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L'hitraot

It has been my great pleasure, a source of profound fulfillment, to have served as the founding editor of Menorah Review, now in its 83rd issue. I am retiring within the next year, and this is a time of transition. Hopefully, my successor will continue publishing. But in this special world of academic freedom, it will be his/her choice. Although an editor should be able to articulate even the most difficult and delicate themes, I am sincerely at a loss of words to express my gratitude to all the contributing editors of this publication, some of whom have been with us and supporting me right from the beginning.

A special thanks to my editorial consultant, Dr. Clifford Edwards, who has been my partner, advocate, writer, and friend from the beginning. With a slight "disruption of service," I hope to be an avid reader of future issues. Although "administration" sounds rather impersonal, the administration of Virginia Commonwealth University has been a constant support, especially the team at University Relations, who make every issue appear on the Internet.

L'hitraot...

Jack D. Spiro

A Model of Courage

A Review Essay by Alison Rose

Books in Brief

Compassion and Truth Meet (Psalm 85.11)

By Jack D. Spiro

Four Poems

By Richard Sherwin

From the Classics

Judaism and a Heliocentric Universe

A review essay by Frederic Krome

Two Essays by Peter Haas

Zachor:

Samuel Usque, Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel

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A Model of Courage

A Review Essay by Alison Rose

*And when my eyes begin to flutter and close
I shall be sad; but why should my courage shake?
If there is darkness, why then, I will sleep,
If light, I shall wake (100). — Sam Levinger*

Laurie Levinger's book, *Love and Revolutionary Greetings: An Ohio Boy in the Spanish Civil War* (Eugene, OR: WPF & Stock Publishers) is a labor of love for an uncle she never met, but whom she came to know intimately through his writings, her research on his life and death, and her search for his final resting place. Sam Levinger, son of Reform rabbi, Lee J. Levinger, and writer, educator and Jewish communal leader, Elma E. Levinger, and student at the Ohio State University, was one of approximately 2800 Americans who went to Spain to fight as a volunteer in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the American contingent of the International Brigades, during the Spanish Civil War. Sam was mortally wounded in the battle of Belchite in September 1937 and died in a field hospital at the age of twenty. This book tells the story of Sam's life and death primarily through his own writings and those of his mother, supplemented by other eyewitness accounts of the Spanish Civil War. Sam's experiences, idealism, and character come through vividly as does the strong bond between Sam and his mother Elma.

Levinger opens by describing her discovery of a box of Sam and Elma's writings in her father's basement in 2001. The chapters that follow, arranged more or less chronologically, reveal some of Sam's earlier experiences and influences. We learn of his sense of adventure as young child, an encounter with anti-Semitism, the impact of the Great Depression, exposure to students' discussions of politics in his home (his father was the director for the OSU Hillel Foundation), his family's travels to Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Europe, his involvement with the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), and his arrest at a coal miners' strike at the age of 17. Of Elma, we learn of her devotion to her writ-

ing, her pacifism, her war-wounded father (he had lost both legs), and the loss of her first child, Moses, to influenza during the First World War in France where Lee was serving as a chaplain.

The bulk of the chapters focus on Sam's life as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: his preparation, travel, training, and fighting. He was twice wounded and although according to the Brigade rules should have thus returned home, he escaped from the hospital and made his way back to rejoin his unit at the Battle of Belchite. Although he was assigned to a relatively safe task, he volunteered for a more dangerous one and received his fatal injury. Sam's letters home depict his sense of purpose, the loyalty of fellow Brigade members, and the importance of their cause, while downplaying the seriousness of the dangers and deprivations under which they lived with his light and casual tone. Touching accounts of others' war stories, such as his portrayal of the death of one of his comrades, Jim, and an encounter with a Spanish woman in a small village who had lost both of her sons, provide a more emotional perspective on the costs of the war (67-73).

The later chapters focus on Sam's final days and death written primarily from Elma's imagination, the aftermath of Sam's death, and the author's quest to find Sam's final resting spot. Included are letters received by the family, reflections of Sam's sister Leah on the loss of her brother, more recent responses to Sam's story, and other interpretations of the Spanish Civil War. Levinger recounts that she began her search for Sam when Leah had a vision, shortly before her death, of Sam and Elma waiting for her. Through research Levinger was able to confirm the location and circumstances of Sam's death, but in order to find where he was buried she had to travel to Spain. When Levinger found Sam's final resting place in the town cemetery in La Puebla de Híjar where the men who died in the field hospital were buried, she chanted the Kaddish, and scattered Leah's ashes. She said, "Uncle Sam, I wish I'd known you. You gave us a model of courage, fighting for what you believe in, making a commitment and putting your body on the line. You lived your ideals and your passions" (150).

While there are a few references to Sam's Jewish upbringing, one is left wondering how Sam really felt about his Jewish identity. Most of the material referring to Judaism is actually from Elma. For example, the discussion of Sam's encounter with anti-Semitism and his enjoyment of religious practices at home on pages 7-8 is presented under the heading "Sam" as if it were his words, but the footnote indicates that the passage is actually from one of Elma's two unpublished novels about Sam, *Death in the Mountains*. The only indication of Sam's feelings about Judaism comes from his letter to be delivered "in case of death," where he reaffirms his commitment and lack of regret and describes death as "unfortunate" but necessary. In an effort to console his parents, he reminds them of their two surviving children and their "extremely valuable work." He writes, "I am less able to evaluate father's work, though I realize its great worth; but in my field, that of an author, I can say I think mother will become one of the most valuable authors of the generation" (158). While this statement indicates respect for his father's work, he does not seem to relate to it as well as to that of his mother. Together with his general silence on Jewish topics throughout his writings, one might conclude Sam was somewhat ambivalent his Jewish identity.

On a related note, the story of the Jews' role in the International Brigades is left largely untold. A passage from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade publication, *No Pasarán* describes the members of the Brigade as "Black and White, Jew and Gentile, they came from every corner of the U.S" (20) but the Jewish participation in the Brigades could be expanded upon. According to Derek Penslar, at least one-fifth of the International Brigades' 30,000 volunteers were Jews, and 38 percent of the American contingent was Jewish. A Jewish brigade was formed in December 1937 within the Polish brigade and named after Naftali Botwin, a Polish communist who had been executed in 1925. Jews supported the Spanish Republicans as part of a larger struggle against fascism, Nazism, and anti-Semitism; they were also motivated by their sympathies with leftist political movements and their desires to counter stereotypes of Jewish cowardliness. [1]

As an unfortunate side note, I found that anti-Semitic groups in the U.S. seized upon Jews' role in the Spanish Civil War, and specifically upon the honors paid to Sam after his death, in their attacks on American Jews as anti-Christian communist sympathizers. [2]

I first learned about and became interested in Sam's story when I was writing an article on Jewish confirmations; I came across the book *Folk and Faith: The Confirmant's Guide Book* by Lee and Elma Levinger at the OSU library and learned that they had a son who died fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Levinger's book was a welcome source for me to find out more about Sam and his family and I read it with enthusiasm. It provides both an eyewitness account of the turbulent times and a meaningful tribute to Sam and the other volunteers who gave their lives to the fight against fascism. On a personal note, this book resonated with me on many levels. First, I currently live in Columbus near to where Sam grew up. Also, as a mother of a son around Sam's age, I can only begin to imagine what Elma must have gone through and wonder how she was able to continue on with her life and work after Sam's death. I believe she was driven by his memory to carry on.

I will conclude with Elma's poignant words:

And there are two worlds — the world we live in and the world we cannot see. If we could bridge the gap — but we cannot. Yet sometimes the veil between the worlds is so very thin. You walk beside me and in every weakness I lean upon your arm — so hard, so strong, so young. I gave that I have — and now nothing can take you from me.

When he came in, he always called Mother are you there?

Sometimes I still pretend

I hear him.

And I answer, yes son I'm here (151).

[1] Derek Penslar, *Jews and the Military: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013): 200-207.

[2] For example, John Merrick Church, *B'nai B'rith: An International Anti-Christian, Pro-Communist Jewish Power* (pamphlet, 1938).

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Books in Brief

***The Case against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, edited by Cary Nelson & Gabriel Noah Brahm.**

New York: Global Jewish Advocacy

How should we understand the international debate about the future of Israel and the Palestinians? Can justice be achieved in the Middle East? Until now, there was no single place for people to go to find detailed scholarly essays analyzing proposals to boycott Israel and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement of which they are a part.

This book for the first time provides the historical background necessary for informed evaluation of one of the most controversial issues of our day — the struggle between two peoples living side-by-side but with conflicting views of history and conflicting national ambitions. This book encourages empathy for all parties, but it also takes a cold look at what solutions are realistic and possible. In doing so, it tackles issues, like the role of anti-Semitism in calls for the abolition of the Jewish state, that many have found impossible to confront until now. The book gathers essays by an international cohort of scholars from Britain, Israel, and the United States.

***The Heart of the Matter: Studies in Jewish Mysticism and Theology* by Arthur Green.**

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Judaism, like all the great religions, has a strand within it that sees inward devotion, the opening of the human heart to God's presence, to be the purpose of its entire edifice of praxis, liturgy, and way of life. This voice is not always easy to hear in a tradition where so much attention is devoted to the *how* rather than the *why* of religious living. The devotional claim, certainly a key part of Judaism's biblical heritage, has reasserted itself in the teachings of individual mystics and in the emergence of religious movements over the long course of Jewish

history. This volume represents Arthur Green's own quest for such a Judaism — as a rabbi, as a scholar, and as a contemporary seeker.

This collection of essays brings together Green's scholarly writings, centered on the history of early Hasidism, and his highly personal approach to a rebirth of Jewish spirituality in our own day. In choosing to present them in this way he asserts a claim that they are all of a piece. They represent one man's attempt to wade through history and text, language and symbol, and an array of voices both past and present while always focusing on the essential questions: "What does it mean to be a religious human being, and what does Judaism teach us about how to be one?" This, the author considers to be the heart of the matter.

***Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism.* Michael L. Morgan and Steven Weitzman, editors.**

Indiana University Press.

Over the centuries, the messianic tradition has provided the language through which modern Jewish philosophers, socialists, and Zionists envisioned a utopian future. Michael L. Morgan, Steven Weitzman, and an international group of leading scholars ask new questions and provide new ways of thinking about this enduring Jewish idea. Using the writings of Gershom Scholem, which ranged over the history of messianic belief and its conflicted role in the Jewish imagination, these essays put aside the boundaries that divide history from philosophy and religion to offer new perspectives on the role and relevance of messianism today.

***To the Gates of Jerusalem* by James G. McDonald and Norman J.W. Gorda.**

Indiana University Press.

This volume, the third in a series of James G. McDonald's edited diaries and papers, covers his work from 1945, with the formation of the Anglo-American Committee, through 1947, with the United Nations' deci-

sion to partition Palestine between Jews and Arabs. The “Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry Regarding the Problems of European Jewry and Palestine” was a group charged with finding a solution to the problem of European Jewish Refugees in the context of the increasingly unstable British Mandate in Palestine. McDonald’s diaries and papers offer the most thorough personal account we have of the Committee and the politics surrounding it. His diary is part travelogue through the desolation of postwar Europe and a Middle East being transformed by new Jewish settlements and growing Arab intransigence. McDonald maintained discreet contact with Zionist and moderate Arab leaders throughout the Committee’s hearings and deliberations. He was instrumental in the recommendation that 100,000 Jewish refugees enter Palestine and won President Truman’s trust in order to counter attempts to nullify the report’s recommendations.

Compassion and Truth Meet (Psalm 85.11)

By Jack D. Spiro

"...affection and care for the old, the incurable, the helpless are the true gold mines of a culture." (1)

After her servants found the infant Moses in a basket floating on the Nile, Pharaoh's daughter made the auspicious decision of adopting him as her son. Many years later, when he was a young adult, saw an Egyptian taskmaster ruthlessly beating one of the Hebrew slaves. Infuriated by this brutal treatment of a human being, Moses struck the Egyptian and then escaped to save his own life. In the desert a tribe of shepherds gave him refuge. While living and working among them, he met Zipporah and married her. (2)

Embellishing the biblical narrative, the rabbinic Midrash adds its own account. (3) As Moses was tending his father-in-law Jethro's flock in the noon heat, a young lamb ran away. Moses followed it until it came to a shaded area where it found a pool of water and stopped to drink. Approaching the lamb, Moses said: "I didn't realize that you ran away because you were thirsty. And now you must be tired." So Moses put the young animal on his shoulders and carried it back to the flock. It was then that God chose Moses for the momentous task of leading the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt to freedom and eventual nationhood. God then spoke to him: "Because you showed compassion to one lamb in the flock, you will surely be compassionate in tending my flock, the people of Israel." According to the Rabbis, the primary criterion for appointing Moses as leader of the Israelites, after four centuries of enslavement, was the depth of his compassion.

Although the story is from rabbinic literature, the concept of *hesed* ("compassion" in Hebrew) is based on many biblical passages. But the Rabbis extracted the basic value from the Bible and enriched it with original meanings. There is hardly a rabbinic idea that is not based on a biblical concept, character, commandment, or event. The rabbinic

imagination, however, transformed every verse of the Bible into a creative tradition of multiple interpretations, such as the story of Moses and the lamb. The primary interpretation of the biblical *hesed* is known rabbinically as *gemilut hasadim*. Its translation comes through best by examining it in several contexts.

Simeon the Just, an early pioneer in the development of pharisaic-rabbinic literature, greeted Alexander the Great when he entered Jerusalem. Knowing that Alexander was not only a warrior but a student of philosophy and curious about the ideas of other peoples, Simeon may have explained some of the basic tenets of Judaism, among which was this statement attributed to him: "The world rests on three things: Torah, worship, and *gemilut hasadim*." (4) The notion of a foundation on which the world rests occurs several times in pharisaic and rabbinic literature. It appears to mean that without certain values, the world of humanity could not endure. They are the desiderata of humane living, the essential ingredients of living in community. Human existence is severely diminished, even endangered, without moral values — more specifically, for our purposes, without *gemilut hasadim*; that is, performing acts of compassion and love for one another.

It is an idea deeply rooted in the soil of Judaism and nurtured through stories, homilies, and laws. With regard to many biblical values which are not explained in any detail, the Rabbis often asked themselves how these values could be lived in community. For example, the prophet Micah simply says that God requires *ahavat hesed* (a love of *hesed* or "compassion") from us, but he doesn't elucidate what he means by this kind of love. It's up to the Rabbis to do so; as teachers, they saw this as one of their sacred obligations. So important was the value to them that they even believed it was "equal to all other commandments." (5) There are similar passages which seem to be hyperbolic, but are intended to point to the paramount significance of this ethical concept, such as the following: The entire Torah begins and ends with *gemilut hasadim*; for instance, at the beginning of the Torah God "himself" makes clothing for Adam and Eve to wear [Genesis 3.21], and at the end God "himself" arranges for the burial of Moses [Deuteronomy

35.6]. So, *a fortiori*, human beings must emulate the deeds of God.
(6)

To put it another way, nothing is more godly than *gemilut hasadim*. The very essence of Torah — i.e., Judaism itself — is synonymous with acts of compassion. It is this value that must resonate through all the observances and commandments of the Jewish tradition. When the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by the Romans, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was reflecting on what this crumbling of the Jewish world would mean for the future of Judaism. Rabbi Joshua, his younger colleague, saw the Temple in ruins and, consumed with despair, cried out: “Woe unto us! The place where Israel found atonement for its transgressions is destroyed.” Rabbi Yochanan comforted Joshua by saying: “Don’t grieve, my son, we have a way to atone which is just as effective: *gemilut hasadimz*.” (7) The Rabbis were successful in offering their people three practices in place of the centuries-old biblical institutions of Temple, priesthood, and sacrificial offerings: learning (*talmud torah*), worship (*tefillah*), and acts of compassion (*gemilut hasadimz*) — practices already mentioned by Simeon the Just and in the process of developing for three centuries before the destruction of Jerusalem. As a result, Judaism was able to make the arduous but redemptive climb out of the Temple ruins, from one way of life to another, from biblical to rabbinic Judaism, from the death of an uprooted culture to renewal as people of the book.

In their transformative journey, the Rabbis discovered another essential characteristic of *gemilut hasadimz* embedded in Genesis 47.29: “And when the days of Israel’s death approached, he called his son Joseph and said to him: ‘If I have not found favor in your eyes put, I pray you, your hand under my thigh so that you will show me mercy (*hesed*) and truth (*emet*); bury me not, I pray you, in Egypt.’” Rashi’s commentary on this passage (8) concentrates on the biblical phrase, *hesed v’emet*, translating it quite freely as “truly disinterested kindness,” adding that by this is meant “one must not hope for a reward” in performing acts of compassion (*gemilut hasadim*).

Here, then, is the uniquely Jewish idea of compassion: the difference between charity (known as *tsedakah*) and compassion (*hesed*), summarized in this passage from the Talmud: “*Tsedakah* is performed with one’s money, given only to the poor; *gemilut hasadimz* is given to both poor and wealthy. *Tsedakah* can be provided only for the living; *gemilut hasadimz* to both the living and the dead.” (9) One is monetary and can be carried out impersonally; the other comes directly from one human being to another, performed with caring and commitment.

Note the rabbinic story above about God caring for the living Adam and Eve, but also for the deceased Moses. In fact, one midrashic compilation known as *Tanchuma* makes this even more explicit: “The highest form of *gemilut hasadimz* is that undertaken towards the dead, because there can never be any thought of reward from the recipient. A poor person may one day be in a position to repay his benefactor, but the dead person cannot repay; moreover, the deceased needs the help of the living....” (10)

Another distinction between *tsedakah* and *gemilut hasadimz* is in the area of legislation. The former can be legislated because it is considered the right of every human being to receive the necessities of life if a person is impoverished. *Tsedakah* relates to *tsedek*, which means “justice.” Providing an individual with material things essential for self-preservation is a matter of justice, which can be and is incorporated in a corpus of Jewish laws. *Gemilut hasadimz*, however, is beyond legislation. One relates to human rights, the other to human needs — a subtle but important distinction, expressed in this story by Rabbi Moshe Leib (1745-1807), a Hasidic rabbi from the Ukrainian town of Sasov: “I learned how we must truly love our neighbor from a conversation I overheard between two villagers. The first said: ‘Tell me, dear friend, do you love me?’ The second: ‘I love you deeply.’ The first: ‘Do you know, my friend, what gives me pain?’ The second: ‘How can I know what gives you pain?’ The first: ‘If you don’t know what gives me pain, how can you say that you truly love me?’ Understand, then, to love — truly to love — means to know what brings pain to your fellow

human being.” (11)

There is another distinction between *tsedakah* and *gemilut hasadimz*. Since *tsedakah* is embodied in Jewish law, there are legal limitations to what a person can give. The Talmud specifically states that the limit is 20% of our possessions. (12) *Gemilut hasadimz* can either be distinguished altogether from *tsedakah*, but it can also be understood as the apex of *tsedakah*, which is the way Moses Maimonides interprets it. The great legalist-philosopher spelled out eight degrees of *tsedakah* and made the following expression of *gemilut hasadimz* the highest rung of the ladder: helping a person to help himself; lending him money to open a business (he can pay back the money, but he can't give the business); helping him join in a partnership; finding him a job so that he can support himself and have no further need of *tsedakah*. *Gemilut hasadimz* is still distinctive because it helps a person avoid the need for *tsedakah*.

Judaism is considered a religion of law, sometimes even criticized for being narrowly legalistic. Extremist tendencies, of course, exist in every religious tradition. But it is also within the mainstream of Judaism to understand that our lives cannot be lived by a legal code alone, by mindless or even mindful obedience to legislation.

The value of *gemilut hasadimz* is also subsumed under the comprehensive principle of *middat hasidut* — the quality of compassion — as opposed to *middat hadin* : the principle of rules, laws, and statutes. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (1194-1270) pointed out that a person can live his life strictly by the letter of the law and still be a villain. (13) After Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai survived the obliteration of Jerusalem, he had already applied the later reflection of Moses ben Nachman to this devastating experience when he wrote that “Jerusalem was destroyed only because its inhabitants...did not act beyond the letter of the law (*lifnim mishurat hadin*).” (14)

This important rabbinic principle does not mean that *gemilut hasadim* supplants or replaces the law. It is only meant to serve as a reminder

that law codes cannot encompass all the moral issues and challenges of life. The compassionate life cannot be circumscribed or even defined by legislative parameters. A Jew is expected to carry out the demands of *halachah* (rabbinic codes of law), imperatives that are clearly prescribed in unambiguous detail. But the legal code of Judaism “accepts” its own limitations in the creation of a moral stance that transcends law. This understanding of human behavior in relation to others was so important to rabbinic authorities that they found a biblical sanction for it in Exodus 18.20. Jethro advises Moses on leading the Israelites and says to him: “...enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow.” In a talmudic passage, this is what the biblical phrases mean to Rabbi Yosef: “Make known to them” signifies how to make a living; “the way” refers to *gemilut hasadimz*; “they are to go” represents visiting the sick and burying the dead; “the practices” means the precise letter of the law (*hadin*); “they are to follow” refers to *lifnim mishurat hadin* (going beyond the letter of the law). (15)

Rabbi ben Nachman confirms this position of an earlier colleague by saying that the Torah, the laws of God, cannot encompass every possible situation that occurs in human intercourse, every moral problem that can challenge a community. A story in the Talmud relates to this reality. Some porters who had been working for Rabba bar Huna broke a barrel of wine while carrying it. Because they had evidently been somewhat negligent, the strict letter of the law (*shurat hadin*) would have held them liable for the damage. They had been remiss in performing their assigned tasks and were, therefore, not entitled to their pay. By way of guaranteeing restitution, Rabba held onto their clothes, which had been left in his possession as surety. Then “they came and told Rav who in turn told Rabba: ‘Return their clothes to them.’ Rabba asked if this was the *din* (strict law). ‘Yes,’ Rav answered [quoting Proverbs], *that you may walk in the way of good human beings*. Rabba then returned their clothes, and they said to him: ‘We are poor, we have worked all day, and now we are hungry and left with nothing.’ So Rav said to Rabba: ‘Go and pay their wages!’ Rabba asked: ‘Is this also

the *din* ?' 'Yes,' replied Rav, 'and [quoting Proverbs again], *keep to the paths of the righteous.*'" (16)

Another talmudic sage, Rav Huna, interprets Psalm 145.17 ["The Lord is just (from *tsedek*) and compassionate (from *hesed*) in all his doings"]: "Initially God applies *tsedek*, but at the end he encounters the world with the principle of *hesed*, because the world could not exist without *hesed*. (17)

The 14th century Maggid Mishneh, a commentary on the Mishneh Torah, the classical compendium of Jewish law, states that the Torah could not command every detail of a person's life, which varies on the basis of time and the individual. But the Torah could and did establish two primary principles: one of *din* (laws that are universally applicable) and the other of *hesed* (the immeasurable expression of loving deeds). (18)

There is a further way that the Rabbis validated the driving power of *gemilut hasadimz*, of acting compassionately. Its traditional authority is embedded in the basic Jewish concept of *tselem Eloheem* (the image of God), living our lives in the divine image. Translating it more broadly but still accurately, living a godly life. (19) In what could be a humorous but sincere vein, Rabbi Yehudah ben Ilai refers to our emulation of God by living a godly life in his interpretation not only of the principle of *gemilut hasadimz* as the beginning and end of Torah, but also in relation to Adam and Eve's "wedding." Rabbi Yehudah said that God himself attended to the needs of the bride and actually served as "best man" at the wedding of the first couple. And he asks rhetorically, what other explanation can there be for the biblical passage, "And he [God] brought her unto the man?" (20)

A final interpretation of compassion in Judaism is its critical importance for human survival itself. Not being the "fittest" necessarily but the most caring is essential for the survival of the human community; or the "fittest" for human beings may be synonymous with being the most caring. Because we are more vulnerable in our infancy and for

a longer period of time than any other species, we could not survive without the loving and patient care of older generations. The benevolence of one generation must be passed on to the next for the assurance of continuity and perpetuation. Perhaps this is what the rabbinic author of another midrashic text meant when he wrote that the “first generations [of humanity] were given the most days and lived the longest lives...in order to see whether they would engage in *gemilut hasadimz* for their immediate forebears.” (21)

From beginning to end, the Torah — representing the entirety of Judaism — is concerned with *gemilut hasadimz* (from clothing the first couple to burying the first prophet). Similarly, according to Judaism, from the inception of life to its completion, deeds of compassion are the moral force guiding the human community, making the world a household of love. (22)

Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov was moved by the conversation of the two villagers whom he overheard in a tavern. Because he applied the lesson of that experience with an unwavering love for others in his daily conduct, the townspeople began referring to him as the “father of widows and orphans.” Of his many writings, this may be the most representative of our theme: “If someone comes to you and asks for your help, don’t turn him off with pious words, saying, ‘Have faith and take your troubles to God;’ but act as if there were no God, as if there were only one person in all the world who could help — only you.” (23)

But much further back in time than a Hasidic rabbi was answer was given as Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakki, the first Jew to hold the rabbinical title, emerged out of the rubble of Jerusalem with the Temple in ruins after the Romans destroyed the nation. One of his disciples cried out: “Woe unto us that our city, our Temple, our nation are all laid waste!” And Rabbi Yochanan said to him: “My son, do not grieve, we have something more effective than all this. “And what is that?” asked Joshua. Yochanan answered, quoting the prophet Hosea: “It is acts of compassion and not sacrificial offerings.” That will keep the Jewish people alive. So it did, so it has, so it will.

References:

1. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1972), 72.
2. Exodus 2.5-21
3. "Midrash" is a vast body of post-biblical literature consisting of rabbinic homilies and legends related to Jewish ethics and religious concepts compiled over a 1,000-year period. It is, in essence, the classical value system of Judaism. The story itself is found in *Midrash Exodus Rabba* 2.2.
4. *Talmud Bavli Yoma* 69a; *Mishnah Avot* 1.2.
5. *Talmud Yerushalmi Peach* 1.1.15c.
6. *Talmud Bavli Sota* 14a.
7. *Avot de Rabbi Natan Mishnah Avot* 1.2.
8. "Rashi" is an acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitschak (1040-1105). His biblical commentary became an indispensable guide for providing illuminating insights into biblical passages.
9. *Talmud Bavli Sukkah* 49b.
10. *Tanchuma B, Vayechi*
11. Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim: The later Masters* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1961), 86.
12. *Talmud Bavli Ketuvot* 50a.
13. Commentary on Leviticus 19.2
14. *Talmud Bavli Bava Metzia* 30b
15. *Talmud Bavli Bava Kama* 100a-b.
16. Proverbs 2.20, *Talmud Bavli Bava Metzia* 83a

17. *Talmud Bavli Rosh Hashanah* 17b.
18. *Maggid Mishneh, Shekhenim* 14.5.
19. See such biblical passages as Exodus 19.6, 8; Leviticus 19.1; Deuteronomy 28.9.
20. *Beresheet Rabba* 12.5; Genesis 2.22.
21. *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* 80, 86, 123.
22. *Talmud Bavli Bava Batra* 10a.
23. Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, 89.

Four Poems

By Richard Sherwin

New Eyes

with my new eyes my neighbors numbers clear
as if i ever wanted seeing them or them
i almost see the edge of Gd thru clouds
i never saw were there before and now
a terror settles in of worlds and men
i'd dimly felt before and barely bear
so this is what or something what they saw
once Gd had cut the veil from off their eyes
and heard the wax pulled out and shook untied
no mast to hold them up and off the rocks
when called to speak uncircumcized their flesh
their hearts their eyes unveiling holy breath
to everyone they never saw before
thru times beginnings ends and more

Who Laughs Last

Abraham laughed first.
In a dream perhaps but first.
Im past it, my wife's
past it, this covenanting
darkness smoke fire animals
and Gd promising
us children. Ninety-nine's past it.
So Abraham laughed.
Even between carcasses
and Gd he laughed. In a dream

he got away with
it. No recriminations.
From Gd or rabbis.
When Sarah laughed wide awake,
then Gd took laughter to task.
No matter silent,
no matter to herself, no
matter privacy,
tented, preparing Gds food,
invaded without escape.
Her covenanted
parts werent any easier
than Isaac to bear.
Recriminations. Laughter.
Hagar and Ishmael gone.

Saul and David

pity david and saul who fought as if
eternal enemies and not as pit
bulls chosen bred and bet on and then tossed
away a royal win and human loss
pity david and saul inflated by
the spirit of Gd sucked out and left to die
a hero on a hill savior in bed
betrayed by Gd and husked and just as dead
pity david and saul who touched by Gd
exalted and degraded israel
and judahs Temples risen twice twice felled
their suffering abandonments the cost
pity saul and david praise the Lord

what david wrote saul lived without the word

The Dancing Lords

what did shiva do to get condemned
to dance forever in a ring of fire
existence into universes men
pass in and out of darkness dreaming higher
lord of the dance he's labelled libelled so
if he cant stop the dance is lord of him
if he's the dance that must go on it's close
to hell he's trapped in beautiful and grim
no wonder rabbis wouldnt dance the tune
piper dancer actor shows in shows
better freedoms few and on parole
of Gd than all such timeless powers doomed
and me idolater par excellence
no shiva jesus pan can dance to sense
i'm out for Gd in all my life's confusions
commandments dancing me thru sins and virtues

From the Classics

***Guide for The Perplexed* by Moses Maimonides (Chapter 51)**

I will begin the subject of this chapter with a simile. A king is in his palace, and all his subjects are partly in the country, and partly abroad. Of the former, some have their backs turned towards the king's palace, and their faces in another direction; and some are desirous and zealous to go to the palace, seeking "to inquire in his temple," and to minister before him, but have not yet seen even the face of the wall of the house. Of those that desire to go to the palace, some reach it, and go round about in search of the entrance gate; others have passed through the gate, and walk about in the ante-chamber; and others have succeeded in entering into the inner part of the palace, and being in the same room with the king in the royal palace. But even the latter do not immediately on entering the palace see the king, or speak to him; for, after having entered the inner part of the palace, another effort is required before they can stand before the king — at a distance, or close by — hear his words, or speak to him. I will now explain the simile which I have made. The people who are abroad are all those that have no religion, neither one based on speculation nor one received by tradition. Such are the extreme Turks that wander about in the north, the Kushites who live in the south and those in our country who are like these. I consider these as irrational beings, and not as human beings; they are below mankind, but above monkeys, since they have the form and shape of man, and a mental faculty above that of the monkey.

Those who are in the country, but have their backs turned towards the king's palace, are those who possess religion, belief, and thought, but happen to hold false doctrines, which they either adopted in consequence of great mistakes made in their own speculations, or received from others who misled them. Because of these doctrines they recede more and more from the royal palace the more they seem to proceed. These are worse than the first class, and under certain circumstances it may become necessary to day them, and to extirpate their doctrines,

in order that others should not be misled.

Those who desire to arrive at the palace, and to enter it, but have never yet seen it, are the mass of religious people; the multitudes that observe the divine commandments, but are ignorant. Those who arrive at the palace, but go round about it, are those who devote themselves exclusively to the study of the practical law; they believe traditionally in true principles of faith, and learn the practical worship of God, but are not trained in philosophical treatment of the principles of the Law, and do not endeavor to establish the truth of their faith by proof.

Those who undertake to investigate the principles of religion have come into the ante-chamber; and there is no doubt that these can also be divided into different grades. But those who have succeeded in finding a proof for everything that can be proved, who have a true knowledge of God, so far as a true knowledge can be attained, and are near the truth, wherever an approach to the truth is possible, they have reached the goal, and are in the palace in which the king lives.

Judaism and a Heliocentric Universe

A review essay by Frederic Krome

New Heavens and A New Earth: The Jewish Reception of Copernican Thought by Jeremy Brown.

Oxford University Press

An oft-quoted anecdote tells of a seventeenth century Italian astronomer who reacted to Galileo's observations about the moons of Jupiter by saying:

These satellites of Jupiter are invisible to the naked eye, and therefore exercise no influence on the Earth, and therefore would be useless and therefore do not exist.

While the enlightened mind of the early twenty-first century might recoil at the astronomer's logic, the passage makes some sense in its early modern context. By necessity astronomy had to be an exact science, for the accurate charting of the heavens was necessary to the philosophy of prognostication (i.e. astrology). Actually knowing where the planets (known as the moveable stars) and the fixed stars were at any given point meant that you could chart their influence on earthy events. Therefore, since the moons of Jupiter were invisible without the telescope, and we should add were not mentioned in the ancient astronomical text or other authoritative sources, they could not have any role in prognostication. If they had no philosophical role, then why rock the boat and chart their existence? On a basic level, therefore, the anonymous Italian Astronomer was making a statement about both the source of authority and the impact of this information. For the Jews of Early Modern Europe, exact astronomical observations were also critical for calculating the beginning of the new lunar month and the lunar New Year, around which all religious life revolved. Indeed, the accurate calculations of the beginning of the month was considered a mitzvah, and as such the skill sets required to conduct such work were highly valued.

The Italian astronomer and his Jewish contemporaries shared some basic assumptions about the universe; the central shared belief was the Ptolemaic system. Over a millennium and a half old by the sixteenth century, the Ptolemaic vision of the universe regarded the earth as fixed in place, the center of a finite universe, with the sun and planets revolving around it. This geocentric universe was the result of a fusion of Greek Philosophy and Judeo-Christian traditions, in particular based on interpretations of the Hebrew bible. What then happened to this vision when Nicolas Copernicus published his revolutionary challenge to the Ptolemaic universe in 1543? How did the concept of a Heliocentric (sun centered) universe reshape the intellectual landscape of science and religion? Two additional questions can also be asked: what impact did the Copernican system have on Jewish thought? And why is that important? Jeremy Brown provides a tour de force of rabbis and their reaction to the heliocentric world, and in the process reveals why answering these questions is important.

Brown begins his study by examining the traditional Jewish understanding of the universe in the early modern world and the authoritative sources for this world view. The sources of authority should not surprise any student of Jewish thought, for they include Biblical text, the Talmud, and Maimonides. In their traditional readings all support, or at least seem to support, the geocentric vision of a fixed earth. Copernicus's challenge to the Ptolemaic universe threatened to remove the earth from the center and move it to the periphery, in more than just a physical sense. For the notion that the earth was a moving body, just like the other planets, also challenged the notion of special creation as elucidated in the Genesis narrative.

As Brown adroitly points out, this movement of the earth — both figurative and literally — meant a challenge to the generally accepted interpretation of the sources of authority in Jewish life. This is one of the critical themes running through his narrative, for what sources of authority can be considered authoritative when seeking to understand the shape of the universe goes to the heart of a larger question: how much did Jews know about the intellectual currents of the Scientific

Revolution? Starting in the sixteenth century a fundamental shift in European intellectual life was taking place, one that challenged conventional assumptions of the relationship between science and religion. What Brown reveals is that some Jewish religious thinkers were also involved in this redefinition of the relationship between Science and Religion.

Brown demonstrates that from the sixteenth century on to the present the rabbinic world is divided into two camps: pro and anti-Copernicus. Initially only a few rabbis, such as David Gans (1541-1613) even mentioned Copernicus, and even fewer accepted his theories. Among this later group the most notable was Joseph Solomon Delmedigo (1591-1655), who studied with Galileo. Delmedigo challenged the rabbinic world not only by accepting as authoritative the scientific method, independent of the Bible, for establishing facts about the natural world. He also set a pattern by arguing that if authoritative religious sources were read properly, then they would reveal support for the Copernican model. These two attributes — acceptance of the scientific method and the “proper” reading of Jewish sources — characterize the pro-heliocentric Rabbinic response up to the present day. Brown charts a very slow process for a majority of rabbis to accept Copernicus, although the Jews were not necessarily unique in this. We tend to regard history as a linear process, with a clear movement in one direction when it comes to something like scientific truth. In this vision, Copernicus was a lone visionary, largely derided in his own time and vindicated posthumously within a generation. In fact, as Richard Westman’s recent study [*The Copernican Question: Prognostication, Skepticism, and Celestial Order* (University of California Press, 2011)] argues, a century after Copernicus’s death only a handful of astronomers accepted his heliocentric theory; indeed, it was not until the experiments with the parallax and Foucault’s Pendulum in the early nineteenth century that scientific proof that the earth moves was conclusively demonstrated (at least to those who accept the scientific method). Brown’s cataloguing and analysis of the rabbis and the texts that deal with astronomy risks becoming tedious. What prevents this from happening is his

active engagement with the wider historical context. For example, an examination of Jewish texts on astronomy not only reveals whether Jewish intellectuals were cognizant of wider trends within European (and later American) intellectual life, but even if they were aware of previous Jewish astronomical texts. Indeed, the debate over the validity of the heliocentric universe is revealed to be part of a wider debate among rabbis as to the value of secular knowledge.

By the time of the late *Haskalah* (early nineteenth century) a preponderance of rabbis who wrote about science had come to accept the Copernican model. Many of these rabbis argued that a proper reading of traditional sources revealed that Jews had always been aware of the truth that the earth moves, and that the knowledge was lost as a result of the diaspora. Of particular interest in this section is Brown's analysis of David Friesenhausen (1756-1828), a Hungarian *Maskil* who embraced both traditional *yeshivot* learning and secular study. The intended audience of Friesenhausen's *Mosdot Tevel* (*Foundations of the Universe*) was young adults, a writing genre that some historians and literary scholars argue first appeared in the eighteenth century. Some argue that if the student of history wants to understand how new ideas are inculcated in a population it is necessary to consider young adult literature. For a comparative example: one of the bestselling English language books of this new genre was *Tom Telescope* (first edition published in 1761), a popular science book that taught Newtonian physics to teenagers, and which remained in print throughout most of Friesenhausen's lifetime.

While Brown documents the preponderance of rabbinic acceptance of Copernicus by the nineteenth century, he does not ignore the Anti-Copernicans. Indeed, he treats them in great detail and while clearly rejecting their arguments, he also treats them with some dignity. Rather than regard individuals such as Reuven Landau (died 1883) who wished for Copernicus to "be removed from the world," as just reactionary cranks, Brown recognizes that to traditionalists the up-ending of customary sources of authority represented an existential threat to their world view. In order to defend the geocentric model

of the universe, however, Landau not only had to reject the modern scientific method, he had to disregard several generations of rabbinic writings that sought to reconcile faith and reason. By the modern era most rabbis, whether they be liberal or traditional, not only accepted the heliocentric universe, but also embraced a concept enunciated by Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-88), considered one of the founders of modern Orthodoxy. Hirsch regarded the Bible as a source of moral lessons and not of scientific truths, and utilized a famous passage in the tenth chapter in the *Book of Joshua*, in which the sun was commanded to stand still, as an example of the separation of science and religion. While traditionally this is one of the passages that was and is used to justify the geocentric world view, Hirsch argued that the passage was not intended to teach anything about the solar system. As Hirsch argued: "Rather, because the Bible is a book of moral lessons it was included to demonstrate that God assigns a special position to men, who live for the fulfillment of God's will." (186).

Brown concludes his study with an analysis of contemporary Jewish geocentrics, many of whom are found in the Haredi or Hasidic community, and while they are a small minority in the Jewish world, they are also extremely vocal. Indeed, the vitriol of the anti-Copernicans seems inverse to their actual influence, providing a proof-text of George Santayana's assertion that for fanatics, the further away their goal, the more fanatical they become. Interestingly, some of the Anti-Copernicans actually use another modern idea, Einstein's theory of relativity, as a mechanism to argue for the notion that the earth stands still. For those who like a bit of irony with their historical analysis, it should be remembered that the theory of relativity had few proponents in the decade after it was published. Even after the Royal Society for the Advancement of Science accepted it as factual in 1921, skeptics did (and still do) dispute it.

Brown's study is based on an impressive level of research, in rare book collections, libraries, and among the book stalls of the modern Ultra- Orthodox world in Jerusalem. By linking his analysis of the Jewish reception of Copernicus with consideration of what constitutes

acceptable sources of information for understanding the natural world, he answers the question “why should we care how the rabbis regarded the heliocentric universe” definitively. What harm is there in rejecting the Copernican model? Did the Italian astronomer hurt anyone by rejecting the existence of the moons of Jupiter? By refusing to see the universe as it is, rather than as we want it to be, we reject scientific truth. There is, indeed, a correlation between rejecting the notion that the earth moves with a rejection of evolution, global climate change, and vaccinations. If we reject science we abandon those tools needed to save lives via medical research, we lose a sense that weather prediction can help prevent or prepare for hurricanes, and if we ignore the moons of Jupiter, we accept that we live in a finite universe with nothing new to teach us.

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Two Essays by Peter Haas

"See, I Lay A Stone in Zion, A Tested Stone" (Isaiah 28:16)

1. A review essay by Peter J. Haas

Tested by Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, by Elliott Abrams.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The picture on the dust jacket says it all. We see Abu Mazen, head of the Palestine National Authority and Ariel Sharon, Prime Minister of Israel, shaking hands from about as far apart as they could stand and still reach each other. President George W. Bush is standing between them with a look of concern. In the background is a bleak landscape. The occasion was the ending of the "Red Sea Summit" held in Aqaba on June 4, 2003.

It hardly needs to be said that the first decade of the twenty-first century, essentially the years of the George W. Bush administration, spanned a crucial time in U.S.-Israel-Palestine relationships. This book is an account, by an insider, of the internal discussions within the Bush administration during those crucial years as regards Middle East peace. Although the focus is on Israel and the Palestinians, larger issues also come into play. The book starts roughly with the fallout from the Camp David meeting in July 2000, setting the stage for what Bush would inherit from the Clinton years and ends roughly with the Israeli ground operation in Gaza (Operation Cast Lead) in January 2009. Along the way were such crucial events as the "al- Aqsa" intifada, the Twin Towers bombing, the U.S. "intervention" in Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq, the death of Yasser Arafat, the Second Lebanese War, the take-over of Gaza by Hamas and the bombing by Israel of the Syrian nuclear reaction in the Deir az-Zor region. On the American side these years saw two powerful Secretaries of State, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, and on the Israeli side, the premierships of Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert. In other words, these were tumultuous times, adding

layers of complexity to an already laden situation.

For most of this period, Elliott Abrams was in the thick of things. He was appointed Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Democracy, Human Rights, and International Operations at the National Security Council on June 25, 2001, special assistant to the President and the NSC's senior director for Near East and North African Affairs in December 2002, and deputy national security adviser for Global Democracy Strategy in February 2005. In this position, he worked as a senior advisor while Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State became more personally engaged in Middle East peace talks, especially in the wake of the Second Lebanon War and often accompanied Bush's second term National Security Advisor Steve Hadley on trips to the Middle East.

It is this insider perspective that Abrams brings to his account of the inner workings of the Bush administration's approach to Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. As one might expect, his perspective is supportive of George W. Bush's vision, and increasingly critical of Condoleezza Rice's approach. This orientation becomes more pronounced as we move through Bush's second term; that is, as Abrams becomes more enmeshed in the details and personalities of internal White House foreign policy debates. The early chapters focus helpfully on the last years of the Clinton administration and the legacy it left for George W. Bush. The bulk of the book, however, is taken up with intricate details and careful descriptions of personal rivalries and inter-governmental jockeying, all bolstered by citations from various documents, speeches, memos and the like. By the end, an overall trajectory has emerged. We see a new president who is initially not so engaged in the Israel-Palestine tangle, who becomes progressively both more involved and more sympathetic to the Israeli situation, who finds himself in an increasingly fundamental disagreement with Condoleezza Rice, and finally who seems by the end of his tenure to have lost his sustaining optimism that a solution was in reach. The book of course is in many ways about Abrams and his assessment of what is going on, but it is also about Bush and how he came to be one of the greatest supporters

of Israel. But there is also a growing sense that Middle East peace policy was a sort of drama being written in Washington in which various players in the region had their assigned parts and were assumed, and at times urged, to act out their expected roles. What of course happened is that while the scripts made a certain sense in Washington, they were repeatedly subverted by the major actors and the sheer realities of the Middle East and its politics. An all too brief recounting of the high points in Abram's account brings some of these crucial disjunctures to light.

As noted, the story covered by this book opens during the waning years of the Clinton administration. In a desperate effort to achieve some sort of agreement in the Middle East, Clinton's diplomacy managed to assemble the Camp David Meeting in July 2000. The meeting was the high point of deep presidential engagement with both Israelis and Palestinians and in the end turned out to have overpromised and under delivered. Clinton blamed Arafat, as did many of the other observers; but the Palestinians and their supporters did not. Whatever happened, the climb down from Camp David led through the outbreak of the "Al-Aqsa" intifada in August of 2000 and had its last gasp at the Taba "Summit" talks in January 2001. By then, of course, Clinton was out of office and the United States had entered the era of George W. Bush.

New administrations always need time of reevaluation, readjustment and repositioning, both internally and in relation to the outside world. In this case there were two major transitions of power as, in Israel, Ehud Barak's premiership ended and Ariel Sharon came into office. The result was that all sides — Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, and the larger Arab world (represented largely by Saudi Arabia) — were testing each other. In the new Bush administration there was a significant debate as to whether or not the United States should stay engaged in the Middle East, and if so how and at what level. What everyone could agree on was that the region needed to cool down and the "al-Aqsa" intifada managed. The new National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, argued that for the time being, simply reducing the level of

violence was all that could be reasonably expected while Colin Powell, the new Secretary of State, argued to the contrary that the United States had an obligation to continue the Clinton policy at some level; that is, to remain an active player (or at least appear to be remaining an active player) in the Middle East. Meanwhile, both Arab and Israeli leaders expected that Bush II would prove to be at least as friendly to the Arab world, if not more so, than was his father, and were adjusting expectations accordingly. Given this background, it is not surprising that Ariel Sharon's first meeting with the new president Bush in March of 2001 went badly.

But there was concern on the Arab side as well. Ariel Sharon's government began pushing back hard against Palestinian rioters and more and more Palestinian blood was flowing in the street. The United States, from the Palestinian point of view, remained frustratingly, and surprisingly, disengaged. It is against this still fluid situation that the Saudi monarchy began pushing the Bush administration to weigh in and stop the (in their case, the Israeli) violence. In the end, their pressure seemed to produce results. The Bush administration agreed to support the creation of a democratic Palestinian state; that is, to explicitly endorse a "two state" solution. Whether or not this was a new U.S. policy or only the enunciation of a policy that was already effectively operative has been a matter of subsequent debate. In all events, it seemed like an important concession and maybe a signal that the Saudis were going to be able to significantly sway U.S. policy. The official announcement was to take place at a speech President Bush was to deliver at the United Nations General Assembly on September 12, 2001.

The attacks on the World Trade Center towers ignited a new debate in the Bush administration. As the book lays out matters, one side argued that the attacks represented a sort of war of ideas (or clash of civilizations) and that the problem to be fought was Islamic fundamentalism. In this version, Saudi Arabia, with its funding of traditionalist Islamic schools was part of the problem. The other view, held by State and much of Europe, was that the problem was Arab anti-Americanism and

that the solution lay in recalibrating U.S. policy; so support of Israel was part of the problem. Chapter Two details how the Bush administration came to hold the former view. In a nutshell, Bush came to see the Israeli fight against the violence of the intifada, which was still raging, as congruent in some way with the American battle against Islamic fundamentalism. But of course the policy concept only slowly emerged, and the announcement that the U.S. was supportive of a “two state” solution continued to play out.

From the point of view of Abrams, the real turning point was the Israeli seizure of the “Katrine A”, a freighter carrying weapons from Iran into Gaza. Despite Arafat’s protestations of ignorance, it became clear to the administration that Arafat not only knew, but had helped fund, the ship. Bush and his vice president, Dick Cheney, were now convinced that Arafat was an incorrigible liar. Over the next several months, Powell continued to travel to the Middle East and to call on Arafat to suppress the violence, Arab pressure on Bush to rein in the Israeli violence continued, and even the Saudis launched a comprehensive peace plan. But by the spring, it was clear that a new approach was taking shape. Dealing with Iraq seemed to require that some peace, or at least peace process, be in place between Israel and the Palestinians. Thus the time seemed ripe for some new policy statement, and that came on June 24, 2002. It reiterated U.S. support for a Palestinian state, but set forth as requirement that the Palestinians get rid of Arafat, end corruption, abandon terror, and begin building democratic institutions. Toward these ends, the United States pledged to be more actively engaged in the Middle East. It was unclear, according to Abrams, whether a peaceful and democratic state of Palestine was the key to this transformation, or was only a small part of bringing democracy to the Middle East in general.

In either case, the new policy, dubbed the “Roadmap”, called for a democratic Palestinian state to be in place by 2005. Abrams notes that most major players had a role in putting this plan together — the Quartet (The United States, the European Union, Russia and the UN Secretary General), the Jordanians, the Egyptians, even Arafat began

calling openly for reform — the exception being Israel itself. It is at this juncture that Elliott Abrams enters the picture as the “Senior Director for Democracy, Human Rights, and International Organizations” in the NSC. He came in supporting the new Bush policy, but convinced that the mechanism was not pressure on Israel, but winning Israeli acceptance and that meant Arafat had to be out of power.

As the Iraq wars ended (“Mission Accomplished”), the script seemed to be playing itself out. Arafat appointed Mahmoud Abbas (“Abu Mazen”) as his reformist prime minister and Sharon seemed to be coming on board. The crucial next step was going to be the “Red Seas Summit” in Aqaba, portrayed on the book’s cover. In the event, everyone stayed on script; Abbas vowed to work against terror attacks and end corruption and Sharon indicated readiness in principle to accept a Palestinian state and to enter negotiations. The peace process, roughly the “Road-map”, was apparently up and running.

And then it crashed. Arafat continued to obstruct his prime minister’s every move, and terrorist attacks continued, until finally Mahmoud Abbas resigned. There was a flurry of activity in the Bush administration to figure out how to salvage momentum. In Abrams’ telling, it was Sharon who made the most encouraging move, namely announcing the “disengagement” from Gaza. To be sure there were other factors which figured in this decision, but the message to Bush, we read, was that Sharon was serious about doing something to have peace talks move forward. As Abrams puts it, “We were stuck. At Herzliya, Sharon showed us a way forward.” (p. 96).

But of course the Middle East itself did not fundamentally change. Although Bush was now firmly standing with Sharon, there was significant opposition: the neighboring Arab states (basically Jordan) were not happy, Sharon was facing strong political headwinds against his “disengagement” plans, and the State Department was pushing for a different approach altogether. But Bush held firm. Then at the end of 2004, the Bush agenda received two shots in the arm: Arafat died and Bush was elected to a second term “by a wide margin.” (p. 116).

In the wake of these developments, Condoleezza Rice was nominated to be the new Secretary of State, and would bring with her the Middle East "Peace Process". Although much of the NSC was expected to follow Rice over to State, Abrams chose to remain in the White House as their "Middle East guy" (p. 117).

At this point the Middle East did seem to be headed in a more positive direction. The Palestinians held elections, won by Abbas. They joined a growing "democratic" club that included Afghanistan (electing Karzai as president in October 2004), the Iraqis, and soon the Lebanese (after the assassination of Rafik Hariri). In addition, the Sharon government had finally turned the corner on the intifada, reducing Israeli terrorism deaths by some 90% by 2005 (p. 122). The effect was not so much that the U.S. tilted away from Israel, Abrams hastens to note, but rather that the Palestinians were being seen less negatively. To be sure not all was rosy. There was growing concern in Israel about the participation of Hamas in the upcoming Palestinian elections, and even Abbas and his cabinet were divided over whether or not to have elections at all. Nor was reform in the Palestinian National Authority really happening. Abrams laments that the only reform the U.S. seems to have succeeded in is having Arafat's picture in the press room moved and replaced with a blue curtain.

But for the time being optimism was still in the air. When President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon met at Crawford, Texas in April 2005, Sharon, according to Abrams, felt optimistic enough about changes in the Middle East to stick with his plans to "disengage" from Gaza. President Bush was supportive and the two men seemed to have established a rapport. But by the end of the year, the carefully woven cloth of American policy in the region was looking decidedly frayed. To be sure, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza had been accomplished, but the Palestinian takeover of Gaza was widely regarded as inept at best. Terrorist attacks continued and the Abbas government was unable, maybe unwilling, to stop them. Hamas was still in the elections. Disagreements also arose over Israel construction of new housing in the West Bank. In the midst of all this, Sharon found that he had to leave

the Likud party. Nonetheless, Abrams concludes this chapter (Five) on an optimistic note. "A situation that had been unchanged since the 1967 war had begun to change....The policy we were following was working....That was the way it looked to us as 2006 began..." (p. 156). Then Ariel Sharon suffered a second, massive, stroke. A few days later, Hamas won an unexpectedly large proportion of the Palestinians elections (44% vs Fatah's 41%).

In short, 2006 opened on a bad foot and things only went downhill from there. The new Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, did try to keep the momentum toward peace going, but Middle East realities relentlessly intervened and progress was grinding to a halt. Attacks from what was by now a Hamas controlled Gaza picked up momentum as the summer approached. Then in June an explosion in Gaza moved Hamas to declare an end to the already tattered truce. In late June, Hamas forces entered Israel through tunnels and killed two soldiers, taking a third, Gilad Shalit, as a prisoner. Israel responded with a major ground operation ("Summer Rain"). The Bush peace process receded into the distance. Then came the war in Lebanon.

In the negotiations that followed, Abrams played a role and so we have an even more detailed and intricate accounting of what happened: the ceasefire, the controversy over the Sheba'a Farms, the Israeli shelling of the Lebanese village of Qana. The upshot, in Abrams' view, was the loss of Olmert, who was politically discredited, maneuvered into resigning and eventually had to face criminal charges of corruption. With his resignation, the peace process was essentially played out, and Rice was charged with finding some way to salvage what she could. The result was the November 2007 Annapolis Conference (the Israelis were apparently promised it would be only a "meeting"), which was aimed at the creation of a Palestinian state even before the political and security issues were solved, a clear departure from the principles Bush had announced in 2002. In Abram's analysis, what moved Rice toward that position was precisely, and ironically, the closeness of American-Israeli relationships. The Americans were getting daily and personal briefings from a range of Israeli politicians and experts. Because of

this closeness and the intensity of the relationships, there was a tendency in State to discount these reports to some extent. On the other hand, information from the Arab world was filtered through, and had the imprimatur of U.S. ambassadors and so were given bureaucratic weight. In all events, gradually the sequence of the Roadmap changed, Abrams tells us, from ending terrorism and then negotiating, to negotiating, then ending terrorism, then implementation. In short, some movement needed to be seen on the ground for the U.S. to retain Arab support for its activities in Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. Abrams indicates all the reasons he remained unpersuaded.

What follows is what one would expect from a person now neck deep in these fraught discussions. We are given detailed descriptions of round after round of dinners, meetings, memos, consultations, outrage, more memos, more meetings, more reports, more optimistic speculation (Hamas will lose at the polls) and always more frustration. Gradually Bush drifted to "Condi's" side, while of course the Middle East continued to be the Middle East. Hamas took over Gaza, the PA remained un-reformed, Fatah and Hamas made pledges of peace with each other while battling it out in the streets, Syria was building a nuclear reactor. Nonetheless Condi raced ahead in the hope of achieving Middle East peace while she and Bush were still in office. The Annapolis Conference was held, but its greatest achievement was to issue a statement with which everyone could agree, but which said essentially nothing. The situation on the ground meanwhile was unraveling. President Bush decided on a trip to the region to take place in January 2008.

Needless to say, the trip produced a good deal of talk but no advance on any front. The dysfunction within and between the two rival Palestinian factions (Fatah and Hamas) rendered any motion impossible. Olmert was also facing corruption charges and seeing the end of his premiership in the near future. A second presidential visit took place in May, 2008 but by then the energy of early negotiations had dissipated. Abrams opines that Bush's optimism was waning. To be sure Rice continued to make trips and push for talks, but this was now, in Abrams'

view, simply a matter of least resistance for Bush: it was easier to just let her continue and it could cause no harm at this point.

The story ends on a down note, the U.S. abstention, instead of veto, of United Nations Security Council resolution 1860 (January 8, 2009). This was Bush's last public act as regards Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. Abrams' analysis of this, in his view sorry, misstep is dense, but boils down to Condoleezza's successful struggle to take control of Mideast policy from the White House (which of course includes Abrams). Internal politics on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides contributed to this denouement. For Abrams, it was Tony Blair who summed up the situation best: it was reality on the ground that would shape an agreement, not the other way around (quoted at the beginning of Chapter 11, p. 282). Here was the nub of the problem.

So at the end of the day, what are the lessons to be learned? For Abrams, the first is, "that every president should organize the White House staff to keep the key decisions in his own hands" (p. 304). A second is to stop subordinating every Middle East issue to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Even many Arab thinkers and leaders realize that there are much more severe problems than Israeli rivalry — corruption, lack of democracy, social unrest and Iran come immediately to his mind. Next is that Israel will be more flexible if it feels it is backed with U.S. support. A fourth lesson is that change on the ground is more important than trying to negotiate agreements; diplomacy is important but is not in and of itself sufficient. Other lessons follow: the U.S. should not be too intrusive, there should not be excess emphasis on a "settlement freeze," a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is neither simple nor obvious. Maybe the overarching lesson is in the last line of Chapter 12 ("Lessons learned"): "And peace will be built on reality, not hope." (p. 313). What is called for, Abrams concludes, is less fanfare and speeches and more decisive decisions and actions.

What came across most strongly to me after plowing through the dense thicket of descriptions in the book is the convoluted intersection of numerous complexities — Arab complexities, Palestinian complex-

ities, Israeli complexities, Washington complexities. It is also clear, that decisions made in Washington break up in unforeseeable ways when they encounter Middle East realities. But maybe the point that Abrams wants us to take away is his conviction that the policies of the Bush administration were really the best possible at the time, given the available opportunities; their failure was due to causes beyond any one's ken or control at the time. Be that as it may, the picture on the dust jacket, taken early on in this process, is both descriptive and prophetic.

Commenting on Rashi

2. A review essay by Peter J. Haas

RASHI, by Avraham Grossman, translated by Joel Linsider.

Oxford and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.

Studying Torah or Gemara with Rashi comes as naturally in the Jewish world as eating latkes with sour cream or bagels with cream cheese and lox. You certainly could partake of the first in the pair without the second, but there is no point and it would only diminish the experience. The book before us is not about Jewish ethnic food, of course, but about the early medieval commentator who has served for hundreds of years as the complement of the Jewish study of Bible and Talmud. Rashi has simply become a standard item of the rabbinic Jewish intellectual diet. In some ways it might be said that the rabbinic Judaism we have today is in many ways flavored by Rashi's influence on generations of students.

Given the prominence, I am almost tempted to say the near indispensability, of Rashi in the study of the canonical rabbinic texts of Tanach and Talmud, it is not surprise that a good deal has been written about him. Unfortunately, there is very little direct evidence about the person himself so that most of what we can say about him has to be adduced from what we know of his context and from what can be inferred from his writings, especially his commentaries. This is of course a method-

ologically fraught approach. Nonetheless there has been a good deal said about various aspects of Rashi's work, and his general place in early medieval Jewish intellectual history. Grossman's book itself provides us testimony to this with its almost nine pages of bibliography.

Probably the first attempt at an academic study of Rashi was *Toldot Rashi* (that is, "The Life of Rashi") published by Leopold Zunz and Simson Bloch in Warsaw in 1862. A few other biographies followed such as Maurice Liber's *Rashi* published in 1906. There have also to be sure been many essays and articles since then focusing on various aspects of Rashi's oeuvre, but no book-length scholarly biographies. This has changed somewhat over the last 50 or 60 years, with works such as Aron Owen's *RASHI: His Life and Times* (London: Jewish Religious Educational Publications, 1955), E. Shereshevsky, *Rashi: The Man and His World* (NY: Sepher-Harmon Press, 1981; Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1982), Chaim Pearl's *Rashi* in the Jewish Thinkers Series, Dov Rappel's *Rashi: His Jewish World-View* (1995) and even Elie Wiesel's slim volume *Rashi: A Portrait* (2009). None of these, however, can be deemed a fully academic treatment. It can be said in this context that Grossman's book promises to fill a significant void, and Avraham Grossman is in many ways perfectly positioned to give us a groundbreaking academic study of Rashi. Recently emeritus from Hebrew University, he has published several books on the social and intellectual life of Jews in medieval Europe in general and medieval France in particular. In 2008 he published in Hebrew a hefty study of Rashi. The book before us is a translation from the Hebrew and reflects the fruits of Grossman's considerable research.

Grossman begins by placing Rashi in his cultural and social context. The area of southern France in which Rashi worked was undergoing significant shifts at the time. On a large scale, this part of Europe can be understood as transitioning from the Carolingian period to the beginning of the Renaissance. Economically, the wide trade routes of the earlier period had given way to more regional commerce and trade. This meant for the Jewish communities weakening connections with the far away academies of Babylonia and the Land of Israel, and more

reliance on local resources. This localization also meant that the security and prosperity of Jewish communities was more reliant on the local power structure and so the need to establish new political configurations. Finally, shifts in Christian intellectual history were placing more emphasis on the literal meaning of the biblical text. All of these vectors help us understand why a person like Rashi would emerge at the time and place that he did.

Having established this background, Grossman proceeds to give us a "biographical sketch". This sketch is an odd mixture of academic critical research and mild hagiography. We are once again told that there is hardly any information about Rashi's early life or family; we know next to nothing about his father, nothing really about his mother's family, and even the name of his wife is unknown to us. We do know he lived in extreme poverty for a while and studied with some of the great figures in Germany. Grossman is skeptical about the tradition that Rashi was a vintner, relying on Haym Soloveitchik's claim that the area of France around Troyes was not suitable for grape-growing (p.19). We do see evidence that Rashi was engaged in community activities and governance and that he had a positive and growing reputation in that sphere. Upon this admittedly sketchy framework, Grossman tries to construct a fuller picture of Rashi the person. In particular Grossman tries to adduce the character of Rashi from various statements in his commentaries and responsa. What emerges is less an academic biography and more of an encomium. Rashi emerges as a person who is humble but self-confident, a pursuer of truth who is sensitive to the feelings and dignity of others, and a remarkable scholar who was also deeply involved in communal affairs. Furthermore, his commentaries show that he had great esteem for the land of Israel, honored the Talmudic sages, and placed great importance on custom, all of which demonstrate his love for the Jewish people. It is probably symbolic that the narrative in this chapter moves from the more critical biographical beginning of the chapter to the legends, traditions, and "charms" that sprang up in the next generations at the end of the chapter. In the process, though, it becomes hard to sort out Rashi the

person from Rashi the legend.

The next chapter is entitled "Rashi's *Beit Midrash* " and focusses, as you might expect, on his school. There is no question that Rashi's "yeshivah" was remarkably productive and that many of his students went on to become major figures in shaping early Ashkenazic Judaism. Grossman gives us in fact an impressive table (on page 57) laying out the accomplishments of Rashi's students in a number of areas (Bible, Talmud, liturgy, midrash, Hebrew grammar, responsa, astronomy, etc.). The academic question is, of course, why was this one yeshiva so inordinately influential. To answer this questions, one would like to know what "yeshiva" education was like in those days, how German yeshivas might have been different from French ones, what innovations Rashi introduced that marked off his particular school from others, whether other schools may have been equally productive but that productivity has been lost to us, and if so what factors shaped the reception of Rashi's students in a way that was different from the reception of the products of other schools. Frustratingly, none of these questions are answered, or even asked. Instead we revert to Rashi the legend. The following comes near the beginning of this chapter under the rubric "The Great Rabbi".

" He was not content simply to write commentaries whose excellent pedagogical technique would be instructive thought the ages; he also took pains to prepare students who would follow his path, developing and expanding his methods. This was a highly important innovation in the nature of the beit midrash, an innovation that sprang from Rashi's sense or mission." (p. 53)

After reading the chapter I am still unclear as to what this pivotal "innovation" was. Grossman points out that Rashi had an impressive closeness to his students, but never shows us directly that other teachers routinely did not. Another factor Grossman suggests is Rashi's "openness" as compared to the "conservatism" that presumably characterized other schools. In this regard Mainz is held up as an example of such conservatism, although Grossman does not investigate wheth-

er its alleged conservatism was a matter of policy or only a function of what manuscripts that have survived. Grossman also mentions Rashi's pursuit of truth as a source of his openness, without ever demonstrating that Rashi's pursuit of truth was unique or unusual among teachers of the time. In short, instead of explaining the emergence of Rashi's yeshiva, we enter a kind of self-referential circle in which Rashi's success leads to the conclusion that Rashi had just the right personality and technique to produce such a success.

Part II of the book (Chapters 4-7) covers the writings of Rashi. Chapter 4 (on the Torah commentary) raises a significant methodological problem, namely, how are we to adduce the original, "ipsissima verba" of Rashi from the range of manuscript evidences that we have. After all, at least some material surely may have been added, or lost, along the way. This is an important consideration since one of Grossman's assumptions is that Rashi's Torah commentary was really focused on details and not on the "big picture". Thus the details of the wording in the surviving texts is crucial. Indeed, Grossman sums up his position by saying, "Rashi saw significance and purpose in every name, time, place and event — indeed in every detail — mentioned in the Torah" (p.79). He also notes Rashi's reliance on midrash, which leads to some lengthy discussions about *peshat* and *derash* in Rashi and his handling of various tensions in the midrashic traditions. The analyses of this chapter are well informed and sensitive, but do not advance our knowledge. We learn that Rashi had pedagogical goals, that some of his comments were apologetics aimed at Christianity, that he relied on midrash even when inconsistent with halacha, and so forth. Grossman documents these claims well, but most readers familiar with Rashi would hardly describe them as new insights.

The next chapters look respectively at the later books of the Hebrew Bible, at the commentary on the Gemara, and on Rashi's legal responsa. In large part, Grossman's analyses and conclusions in these chapters are largely compatible with what he just adduced in the chapter on the Torah commentary. He notes as regards the later Biblical books and the Gemara, that Rashi displayed considerable interest in linguis-

tics and the nuances of Hebrew grammar. He also alludes to the details and realia of daily life in a more systematic way than he did in the Torah commentary. In such cases, it would appear that the intended audience may have been more advanced than the intended audience of the Torah commentary, which presumably was aimed at a more general (though surely literate) readership. As regards legal responsa and other writings, Grossman comes to the conclusion that Rashi "inspired and contributed to the development of another important branch of the tree of halakhic creativity: the writing of halakhic monographs." (p. 149). In this he disagrees with scholars who maintain that Rashi was too humble to issue halakhic rulings. This statement comes despite Grossman's own opening words in Chapter Seven ("Rulings, Responsa, Liturgical Poems, and Commentaries on Liturgical Poems") that "Rashi's surviving oeuvre offers no evident that he himself wrote any comprehensive halakhic works" (p. 149). One can not help but wonder if here the hagiographic impulse has here outrun scientific methodological considerations.

In Part III Grossman gets to what I think might be the heart of the matter, namely Rashi's world view. This of course is situated to build on the previous two parts: the biography and the examination of his writings. In his introductory remarks on this section, Grossman makes two important methodological points. One is that he is convinced that much of Rashi's commentary does reflect the man's world-view, a position in opposition to that of other scholars, like Nehama Leibovitz who regards the Rashi commentaries as focused more narrowly on solving issues in the text. Having staked out his position in this controversy, Grossman also acknowledges, in his second point, that adducing the worldview of Rashi from his commentaries is fraught with methodological difficulties. After all, in many cases Rashi does seem to be focused on simply explicating the text, he does often appear to follow the Babylonian Talmud in places where he might have felt inclined otherwise (as in banning women from reciting blessings religious acts they were not commanded to fulfill) and at times he might well have cited mid-rashic point of view with which he might personally have disagreed. It

is hard, then, to sort out what is authentically Rashi's own voice being articulated from what is not. Nonetheless, Grossman is convinced that a reconstruction of Rashi's world view is possible. In the ensuing three chapters — "Uniqueness of the Jewish People", "Values", "Society" — Grossman proceeds to this work.

In reading this material it is safe to say that there is very little that is surprising. Grossman's Rashi comes across as a fairly traditional or what we might today term an "orthodox" thinker. He believed in the uniqueness and chosenness of the People of Israel, in the special character of the Land of Israel, in the curse of Exile and the promise of Redemption, in the study of Torah as the highest of Jewish virtue. He conceived of the ideal Torah teacher who, much like himself, was both a dogged pursuer of the truth but also humble and sensitive to the dignity of his students and one who worked for peace and struggled to overcome the factionalism that often threatened the welfare and the unity of the community. In a few cases Grossman points out features of Rashi's thought that might seem to stand out, such as his apparently deep belief in miracles, or the importance of doing mitzvot in the Land of Israel or the person of the scholar as the true "king" in Israel. Rashi also seemed to be on the lenient side of how to treat Jews who had converted to Christianity ("the hearts of all *anusim* were directed towards heaven", see page 266) and he was profoundly concerned with the honor and rights of women.

So at the end of the day how are we to understand Rashi? Grossman poses the question as to whether he is a conservative or an innovator. The answer, Grossman concludes, is both, or rather, something in between. Rashi appears to have been an innovative teacher: openness to all Torah teaching, dedicated to close critical analysis, pushing his students to publish. His very publishing program clearly seems unprecedented. And yet, he was a kind of conservative at heart. He stressed the importance of Torah study, even if he was innovative in how he made such study accessible; he discounted local customs and *minhagim* in favor of the rules laid out in the Babylonian Talmud, possibly in the interest of broader Jewish unity; he elevated the status

of the Torah sage over other, presumably secular, leaders. But, Grossman concludes, what ultimately distinguishes Rashi was his foremost concern with both truth and humility, which “coexisted within him in wondrous harmony” (p. 298). It is almost as if this character trait is what ultimately makes Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak into Rashi. It is this dedication to rigorous scholarship, yet openness to and love of all Israel, that is Rashi’s greatest legacy, for Grossman, the one ingredient that is the ultimate preserver of Jewish survival.

There is no question that Rashi was a remarkable person and that his almost oversized stature in the subsequent rabbinic teaching tradition is well deserved. It is hard to imagine today what the experience of studying Torah and Talmud would be like without the spice of Rashi. He for sure influenced all that followed. But interestingly, or maybe by the very nature of things, Rashi the actual person remains elusive. That elusiveness itself, however, may be part of the magic. Grossman begins the book with a citation from the poem “Ashira Lerashi” (Of Rashi I Sing) by Samson Meltzer. The citations ends with the line, “Bring forth your produce, wondrous orchard, reviving the dispersion of Israel”. If Rashi and his writings are the “wondrous orchard”, maybe there is some virtue in leaving them in a wondrous and vaguely mythical state.

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Zachor:

Samuel Usque, Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel

Part three of Samuel Usque's Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel (Ferrara 1553), is a lengthy account of the many sufferings of the Jewish people in the diaspora. Beginning with the forced conversion of the Jews of Spain in 617, the author lists 37 separate instances of Jewish suffering down to a massive fire in Salonika in 1545, an outbreak of the plague in Ferrara in 1551 that led to the expulsion of the Jews, and the vandalizing of the synagogue in Pesaro two years later.

After bewailing the unending and undeserved sorrow afflicting the Jews, Usque ends with hopes for the future. He reminds the Jews that their sufferings are a just punishment for their sins as well as God's way of purifying them so as to make them worthy of an ultimate — and greater — happiness that will be theirs in the world to come. Finally, Usque lists eight patterns or factors that explain why Jews have not been totally destroyed by their suffering and turn his tale of woe into a message of consolation.

First, He meted out your punishment gradually, so that your full punishment might not consume you and destroy you... Secondly, He punished you immediately after each sin, so that your unrequited iniquities should not accumulate, and so that you should take measures to remedy your works after every lash...

Thirdly, by scattering you among all peoples, He made it impossible for the world to destroy you, for if one kingdom rises against you in Europe to inflict death upon you, another in Asia allows you to live. And if the Spaniards burn you in Spain and banish you, the Lord wills for you to find someone in Italy who welcomes you and lets you live in freedom. And if the Lord had not dispersed you but instead, as your iniquities merit, had isolated you in one corner of the earth, like your brethren, the Ten Tribes, your life would be in jeopardy and the die for your destruction cast. You would long ago have perished from the

wrath of only one of the peoples who had subjected you...

The fourth way for you to receive consolation also derives from this mercy. The Lord not only prepared these grades for the great mountain of punishment which you were required to climb, but in order for you to scale it with less hardship. He from time to time consoles you by redemptive acts and taking vengeance on your oppressors for the malice with which they have inflicted the penalty for your iniquities. Jeremiah's words testify to this: "I will visit upon you nations the wickedness of your thoughts." (Jer. 23.2). You have already witnessed this in the fates of the early nations — the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans, and in the more modern nations of whom you recently complain...

So as not to weary you with more such details, let me tell you generally that among all your abusers, though they were brethren of one and the same religion and faith, such an accursed strife has arisen and continued to this day that great torrents of Latin blood have run throughout their lands and abroad. We can thus say of Spain that Italy is its grave; of France, that Spain is the means of its consumption; of Germany, that all of its neighbors, including the Turks, are its executioners, who make it the wall where their artillery strikes; and of England, that continual pestilence and hostile Scotland are its scourge...

Thus, Jeremiah's words have been fulfilled: "They that eat you shall be devoured, and they that carry you off shall be carried off and they that spoil you shall I make a spoil." (Jer. 30.16). Therefore, unburden yourself, and lighten your load of your suffering. Your hungry spirit will rest as soon as it imagines its vengeance.

The fifth road to consolation is the great benefit which has come of your misfortunes in Spain and Portugal, of which you so bitterly complain; for when a person's limbs are being devoured by herpes, it is best to cut them off with the knife or the fire, so as to prevent the spread of the disease and save the rest of the body. At such a time the cruel surgeon is the instrument of recovery. Therefore, since you

had forgotten your ancient Law, and feigned Christianity with all your might solely to save your life and property, without realizing that you were jeopardizing your soul, it was proper that in such a perilous and mortal illness the Lord should not be apprehensive about applying the cautery to cure you. Truly, if you consider matters carefully, His mercy was great in being cruel to you, for the noxious wound penetrated your body so rapidly that in a few years it would have killed the memory of Judaism in your children... Let the great benefit you are receiving soften the unyielding pain of your rigorous cure. And throw these waters of consolation upon the flames of the Inquisition, that the heat you suffer may be lessened.

The sixth way to consolation is the help you received in the hardships which you say you had to suffer in order to save your life after leaving Portugal:

Has God's mercy ever appeared to anyone in human garb? It has appeared to you, to help you with your troubles. Has anyone ever seen a woman risk her life to save her brethren ... or govern her people... or aid the persecuted... or free the besieged from anguish...? The Lord has sent you such a woman in our own days from the supreme choir of His hosts. He has treasured all these virtues in a single soul. To you happy fortune, He chose to infuse them in the delicate and chaste person of the blessed Jewess [Gracia] Nasi.

Her inspiration greatly encouraged your needy children in Portugal, who were too poor and weak to leave the fire, and to undertake a lengthy journey. She generously provided money and other needs and comforts to the refugees who arrived destitute, sea-sick, and stuporous in Flanders and elsewhere. She helped them overcome the rigors of the craggy Alps in Germany and other lands, and she hastened to alleviate the miseries caused by the hardships and hazards of their long journey. She offered you her compassion and divine largesse in the sudden dire distresses you faced when you were exiled from Ferrara... To more aptly describe the great blessing she represents, she has always been a beautiful summer, a refuge during all the misfortunes

of our Portuguese people, and a pillar of strength on which its affluent could depend to preserve them and their fortunes. A large number of your children, who have fled from the brutality of the Portuguese, have reached safety on this eagle's outstretched wings...

The seventh road which leads you to great consolation is the safe and placid port which God's boundless mercy has prepared for you, so that your wearied limbs, your exiled children, might find shelter from the storms of sea and land. It lies in the blessed spirit of a noble prince of Italian blood, sublime and generous, whose abode is nestled on the beautiful river Po... Indeed in no other human being has heaven infused a more blessed spirit or a nobler soul than in this prince, who is not human, but divine. To this day he has stood with his wings outstretched, waiting to gather you lovingly beneath them... Therefore, if you suffered such bitter tribulations up until this time, the remedies now beginning are so sweet that they should arouse your expectation for greater blessings yet to come...

The eighth and most signal way by which you will rise to a higher degree of consolation is in the great nation of Turkey. This country is like a broad and expansive sea which our Lord has opened with the rod of His mercy, as Moses did for you in the Exodus from Egypt, so that the swells of your present misfortunes, which relentlessly pursue you in all kingdoms of Europe like the infinite multitude of Egyptians, might cease and be consumed by it. Here the gates of liberty are always wide open for you that you may fully practice your Judaism; they are never closed. Here you may restore your true character, transform your nature, change your ways, and banish false and erring opinions. Here you have begun to embrace your true ancient faith and to abandon the practices opposed to God's will, which you have adopted under the pressures of the nations in which you have wandered.