
I remember a moment when it was clear to me I was on a crossroads, shutting the door on a way of life that would be permanently cut off to me. When I began my first year of rabbinical school at JTS, I befriended a woman who was in her preparatory year for entering rabbinical school. In search of a more intensive text experience she took the next year and attended Drisha. At the end of that year we met for coffee and she told me of her decision to become Orthodox and not to return to JTS. Of course it was a decision that initially I was quite threatened by. How could you abandon me?—I thought. How can you abandon this fight of women to be counted?

The Road Not Taken

But I did not utter these words aloud. Instead I continued to listen. And so did she. While she was not betraying me, I felt betrayed by her choice. At some point I came to a different conclusion: we were both choosing our losses. They were very different losses but losses nevertheless. I was jealous that she could be part of a life that I could never return to. I was in the midst of mourning the community I left behind. I missed the passion of its religious life and its naturalness. She was giving up the possibility of becoming a rabbi, of counting in a *minyan*, of a freer hand in the play of theology.

When she acknowledged what I said—that we were both choosing our losses, I felt deeply gratified. While making the decision to become Orthodox she did not feel the need to invalidate the choice she was leaving behind; she did not feel the need to denigrate my Jewish way—the room I chose. I've made my bed in the Conservative room of the house, thankful for its gifts and blessings. But still I dream of the room I moved out of. I still hope that some of its gifts will find its way to where I live now. ●

🌿 Endthoughts 🌿

On the morality and consistency

Alan J. Yuter

The Israeli Labor government seems to have difficulty distinguishing between the terrorist's opposition to the State's integrity and the political opposition to the ruling

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government's policies. Chaim Ramon, Minister of the Interior, announced on ABC's Nightline that Labor intended to "crush the opposition," using language more appropriate for military opponents than political opponents. By applying the "Administrative Detention" law, people may be jailed, without being able to defend themselves, with the charges labeled "state secrets." Shmuel Cytron, Rabbi Aryeh Friedman, Baruch Marzel and recently, Rabbi Yitshaq Ginsbergh, a Hasidic rabbi whose religious nationalist ideology is in radical conflict with the current government's policies, have been subjected to "administrative detention."

If it is argued that these right wing Jews use inflammatory language, it must be remembered that Labor government appointed Professor Moshe Zimmerman to chair "the Committee for History Curricular Reform." Zimmerman had compared Orthodox Jewish children to Hitler's youth. If it is argued that those who ask for citizen's rights for the Israeli right were silent when Arab "rights" were being curtailed, we would do well to remember that it is one matter to be vigilant over a hostile population with which one is at war, and quite another to apply the laws of the State against that segment of the population which disagrees with the views of the party in power.

We have now learned that the charges against the "Women in Green" were dropped when a video tape revealed that the police had perjured themselves in order to obtain political convictions. In western democracies, the police are but an arm of the Department of Justice; for Labor government Israel, the police serve as an extension of the State. To do anything that will endanger the longevity of the government is an attack on the very vision of Israel that is the view of those in power. But, this use of power is pagan. When people in power use the office of power as personal privilege, their right to that power has been irrevocably compromised.

Both American civilization and Torah law are based on the notion that there are human rights which the State is not authorized to violate. The potential abuse of state power in American law is limited by the right of people to know the charges for which they are held. In Torah law, the king is subject to the law. The notion that the State is *ubber alles* is foreign to the rabbinic and prophetic concepts of State.

The Right Of The Right

It is not without irony that a generation ago, the Israel Left authored a volume called *Siah Lohamim*, the musings of military men and women who confronted the issue of *tohorat ha-nesheq*, the purity of arms. A sense of guilt is felt when shooting at the enemy. If contemporary Israeli

Jews are concerned about the purity of arms, it would do well to concern itself with the purity of politics, and not use the police to intimidate those who advocate through peaceful protest a change in the government. Likewise, liberal Judaism in America, in both Conservative and Reform varieties, often speak about "pluralism" and autonomy. Those American Jewish thinkers who are committed to pluralism as a matter of principle would do well to support the *right* of the Israeli Right to speak its mind without fear of intimidation or reprisal. I am not here advocating the position of the Israeli Right; I am calling on the *liberals* of American and Israeli Jewish societies to practice what they preach consistently and forthrightly. The greatest protection that a free society can make in its quest for spiritual freedom is the toleration of political dissent. To do otherwise is to spawn a culture of political reprisals whenever governments change, and this would endanger the freedom created by democracy and the rule of law.

When one Jew assaults another in the abuse of power, that Jew is behaving wickedly. It makes no difference whether the abuser is Yigal Amir or an unnamed policeman who is "following orders." It is of no consequence whether the wielder is wearing a skull cap or is bare-headed. Jews living in the second half of the 20th century do not "just follow orders." One weighs those orders before obeying them. We also should be addressing a "higher authority." This disobedient streak is not only consistent with the modern mood, it is demanded by the Torah of Moses. ●

But others say about...

Mi-Sheberakh

Any meaningful discussion on the efficacy of a *mi-sheberakh* must move on to the overriding question of Eliezer Finkleman (*Sh'ma* 26/511), namely "Can God 'do' anything?" While I agree that "ancient paradoxes of theology do not stand ready to be solved," we desperately need a much more plausible version of transcendence than the weak one we offer the increasingly amoral world around us, that "God works in mysterious ways we humans cannot fathom."

That's too easy to refute. Proof abounds on all sides—daily, everywhere—that a Transcendent Power that punishes and rewards does not exist. One doesn't need to cite the Holocaust for proof. Any earthquake that ever

❖ ❖ ❖ Ta sh'ma ❖ ❖ ❖

We invite you to send us your favorite text and comment. Submissions should not exceed 200 words. Be sure to include proper citation of sources. Hebrew will appear in transliteration.

Ed Levin

God tested Abraham.

GENESIS 22:1

God tested Abraham by requesting the sacrifice of his son Isaac. If this test is understood as a test of devotion, Abraham passed. But on another level, if this was a test of Abraham's moral sense, whether he would question the justice of sacrificing his son, Abraham failed. Abraham had previously demonstrated this moral sense by arguing with God about the possible burning of the innocents with the guilty in Sodom. Why did he not argue with God about the planned burning of his son Isaac?

Abraham may have been incensed that God would test his moral fiber yet again in such a dire way. He may have decided to turn the tables, to test God's fiber, cynically returning the onus to God to save the day. Abraham failed this test by tiring of the moral challenge. He refused to engage God once again in a moral discussion.

Our moral senses are tested again and again. We must continue to respond with genuine concern. After this test, God did not speak to Abraham again. The lesson of the *Akedah* may be that to keep in contact with God, what is necessary is not blind obedience, but an inner sense of justice and constancy, and overcoming the anger, fear and cynicism that impedes the continued expression of that justice.

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killed one innocent child should be proof enough. We might never know what God *is*, but it seems clear, what He *is not*.

What version of God, then can bring us closer to the truth? Reb Menachem Mendle of Vitebsk suggests one, most succinctly: "Man," he said, "is the language of God!" That suggests that God can only speak, and act, through humans!

Perhaps, after creating the universes, God signed off by breathing Himself—as a soul, with free will—into humans; and anything and everything that ever happened, is happening, or ever will happen, is a product of human choices. When they choose to act as God inside prompts them, miracles occur, such as the Ten Commandments, Magna Carta, the US Constitution. And when they choose *not* to, either as the killers or those who don't stop them, a Holocaust occurs.

Such a view of God seems much better to match the way things happen, yet allows us to continue to be grateful, for Creation, and for that spark inside us all, that is there for the choosing. In that light, a *mi-sheberakh* become solely an expression of concern by a congregation (each responding to that spark inside) that for that reason alone might give comfort to invalid and family.

Shlomo Stillerman
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Book reviews

Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist Yossi Klein Halevi. Little Brown. \$22.95.

I remember well the constant irritation Halevi's youthful guerilla journalism caused me but at least his bourgeoisification didn't make him an investment banker lover of Newt. An Israeli writer now, he tells his story with becoming irony and a decent moral edge.

The Word Noah Benshea. Random House. \$25.

Some people think Cuisinart gefilte fish superior to the chopped version. They will like this "Spiritual Sourcebook" of "Jewish Wisdom Through Time" as filtered through the anthologizer's positive thinking.

The Jewish Religion: A Companion Louis Jacobs. Oxford. \$39.95

The astonishingly broad learning of the traditionalistic British sage has often illumined Jewish intellectual life. Now he gives us an outstanding one-man encyclopedia of Judaism, 50 people, texts, practices, books, places, and ideas, you will benefit from consulting.

Embracing the Stranger Ellen Jaffe McClain. Basic, \$25. **Preserving Jewishness in Your Family** Alan Silverstein. Aronson.

McClain (*sic*) makes the case for not turning a cold shoulder to the intermarried, while Silverstein moves on to making that family robustly Jewish. Both are highly practical, talking about situations they know well. Both are partisan, the former summoning substantial data to show Jewish fearfulness is unwarranted. The latter responds to the questions people ask with down-to-earth, practical, welcoming answers. Both may have somewhat limited appeal, the one because of its one-sidedness, the other by its steady focus on Conservative Judaism.

Opening the Inner Gates Edward Hoffman, ed. Shambhala. \$16.

Setting a fine tone with his own two chapters, Hoffman has gathered a number of contemporary teachers of Jewish spirituality-mysticism to give some insight into their unique takes on the Jewish version of the "perennial philosophy." Eminently readable and instructive.

Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe

David Ruderman. Yale. \$30.

Search Out the Land

Sheldon and Judith Godfrey. McGill-Queens. \$34.95.

Stretch a bit to read these academic histories. I reveled in the intellectual history so elegantly and eruditely explicated by Ruderman. A stunning performance. The Godfrey's account of the early days of Canadian Jewry (1740-1867) nicely recounts how a major community came into being and, for us in the States, suggests what our lives might be like had Washington not won.

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