.
3. Even if, practically, one accepts the ruling in *Shulhan Arukh*, *Orah Haim* 554:2, which permits learning *Elu Megalhin*, containing the laws of mourning, on Tisha B'av, and therefore implicitly reads the permission granted in the braita in Taanit as more expansive than merely the three examples given, one can still ask why Job was chosen as the quintessential example to be mentioned in the braita.
4. In comparing Job to Jeremiah and Lamentations, it is not the intent of this article to take a stance on the dating or authorship of the book of Job. That has been debated by scholars ad nauseam since the time of the Gemara (see *b. Bava Batra* 15a-b and Marvin Pope, *Job* (New York: 1973), xxxii-xliii for a summary of the modern scholarship) and I do not expect to be able to settle it. Similarities between Job and Jeremiah may be because Job is drawing off of Jeremiah, they may be because Jeremiah is drawing off of Job, they may both be drawing off of some unknown third source, or it may be a complete coincidence. The goal of this article is merely to show why Chazal would have thought the ideas contained in the book of Job are related to the ideas contained in the book of Jeremiah, and why they would therefore be worth studying on Tisha B'av.
5. This similarity has been noted by many without elaboration. See *Breishit Rabba* 64:5 (in the Vilna printing; 64:8 in the Theodor-Albeck printing), Pesikta Rabbati 26, Radak on Jeremiah 20:14, and Pope, *Job*, 27.
6. Biblical translations in this article are taken from the new JPS translation with occasional edits to highlight nuances of the Hebrew text missed by the translation.
7. Edward Greenstein, "Jeremiah as an Inspiration for the Poet of Job," in John Kaltner and Louis Stulman, ed.s., *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (London: 2004), 102-103.
8. Job 1:1.
9. Note the similarity of the language used by Jeremiah here to Job 21:7-8.
10. See Deuteronomy 19:17, 25:1, II Samuel 15:2-4.
11. See Isaiah 3:13-15, Jeremiah 2:7-28, Hosea 4:1-19, Micah 6:1-5.
12. Greenstein, "Jeremiah as an Inspiration for the Poet of Job," 104-105.
13. See *b. Gittin* 56a-57a.
14. This overall structure of both Job and Lamentations is based on Hayyim Angel, *Through an Opaque Lens* (New York: 2006), 279-295.
15. Traditionally associated with Jeremiah. See *b. Bava Batra* 15a.
16. See *b. Bava Metzia* 58b, where behaving like the friends of Job is given as one of the paradigmatic cases of *ona'at d'varim*.
17. The Hebrew השטן is obviously not identical with the English Satan, given the many Christological influences on the latter. However, it is used as the translation here for maximum effect.
18. The debate can already be found in *b. Bava Batra* 15b-16a.
19. See supra, n. 16. Telling a person who is suffering that they deserve it is a violation of the issur of *ona'at d'varim* regardless of whether they do, in reality, deserve it.
20. See *b. Bava Batra* 16b, where it learns from Job that person is not held accountable for the things they say in the moment of their suffering.

MARC B. SHAPIRO

Torah im Derekh Eretz as a Means of Last Resort

RABBI DR. SAMUEL GRUENBERG (1879-1959) was one of the intellectual leaders of German Orthodoxy in the years prior to World War II.[1] Born in Rumania, he received both a yeshiva as well as a secular education. He then traveled to Berlin where he studied at the Berlin Rabbinical Seminary, and later received his doctorate at the University of Giessen.[2] Gruenberg was appointed to the faculty of the Rabbinical Seminary where he taught Talmud, biblical literature, and Hebrew language. He was also a leader of the Mizrachi movement in Germany and the prime mover behind the 1930 founding of the international Shomrei Shabbat society.

Settling in Palestine in 1936, he was one of the founders of Yeshivat Torah u-Melakhah in Petah Tikva and he would later become head of the Religious Council in Tel Aviv. In 1945 Gruenberg published a volume of biblical studies, *Li-Feshuto shel Mikra.* Among other intellectual achievements, he co-authored a German-Hebrew, Hebrew-German dictionary and translated R. David Zvi Hoffmann's classic study of the Mishnah, *Die erste Mischna und die Controversen der Tannaim* into Hebrew.[3]

Gruenberg's 1929 essay, offered here in translation, is part of my continuing efforts to make important *Torah im Derekh Eretz* writings available to the English-speaking world.[4] What makes this essay significant is its argument that while Hirschian *Torah im Derekh Eretz* is necessary in modern times for those Jews living in Europe, it must be viewed as a necessary means of last resort rather than a desired state of affairs. Yet just as significant is Gruenberg's conclusion that all of the negative aspects of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* are tied to the Diaspora and its non-Jewish cultural surroundings. However, the Land of Israel, with its reborn Jewish community, is for Gruenberg the perfect place for the creation of a true *Torah im Derekh Eretz* community, one that will be Jewish in both content and form.

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SAMUEL GRUENBERG

Towards an Evaluation of the Orthodox Educational Methods

Ha-Hed recently published two articles[5] dealing with the German Orthodox educational method known as *Torah im Derekh Eretz*. One side praises it and says that this method is very good, "tried and proven," and full of blessing. "By participating in the cultural-intellectual life of the [Gentile] nations we have been enriched with a number of noble values." The other side speaks negatively about this method and about European culture, and points to the damage caused by the latter. The first side thinks that we must relate to the above-mentioned method [*Torah im Derekh Eretz*] not out of necessity, but rather out of love as a positive commandment. The other side proclaims: "This viewpoint is 'death in the pot' [cf. 2 Kings 4:40]! Turn away from it and do not come near! Return to the *hadarim* [pl. of *heder*] and the yeshivot! All who remove themselves from them [the *hadarim* and yeshivot] it is as if they remove themselves from the Torah."

The educational question among us did not arise yesterday. More than a hundred years have passed since its presence was felt in the Jewish street. Much has been written on it, and there have been many disputes. Without involving ourselves with the various disagreements in *Ha-Hed*, from either side, we must say that in our opinion this is not the way to dispute about this difficult issue. It is not correct to ask which approach is better, this one or that. Rather, *at present* we should formulate the question as follows: Which approach is *possible*? What are the prospects [of success] for each one? For only from the standpoint of *possibility* can we analyze and clarify the matter. A short glance at history will show us how matters developed, the conclusions we can derive from the past, and the relationship that we must establish between ourselves and the two methods [of education] on the one hand, and how to evaluate and relate to European culture on the other.

It is well known that until the era of the French Revolution (1793 [!]) Jewish education was very simple. The Jew was regarded by the Gentiles among whom he lived as a contemptible good-for-nothing. (The Golden Age of Arabic Spain is many hundreds of years removed from us and there is no need to include it in our review). The Jew did not have anything to do with the Gentile surroundings. He was a dangling limb in the midst of society and state, both of which were explicitly Christian. The Jew made a meager living

from small trade, primitive labor, money lending, and similar pursuits. Due to state and societal compulsion he had to be satisfied with a life of abject poverty. It was enough that he was alive, even if his life was very difficult. Since the external circumstances were so hard, he sought and found his spiritual fulfillment by educating his children in the Torah, which alone was his enjoyment in life and in it he found everything. As great as the disdain from his enemies and oppressors, so too grew his own disdain for them. The poor and despised Jew regarded his life as the most exalted, the most ethical, and the most excellent. The vulgar and insolent Gentile surroundings were not able to influence him in any noticeable way. There were, to be sure, in every generation individuals who abandoned the life of their people. They also made light of our spiritual values and qualities, and longed for either the action and freedom beyond the walls of the Jewish street, or for the ideas of non-Jewish intellectuals. However, their number was always relatively very small, and no one regarded those who broke with the community as a danger to the customary method of Jewish education, or to the traditional Jewish culture that was ingrained throughout the nation.

But then the French Revolution occurred, bringing in its wake what were almost new structures of life. At this time, equality, fraternity, and liberty were proclaimed. It was also then that the enlightened [Gentile] neighbors began in small measure to relate to the Jews as people just like them. From one side they gave the Jews the option to change the conditions of their lives for the better, while on the other side they placed upon them obligations of citizenship. At this time, the great change happened in the education of Jewish children, marking the birth of the question of education. Knowledge gained from the *heder* and yeshiva was no longer sufficient for the Jew who entered the [wider] society and state. Not only were the ways of his life forced to change, but also his preparation for earning a living. In order to be a merchant going from village to village, a middle-man in town, a primitive craftsman, *heder* teacher, blood-letter or "doctor" on the Jewish street, one did not have to study European languages, have [academic] knowledge in business and technology, or know about sciences and universities. But the new economic and cultural possibilities that the Jew received in the new era required approaches to education and acquisition of knowledge that differed from those offered in the *hadarim* and yeshivot. Later, civil laws were instituted that *required* the Jew to leave his four cubits and to enter into the larger world against his will, for example, by being drafted into the army. This law apparently came about due to civic egalitarianism. However, our fathers understood that a young Jewish man, a product of the yeshiva, whose ears

had never heard a coarse expression in his life, and whose eyes had only looked into holy books, would now enter an environment destructive of moral standards, and what he would hear, woe to the ears that hear this, and what he would see, woe to the eyes that see this! Consequently, through this the Jewish character would lose its glory, essence, and purity, which indeed happened to an even greater extent than had been feared by the holy and pure fathers and mothers. Our entire structure of life was thus changed, and with it the structure of education.

"Haskalah" was the magic word for that generation that went in search of personal freedom. It was not simply Haskalah on account of a world outlook and idealistic vision, but Haskalah as a bridge and path to a new and expansive life that came effortlessly to that generation. The Jews were given freedom first in Western Europe, and that is why *it was there that the question of education first arose*.

From this time a new historical phenomenon begins, which was unlike anything in previous generations: The battle of the older and the younger generations. The older generation was used to its way of life, which was also the way of life of its fathers, and wished to keep this tradition in all particulars. The younger people, who were drawn by the new possibilities for both a more productive life and also to be more respected among the general population, hastened their path by chopping not simply at the branches of Judaism but also at its roots. Thus, the war spread, and as the war intensified due to *conditions of life* that assisted the younger generation, people no longer understood each other. The older people said: "It is impossible to compromise, it is forbidden! The Jewish child needs a complete Jewish education just like our forefathers." They understood and felt that a compromise with the conditions of life would weaken Judaism and damage it, and on occasion even be the cause of its death. But the new circumstances, which Judaism had never before confronted since the time it first went into exile, did not reverse themselves because of the reproach of the elders. The baser elements triumphed over the nobler ones, those affirming "life" over those who negated it, with obvious results.

However, when the cry encompassed the entire Jewish community of Western Europe and the danger of assimilation increased frightfully, a few superbly talented *gedolei Yisrael* arose. These men had pure Jewish hearts, great piety, knowledge of Torah, were at home with high European culture, and with all this a penetrating and wide-ranging vision that enabled them to understand the reason for the great crisis and from where the danger drew its strength. They were the ones who awakened and stood in the breach, begin-

ning the work of a new education, and a new blending, in accordance with the method of *Torah im Derekh Eretz*. This method is based on coming to terms with the reality of life and its inescapable demands. They certainly wanted, based on the historical idealistic Jewish outlook, to hold onto the view of R. Simeon ben Yohai. But they recognized that those who do so in contemporary times will not be successful. Therefore, they adopted the position of R. Yishmael (*Berakhot* 35b)[6] and created the motto of "*Torah ve-Derekh Eretz*."[7] They undoubtedly knew that this approach is not preferable, and is not the best for the spreading of Torah and bringing about a flowering of Judaism. They certainly understood that we would rather be able to educate our children in a completely Jewish fashion, and in a way that the limited general knowledge that Jews also long for could be taught in a purely Jewish environment, just as our forefathers did for generations. Yet they understood the new situation, and they realized that this aspiration is an ideal only for *exceptional people*, and that in contemporary circumstances it is impossible for the *general population*. They saw the educational method of "*Torah ve-Derekh Eretz*" as a necessity, which while having negative aspects and dangers attached to it, provided some slight relief. In the emergency situation we are confronted with, we must save that which we can, and the meager anchor available for this was the method of "*Torah ve-Derekh Eretz*."

Some of them also attempted to see the good in European culture, which we can now no longer avoid, and felt that we should *attempt to make use of it for our benefit*. But the way history developed proved to us that this was a false hope. European culture brought pain to every good aspect [of our lives] and increased spiritual waste like no other. To be sure, we cannot swim against the current. We are not able to free ourselves from the effects of European culture. But every sensitive Jewish soul must recognize and admit that this foreign culture, even the truly positive found in it, does not strengthen our Jewish consciousness. It also does not offer assistance in difficult times to triumph over the anti-religious forces that have arisen among us. Yet this very culture is what captures the hearts of the Jews and pours upon them a spirit of dizziness, the spirit of our time and of our Gentile neighbors. It drives them out of the Jewish world and away from Jewish hopes and aspirations. Only with great difficulty do the overwhelming majority of those educated in this culture retain a *measure* of their Judaism, and it too is lacking and defective. What they retain is only due to the essential strength that is found in our religion and due to the promise of God that the Eternal One of Israel will not lie [cf. 1 Sam. 15:29]. We must admit that among Torah observant Jews, there is a great distance in Jewish understanding, Jewish completeness, Jewish puri-

ty, and Jewish living between those educated in the *heder* and yeshiva and those raised with European culture and educated in the schools—even those schools operating with the "*Torah ve-Derekh Eretz*" method. We must admit that European culture negates and destroys Judaism, but there is no way to avoid this difficulty. From the standpoint of the truly refined and traditional Judaism, happy is he who doesn't have to confront it [European culture]!

In the conditions of contemporary life, which I see no need to recount in detail as they are many, the approach of "*Torah ve-Derekh Eretz*" is the method that is suitable and proper for *the masses*. What I mean by this is if we desire that Jewish children in their multitudes will grow up as Jews, despite the conditions of contemporary life, we have no other method than "*Torah ve-Derekh Eretz*." As mentioned, this will raise up Jews whose Torah knowledge and Judaism is weak and very superficial, because the few hours that can be given in this method to Jewish studies are not able to provide the young children with the strong influence that was found in the *hadarim* and yeshivot. The desired blending often spoken about has really not yet been found. Furthermore, the influence of popular literature, newspapers, and society is very damaging and wipes out the national consciousness and feeling, so that it is possible even in extremely Orthodox households to raise children to be Germans of the Mosaic persuasion and French of the Mosaic persuasion. However, we cannot change the functions of life and its direction. We must not delude ourselves with a false hope that we can change matters and bring the masses of Jews back to the yeshivot and their way of learning, much as we acknowledge that they educate [pupils] to become fully Jewish. The people will not listen to us, even if we prove the value of the yeshiva and the negative aspects of the schools when it comes to the survival of Judaism. Life moves on, and due to this we see the decline of the yeshivot and the turn to irreligiosity of some who are yeshiva educated when they go out into the world. Conditions of life, economic and cultural, have conquered the entire world. We therefore say that the educational approach of the *hadarim* and the yeshivot is only possible for a *few individuals* and in exceptional circumstances. We strongly hope that in every generation and in all conditions of life there will be those special cases, idealists, complete Jews, who will study the Torah *li-shemah*, disdain all the hindrances of life, and completely devote themselves to Torah study. They will be the ones who guard and carry the Torah and its spirit, the guardians of complete Judaism and observers in the traditional fashion. But throughout the Diaspora, these special people will be few. Only through a correct evaluation of the circumstances will we know how to guard our existence as a chosen people, a people of the Torah and

mitzvot, and know how to defend our independence and Jewish character.

Let us summarize: The method of "*Torah im Derekh Eretz*," which still needs to be improved from top to bottom, is for *the masses* the method that is *possible*. The old educational approach of the *heder* and the yeshiva is today only possible with *a limited number and with small groups*. To tell the truth, the first approach [*Torah im Derekh Eretz*] is lacking and defective, but *it is the result of the current conditions of life that we cannot change*, in particular, when it comes to general and cultural life. It guarantees us "a minimum" of Torah and Judaism. The second approach [that of the yeshivot], which is the tradition of thousands of years and which raised up all of our great Torah sages and *tzaddikim*, indeed raises complete Jews, but the battle for it is on all fronts, and only an elite few still remain attached to this approach after coming into contact with modern life.

We are currently dealing with a necessity [*Torah im Derekh Eretz*], which although not to be condemned can also not be lauded. Anyone who cares about the fate of *authentic* traditional Judaism, as is still found in Eastern Europe, should carefully examine matters as they really are, without any whitewashing. Only then will he understand that one must not be satisfied with the meager measure that, due to necessity, has been and continues to be provided through the method of *Torah im Derekh Eretz*. General culture has brought us knowledge but not values! The advocates [of *Torah im Derekh Eretz*] will also acknowledge that even from their perspective this method is "choosing the lesser evil."[8] Would that more follow in its path [*Torah im Derekh Eretz*] rather than the path of general European education, in which today more and more young Jews are being educated, whether out of compulsion or of free will.

Today we cannot give up on either of the two methods [of education], but must recognize their place and their strengths. For what happened in Western Europe in the previous century is repeating itself at present in every Jewish center, be it in Eastern Europe, the Land of Israel, and needless to say across the sea in the great America and its environs.

In conclusion, one more point: Happily, we live in an era that is seeing the creation of a new Jewish center in the land of our forefathers, the Land of Israel. Therefore, in evaluating methods of education we need to distinguish between the Land of Israel and the Diaspora. Here, in a foreign environment where we are hitched to the norms of life matching those of the leaders of the land, we cannot hope for greatness to come out of the method of "*Torah im Derekh Eretz*." This is not the case for the Land of Israel. In the independent Jewish center that is arising, there is the possibility that also this

method will bear admirable fruit. There the land is Jewish, the environment is Jewish, the organization of the community is Jewish, and the life on the street and its conditions are Jewish. There it is possible that all the knowledge that a Jewish child learns in school will have a Jewish form. There it is possible to provide a larger measure of Torah and Jewish knowledge, love of Torah, and love of Israel. And there the popular Jewish elements will slowly arise that will be able to strengthen the position and spirit of Judaism against European culture and its influence. There it is possible that the "synthesis" of "*Torah im Derekh Eretz*" that we are seeking, and which is impossible to find here in the Exile, will be born. However, we must also support yeshivot there, from which Torah will go forth in a more significant way than what the [modern] schools with their curricula are able to give to their students.

NOTES

1. Biographical information on Gruenberg is found in *Areshet* 2 (1960), 430-431.
2. His dissertation was published as *Die weisen Sprüche des Achikar nach der syrischen Hs. Cod Sachau Nr. 33 der Kgl. Bibliothek in Berlin herausgegeben und bearbeitet* (Berlin, 1917).
3. *Ha-Mishnah ha-Rishonah u-Felugta de-Tanai* (Berlin, 1913).
4. Gruenberg's essay originally appeared in *Ha-Hed* 4 (Shevat 5689 [1929]), 1-4. I previously published "Rabbi David Zevi Hoffmann on Torah and *Wissenschaft*," *Torah u-Madda Journal* 6 (1995-1996), 129-137; "Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer's Program of Torah u-Madda," *ibid.* 9 (2000), 76-86; "*Torah im Derekh Eretz* in the Shadow of Hitler," *Torah u-Madda Journal* 14 (2006-2007), 84-96; "Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Friedrich von Schiller," *Torah u-Madda Journal* 15 (2008-2009), 172-187.
5. From the *Admor* of Lubavitch and R. Dr. Moses Auerbach [see *Ha-Hed*, Av 5688, Sivan 5688].
6. [*Berakhot* 35b records the positions of R. Ishmael, that one must combine Torah study with an occupation, and R. Simeon ben Yohai, that one should devote himself to Torah study alone. Gruenberg's description in this paragraph reflects the approach of R. Esriel Hildesheimer rather than the outlook of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch. Contrary to Gruenberg, Hirsch did not regard the educational method of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* as a concession brought about by the problems of modern times. Regarding Hildesheimer's view (which is not without ambiguities), see my *Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy* (London, 1999), 76 n. 2.]
7. Gruenberg alternates between the phrases *Torah im Derekh Eretz* and *Torah ve-Derekh Eretz*.
8. The sentence is ambiguous and its meaning might be that even the opponents of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* will acknowledge that this is "the lesser evil."

הנחיצות בהעמדת רבנים בעלי תורה ומדע לשמש בקדש במדינת ישראל

מלך שפירא

הנני מפרסם בזה מכתב אחד, וקטע מעוד מכתב, ששלח הגאון רבי יחיאל יעקב ווינברג לידידו הרב אליהו יונג, מי שהיה בשעתו סופר פורה ואחד מהרבנים החשובים בארצות הברית (מרא דאתרא של קהילת המרכז היהודי בניו יורק). יש לייחס חשיבות מיוחדת למכתבים אלו שבהם ביאר הרב ווינברג את דעתו על הנחיצות להעמיד רבנים יושבים על מדין שיהיו גם בעלי השכלה כללית כי רק רבנים כאלה יוכלו להתייחס היטב לדור החדש של העם היושב בציון, במדינת ישראל החדשה. תודתי נתונה לר׳ יהודה רוזנבלט שמסר לי צילומים ממכתבים אלו – המלבה״ד מלך שפירא.

ב״ה יום א׳ כ״ז בתמוז תשט״ו

לידי״נ וגדל [?] מכובדי הרב הג׳ חכם וסופר דגול וכו׳ מהרר״א יונג שליט״א

את מכתבי׳ קבלתי בתודה רבה. אני מצטער צער רב על שנבצרה ממני היכולת, מחמת עכובים שונים, לבוא ולהתעלס בחברתו הנעימה. ברצוני להזדמן עמו בשעת חזירתו אם בציריך או במקום אחר מתאים לו ביותר. ויודיעני נא את המקום ואת היום להזדמנותנו הבאה אי״ה, ועכשי׳ אני בא בשאלת חכם ואוהב נאמן כמותו. אני מצרף כאן את מכתבו של פרופ׳ ליברמן ומתוכו יראה שיש תקוה כי האקדמי׳ תרצה לקבל את האחריות להוצאת ספרי, ואני שואל לדעתו אם יש לסמוך ע״ז. ואמנם יש לי עצה אחרת, והיינו שאיגוד הקהלות בשווייץ או אגודת הרבנים בשווייץ תקבל עלי׳ הוצאת ספרי. והם יפנו בבקשה אל הקונפירינציא, אלא שיש לי היסוסים בזה. איני רוצה שהדבר יתפרסם, ובין חברי אגודת הרבנים יש רב אחד שאוהב לפטפט ולספר לכל, וגם אני חושש שרב זה יבוא אלי בבבקשה שאשתדל גם בשבילו ...[1] וד״ל. ולכן יחווה נא לי דעתו בזה, כי כת״ר חכם ומבין מדעתו ויוכל ליעצני איזוהי הדרך הטובה ביותר.

ועוד שאלה: אני מצרף כאן מכתב שני של הסוכנות ומשרד הדתות בדבר הקמת בימ״ד לרבנים ומורים בירושלים עיה״ק. והנה אף שהם כותבים שהמוסד החדש יעמיד רבנים בשביל ארצות הגולה, מ״מ ברי לי שהם מתכוונים להעמיד רבנים בשביל א״י, כי בארצות הגולה ישנם בכל ארץ וארץ מוסדות משלהם ואינם זקוקים לרבנים שיחונכו בא״י. ולא אכחד מה שבלבי: סובר אני כי גם בא״י צריך לדאוג לרבנים בעלי השכלה גבוהה, כי

1. הנקודות במקור.

הרבנים חניכי הישיבות והכוללים אינם מתאימים כלל וכלל לתעודה הגדולה של הנהגת הדור החדש ההולך וקם בארץ ישראל החדשה. אבל ברור כי רבני א״י מסוג הישן וכן ראשי הישיבות יתנגדו למוסד החדש ויצאו במלחמה נגדו. ולי אין כח ורצון לעמוד במלחמה, ובפרט שאני ידיד וחבר לכל הרמי״ם שבארץ ועלי יתרעמו ביחוד, שאני נותן יד למפורר תורה כביכול. הם ירימו קול שרוצים להחריב את הישיבות חלילה, ואי אפשר להתוכח עמהם בזה, כי לא ישמעו כלל להוכחות שבהגיון.

בכ״ז אני רוצה לשמוע גם בזה את חוות דעתו של מר, שהרי גם כת״ר הוא באותו מצב כמוני, מצד אחד הוא אוהב חכמה ודעת ורוצה בהתקדמות רוחנית ומדעית של רבני ישראל ומצד שני לבו אדוק ורתום לישיבות ולרבנים הזקנים מטעמים שברגש ובאהבת מסורת אבות ומורים.

אני כותב בקיצור נמרץ, אבל יספיק לחכם שכמותו. דורנו הוא דור המעבר, צריך להעביר את היהדות הדתית למצב חדש עם תנאים ונסבות חדשות שלא ידעום הדורות הקודמים. ואנחנו אנשי דור הביניים שלבם קשור לעבר ולכל מחמדיו ועינם צופי׳ בחרדה גדולה לעתיד המתרקם במדינה החדשים [!] מה קשה להם העברה זו! ...[2]

וד׳ יראנו בנחמת ציון וירושלים

ידידו אוהבו
יחיאל יעקב וו״ב

P.S. נא להחזיר לי שני המכתבים הרצופים.

במכתב נוסף להרב יונג, מב׳ דר״ח אלול תשט״ז, כתב הרב ווינברג:

היום ביקר אצלי מר ד״ר נעבענצאהל מירושלים, דירקטור של הבנק הלאומי בא״י ושל בנק הדאור [!] שם, אדם חשוב מאד ויר״ש ואוהב תורה. גם הוא קובל על מחסור של רבנים מלומדים היודעים פרק בהוויות העולם ויכולים להשפיע על הנוער. אבל החרדים והרבנים מן הטיפוס הישן מתקוממים נגד כל תיקון במוסדות החינוך לרבנים ורוצים להשאיר את הישיבות בצביונן הקדום. זהו באמת מצב טראגי מאד, כי באמת המזיגה של תורה והשכלה חילונית היא מהדברים הקשים ביותר, וחסרים אנשים גדולים שמוכשרים להפעילה בלא נזק ללימוד התורה ובלא קיפוח של היראה התמימה. ועל כגון דא אמרו חז״ל: מן השמים ירחמו![3]

2. הנקודות במקור
3. יבמות יב ע״ב, מב ע״א, עבודה זרה יח ע״א, ועוד.