ABSTRACTS

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Guest Editors: Miri Freud-Kandel and Adam S. Ferziger

ORTHODOXY AND THE CHALLENGE OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION
Tamar Ross

Traditional Jewish theology and practice are predicated on belief in the divinity of the Torah. Biblical criticism has posed increasingly formidable challenges to this belief in modern times. To the extent that Modern Orthodoxy has addressed the problem, it has generally attempted to refute the findings of scientific scholarship on its own terms. This article will suggest that such an approach represents a misplaced framing of the question, by viewing all religious truth claims cognitively as simple statements of fact. Instead of questioning whether the doctrine of Torah from Heaven is true empirically, its “truth” is established via its function within the context of the “form of life” (in the Wittgensteinian sense) that it engenders.

TORAH MIN HASHAMAYIM IN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY: DISPUTES, DEBATES AND DISCOURSE
Paul Morris

The meaning of Torah min HaShamayim has been debated by Jewish theologians across the centuries and these discussions have intensified in the light of modern science and critical historical and biblical studies. The understandings of what is meant by the divinely revealed Torah have historically marked the boundaries of the Jewish community, and in the contemporary world define the limits of Orthodox Jewish identity. The recent statement of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) on Torah is the starting point for an analysis of two novel models of revelation by Louis Jacobs and Emmanuel Lévinas. The conclusion focuses on their ongoing relevance to the contemporary debates at the very heart of Orthodox Judaism.

MANY QUESTIONS, FEW ANSWERS: THE HOLOCAUST IN THE THEOLOGY OF LOUIS JACOBS
Miri Freud-Kandel

Louis Jacobs identified the Holocaust—and the creation of Israel—as the two most significant events influencing contemporary Jewish consciousness. Yet his engagement with the theological implications of the Holocaust is notably limited. Since many of his writings are focused on issues facing those he termed “the Jew in the pew,” this absence of detailed consideration of the theological questions posed by the Holocaust seems particularly perplexing. This paper will consider if there is an explanation for this lacuna.
HALAKHIC CHANGE VS. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE: AMERICAN ORTHODOXY, BRITISH ORTHODOXY, AND THE PLIGHT OF LOUIS JACOBS

Chaim I. Waxman

Many Orthodox Jews, especially the Ultra-Orthodox or “Haredim,” insist that both the Written and Oral Torah as we know them were given at Sinai and that any mention of halakhic development is heresy. This article seeks to highlight change in American Orthodox Judaism from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. The first part deals with cultural change. A series of changes in the halakhah-related sphere that are deemed to be religiously acceptable in the halakhah-observant community are then presented. The issue of the influence of values on the halakhic decision-making process is briefly discussed, after which a number of possibilities—sociological and demographic—are raised as explanations of the basis for the then-Chief Rabbi Brodie’s veto of the appointment of Rabbi Louis Jacobs as Principal of Jews’ College and his subsequent refusal to reappoint Jacobs as Minister of London’s New West End Synagogue.

R. ARELEH ROTH’S PRISTINE FAITH: THROUGH HOLOCAUST TO REDEMPTION

Gershon Greenberg

Areleh Roth responded to the Holocaust by labouring to have Jews actualize pristine faith. As the slaughter in Europe mended the sinful universe prior to the advent of the Messiah, the living were enjoined to bring to bear the faith which was experienced by Abraham and which the people of Israel inherited over the ages. This meant struggling against the forces of Amalek who clouded the perception of God’s presence amid the tragedy. Under divine aegis, Amalek brought suffering to induce repentance, he tested the people in order to activate free will, and clouded the perception of God’s presence amid catastrophe. The struggle centred on annulling one’s personality entirely, enabling God to enter the heart so completely as to totally replace the ego. This was the experience of pristine faith, and with it one related to God, through Abraham, and gained the strength to endure the tragedy. Even more, one’s soul could join the ascent of those sparks which were dispersed upon the cosmic catastrophe (described by Isaac Luria) and thereby contribute to, and participate in, the rise of Israel to the spiritual redemption of the Sabbath before Adam’s sin. Roth’s response to the catastrophe was not of theological exposition (for example, why the pious suffered) but of practical means to survive and thrive on the level of spirit.

BACK TO ZECHARIAH FRANKEL AND LOUIS JACOBS? ON INTEGRATING ACADEMIC TALMUDIC SCHOLARSHIP INTO ISRAELI RELIGIOUS ZIONIST YESHIVAS AND THE SPECTRE OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE HALAKHAH

Lawrence Kaplan

This paper will discuss three new methods of teaching Talmud that Israeli Religious Zionist Yeshivas have adopted over the past two decades against the backdrop of the hitherto and perhaps still dominant approach to teaching Talmud in these Yeshivas, namely, the classical conceptual, ahistorical, highly abstract “Brisker” approach: (1) a modified Brisker approach; (2) the “Torat Eretz Yisrael,” “the Torah of the Land of Israel” approach; and (3) what I would call the “shiluv” approach, a term that implies
forming a new and harmonious whole. What these three approaches have in common is
the desire to retain the conceptual analysis of the Brisker approach, but to abandon its
strict formalism and combine it with the search for religious meaning and significance.
However, while the first two approaches in their search for the religious significance of
the text generally eschew the use of the critical methodologies employed by academic
Talmudic scholarship, the third approach embraces the use of those methodologies and
seeks to integrate them into the world of traditional Talmud study. I will focus on the
theological challenges raised by this attempted integration and on how the exponents of
the “shiluv” approach have sought to deal with them.

IDENTITY, POLITICS AND HALAKHAH IN MODERN ISRAEL

Arye Edrei

The fierce debate over conversion to Judaism raging in Israel today has been fuelled by
the Israeli Law of Return and the resulting immigration of large numbers of non-Jews to
Israel from the Soviet Union. It has precedents, however, in earlier rabbinic literature.
This paper traces the conversion debate from its Talmudic origins, through the nine-
teenth century halakhic polemic, to the present day. It demonstrates how the processes
of secularization and nationalism that have affected the Jewish community have impacted
on a changing balance in the roles of religion and nationalism in the definition of “who is
a Jew” and “who is a convert?” It also shows how halakhic rulings are affected by social
changes and how the ideologies of halakhic authorities impact their decisions.

MODERN ORTHODOXY IN POST-SECULAR TIMES: JEWISH IDENTITIES ON
THE BOUNDARIES OF RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

Ari Engelberg

Post-secularism in Israel is expressed, among other ways, by the growing public accep-
tance of identities that are neither religious nor secular. This paper is predicated on
research of individuals located on the boundaries of Orthodox Religious Zionism. It
explores their attitudes on a range of issues and argues that they reflect their post-secu-
larist identities. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with young men and
women who chose to abandon the strictures of a Religious Zionist lifestyle as well as
those who still remain within its bounds. Various late-modern and post-secular
modes of thought and expression were identified in interviewees’ narratives. These
included pluralism, relativism, egalitarianism, the personalization of relationships
with God, and a disregard for theological arguments based upon scientific findings. It
is argued that these attitudes are related to two late-modern social processes: (1) the
rise of individual expressivism and (2) the belief in the liberal human-rights ethic.
These tendencies cut across the social divide between interviewees who left Religious
Zionism and those who chose to remain within the fold, traversing the previously domi-
nant religious–secular social divide and thus serving as yet another indication for the
blossoming of new post-secular spaces in Israeli Jewish society.

BEYOND BAIS YA’AKOV: ORTHODOX OUTREACH AND THE EMERGENCE OF
HAREDI WOMEN AS RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Adam S. Ferziger

The twentieth century witnessed an array of fresh models of Jewish women’s educational
and religious leadership. Quite understandably, the majority of the scholarly focus has
been on burgeoning egalitarian trends featured in the new roles for women within liberal Jewish denominations and among the Modern Orthodox. Yet increased appreciation for gendered perspectives within Jewish studies has also led to recognition that seemingly conventional female roles, once viewed as purely supportive in nature, have evolved into platforms for voicing uniquely feminine styles of Jewish authority. This article offers an initial portrayal and analysis of a relatively new phenomenon: the American female non-hasidic Haredi outreach activist. It does so, first, by locating these figures within overall trends of American Haredi Jewry as well as in relation to the broader phenomenon of Orthodox feminism. The central contention is that inasmuch as American Haredi Orthodoxy vehemently opposes many of the changes advanced by the Modern Orthodox sector, a “silent” revolution is actually taking place within its own elite frameworks. The instigation for the emergence of new religious leadership roles for Haredi women is the increasing focus of this sector on outreach to the non-observant, and the recognition that woman can be especially effective in these capacities. Yet such activities demand types of public behavior, often in mixed gender settings, that are inconsistent with the messages of strict modesty put forward within Haredi female education. Moreover, some of the female Haredi figures have begun to advance the notion that their functions are not merely vehicles for increasing engagement with Judaism, but actually represent a new empowered model of Orthodox women’s leadership and activism.

MODERN ORTHODOXY’S ANCIENT PAST: OPENNESS VERSUS INSULARITY IN ANTIQUITY
James Kugel
The movement known as Modern Orthodox Judaism is often distinguished from “ultra-Orthodoxy” (or Haredi Judaism) in terms of openness. While adherents of the latter form of Judaism typically live together in isolated communities and seek to seal themselves off from secular books and learning (and, in our own age, such potentially malign influences as television, movies, and the internet), Modern Orthodox Jews are generally characterized by a more open attitude toward such things, and toward outsiders and outside ideas in general. The present article seeks to argue that the tendencies represented by these two movements are in fact dyed in the wool—that, from the very beginning, Judaism has endorsed and incorporated both isolationism and openness. This contention is illustrated with examples from the Hebrew Bible itself as well as from the extensive literature of the Second Temple period.