**ISF Research Proposal**

**Judaism as Morality: Its Roots in Modern Jewish Thought and Judaic Sources, its Limitations and Possibilities of Renewal**

**Scientific Background**

One of the prominent characteristics of modern Jewish thought, from Moses Mendelssohn onward, is the emphasis placed on the ethical dimension of Judaism, to the point where the essence of Judaism is often identified with morality. In the nineteenth century, many thinkers tended to equate this morality with Kantian duty-based ethics. However, even in earlier Jewish religious philosophy—such as that of Mendelssohn, which preceded Kant’s formulation of his ethics—the terms morality or ethics were used in their Western sense, meaning a system of rational mandates that applies to all human beings and regulates the interactions between them. The understanding that ethics is a universal phenomenon is common to all those espousing the notion of Judaism as morality, whatever other differences may exist between them. Nathan Rotenstreich argues that the first modern Jewish thinker to explicitly claim that the essence of Judaism is its moral code was the Italian Rabbi and scholar Samuel David Luzzatto, head of the Rabbinic Beth Midrash in Padua. In a booklet titled “The Essence of Judaism,” Luzzatto maintains that the Jewish moral code aims to amplify compassion in the face of other conflicting emotions that tend to dampen it (Margolin, ‘Samuel David Luzzatto’). Many nineteenth-century thinkers of the German-Jewish Enlightenment, in its various iterations, subscribed to the general claim that the essence of Judaism lies in its moral dimension—a conception that culminated in Hermann Cohen’s book, *The Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism*. The same notion was also typical of a number of twentieth-century thinkers who associated themselves with the legacy of Ahad Ha’am, the founder of spiritual Zionism. Since the mid-nineteenth century it has likewise had echoes in the rabbinic world, which we will explore below.

Orthodox rabbis and philosophers among these moralists emphasized the halakhic commitment, which, in their view, constitutes the framework of Judaism. Their modern secularist counterparts, conversely, emphasized Judaism (or Jewishness) as a nationality. Ahad Ha’am is a model example of someone who combined the national and the moral elements. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, on the other hand, combined the ethical element with the halakhic, national and religious-spiritual elements. However, just as the substantive disagreements between such figures as Ahad Ha’am and Yehezkel Kaufmann within the secular-nationalist stream fail to override their common conception of Judaism as an ethical monotheism, so too the differences between all the personalities and circles mentioned above take nothing away from their commitment to the common premise regarding the centrality and importance of the ethical dimension of Judaism and its sources. The conception of Judaism as morality assumes that, as a religious culture originating with the Hebrew Bible and continued through its interpretation in the Mishnah and the Talmud, it is unique in its commitment to moral decrees that are universal, on the one hand, while on the other hand, these moral decrees apply to a particular group that is required to maintain its separateness through separatist laws. According to the proponents of this view, the tension between this mandate for separateness—evident in Jewish marriage law, the dietary laws of kashrut, distinctive clothing, and the clear distinctions drawn between Jews and a non-Jews—and a distinctly humanistic moral code is at the core of Jewish existence.

Key figures in the field of Jewish Studies, such as Heinrich Graetz, David Neumark, and Yehezkel Kaufmann, among many others, had internalized the conception laid out above, and their research often corroborated its central theses. Of particular interest is the case of Heinrich Graetz who, ironically, laid the foundation for dismantling the thesis he himself had put forth.

The development of Jewish Studies in the course of the twentieth century gave rise to trends that contradicted the identification of earlier scholars with the conception of Judaism as morality. The historical research, which began with the work of Isaak Markus Jost and the aforementioned Graetz, revealed many dimensions in Jewish history that are inconsistent with the claim of Judaism as morality and sharpen the tension between the historical facts and the philosophical principles laid out in the relevant literature. Criticism of the morality school has been voiced since the nineteenth century, and historians with opposing views, such as Graetz and Scholem, have emphasized the reductionism entailed in identifying Judaism with ethics. Scholars of Halakhah, such as Ephraim Urbach, object to the notion, arguing that the heteronomous law characteristic of the Halakhah contradicts the autonomous dimension required to identify Judaism as a morality. The study of the connection between Judaism and ethics in recent decades has pointed to opposite trends within Jewish sources in relation to the interdependence between the commandments of the Torah and the commandments of morality (Sagi, *Judaism: Between Religion and Morality*). Despite all this, the various critiques seem to have been unable to fundamentally challenge the claim of the existence of a significant ethical dimension in the Jewish sources, despite the sophisticated interpretive tools utilized in more recent studies (Halbertal, *Interpretation*).

The two dramatic events in twentieth-century Jewish history—the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel—led, among other things, to a fundamental change in the cultural and public status of the conception of Judaism as morality. This conception still had a significant impact on education and society in Israel in the first decades of the state’s existence, but in more recent years, serious challenges to the centrality of the ethical dimension of Judaism have been raised both in public and academic discourse.

In the nineteenth century, the monumental impact of Kantian ethics led Jewish intellectuals to claim that Jewish Halakhah was closer to the categorical imperative than anything proposed by the Christian religion (Hermann Cohen and others). However, the partial decline of Kantian ethics in light of the rise of other trends in European thought, including the growing influence of scientific positivism on the humanities and on Judaism as well, changed the order of things. In the second half of the twentieth century, the conflict between the dictates of morality and loyalty to the Jewish state in its military struggles led to attempts by various parties to emphasize the distance between religion and ethics. Their goal was to liberate the Halakhah from a dependence on the principles of morality in instances where Halakhic and moral impetuses happened to clash. Even though the second half of the twentieth century still produced plenty of Jewish ethical writings, such as those of Abraham Joshua Heschel and Emmanuel Levinas, and the subject of Jewish ethics remained pertinent in American scholarship, pursued by thinkers such as Novak and Dorff, among others, their ideas had no significant resonance in Israel. The current revival of interest in the writings of Heschel and Levinas is limited and represents the exception rather than the rule, but there is no doubt that it stems from the status these thinkers have gained outside of Israel and it is difficult to estimate their actual impact on Israeli society.

By contrast, within the liberal circles of American Jewry, a gradual transformation took place wherein the principle known as *tikkun olam* (“repairing the world”) became an expression of the notion of Judaism as morality and came to represent, for many Jews, the central meaning of their Jewishness. As American or European citizens who identify with the nation-state in which they live, for Diaspora Jews their Judaism allows them to separate the universal moral imperative from everyday politics and identify it with the Jewish code of ethics that exists for them independently of the national dimension, contrary to the natural experience of Israeli Jews.

The objectives of this study, as detailed below, are based on the ideological-historical analysis presented here.

**Research Objectives and Expected Significance**

1. To define the conception of Judaism as ethics and to characterize the different iterations of this notion in modern Jewish thought. This characterization will be made in light of an examination of the concept’s various origins and schools of thought, as well as the degree to which it was influenced by the zeitgeist of the period (as evident in the rationalist understanding of biblical monotheism), by the emotional perceptions of the importance of mercy and compassion, and by the syntheses between them. What is the difference between thinkers that overtly subscribed to this notion wholesale, as opposed to those adopted it only in part? How does each of them justify their position and how do they deal with aspects that contradict their claims?

2. To identify the factors that have brought about the decline of the perception of Judaism as morality over the last few decades in general and in Israeli society in particular.

3. To conduct an up-to-date critical examination of the ethical element in Jewish sources through a thorough review of the relevant studies carried out in recent decades. Is it possible to substantiate this dimension independently of the particular nineteenth-century worldviews that informed considerations of the moral element in the past?

4. To analyze the meaning and implications of the notion of Judaism as morality in the present day, and assess its feasibility in light of the challenges presently facing the Jewish people as a whole and the State of Israel in particular.

The basic hypothesis of this research is that the conception of Judaism as morality in modern Jewish thought was influenced greatly—both directly and indirectly—by the ethical attitudes of the European Enlightenment movement in general and especially by the moral philosophy of Emmanuel Kant and his critique of religion. Although this conception did include blatant attempts to reduce Judaism to morality, it is not quite as unfounded as some present-day scholars strive to portray it. Our working assumption is that this is a deep-seated notion that cannot be attributed to any one thinker and its impact is also more profound than is commonly assumed. Even among thinkers who did not see themselves as deeply influenced by the ideas of European philosophy in the nineteenth century, there is a deep moral commitment that is reflected in the moral interpretation of Jewish sources. The ethical foundation in the Jewish sources can therefore be deemed solid, but it is certainly not absolute. There are areas in which it reflects dated moral norms and there are areas in which it is groundbreaking, even if not to the same extent as is often attributed to it. The conception of Judaism as morality is a significant part of the modern definition of Judaism as understood by many persons of note, and the decline of this conception is, in my view, the result of sweeping cultural changes and the rising priority given to nationalism in Israeli society.

An analysis of the factors contributing to the decline of this conception is required in order to assess the chances of its resurgence in Israel, in light of the fragility of the state’s definition as Jewish and democratic. To enable Judaism as morality to become once again a basis for unifying Jewish society in Israel, the last part of the present research will suggest possible directions for development and refinement to render this concept viable under current conditions. Our research hypothesis is that the thesis of Judaism as morality can have an important part in bringing back a sense of unity to the Jewish people, on the condition that it entails profound changes, especially in the Halakhah’s approach to moral codes pertaining to life in a globalized world, such as attitudes toward women and toward the non-Jewish other.

To illustrate, let us take for example the concept of responsibility developed in the twentieth century by three major Jewish thinkers—Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hans Jonas. This concept will be developed, in light of the notions of responsibility contained in the sources of Judaism, into a contemporary perception that recognizes the importance of transferring responsibility to the individual, on the one hand, while identifying the limits of the individual, on the other. This, in order to prevent the principle of responsibility from being eroded by excess and exaggeration. The principle of concern for others, as evident in the Halakhic principle of *tzedakah*, will be re-examined in the light of the criticism leveled against it. Maimonides’s view that the great virtue of charity is to “strengthen a man’s hand so that he shall not want from the rest of his kind,” will be examined as an alternative to the shortcomings of other charitable practices and will form the basis for promoting a welfare policy informed by the foundations of Judaism, especially in light of the current global health crisis. Likewise, the egalitarian notions stemming from the creation of man in the image of God, for example, can be promoted over the hierarchical and classist notions anchored in the Jewish tradition.

**Detailed Description of the Proposed Research**

The structure of the proposed study is based on the four objectives formulated above, with each objective constituting the main topic of one of the study’s four parts.

**Part One**

This section will be devoted to a detailed examination of the thesis of Judaism as morality developed by a long line of modern Jewish thinkers from the days of Mendelssohn onward, as briefly described above. The chapter will open with an examination of the history of the term “Judaism” and, following its transformations in nineteenth-century thought, the debate about the essence of Judaism and Jewishness. There is no doubt that it is appropriate to place the concept of Judaism as morality in the context of the discourse on the essence of Judaism and also as an answer to what German-speaking intellectuals referred to as “the Jewish question.” The various theories of what constitutes the essence of Judaism and Jewishness have provoked many criticisms and reservations. These controversies cannot be understood outside of the broad historical context that includes the rise of the Enlightenment movement and its counteraction in Romanticism, the roots of secularism in Europe and its implications for Jews in general, and the development of the Jewish Haskalah movement – in particular the establishment of the field of academic Jewish studies. The aim of this section is to outline the process by which various figures shaped the claim that the core of Judaism lies in the ethical dimension of Torah laws and biblical chapters of prophecy dealing with moral admonishment, the laws and discussions that have a clear ethical foundation in the Midrashic sources, as well as ethical conceptions in medieval Jewish philosophy and the principle of love in the Kabbalah and Hassidic writings.

Some point to Mendelssohn as the initiator of this conception due to the claim in his book *Jerusalem* that Judaism is a religion of laws whose main purpose is to develop the Jews’ civic morality (Horowitz, ). Clear formulations of this conception emerged in the early nineteenth-century writings of Samuel David Luzzatto, on the one hand, and those of Nachman Krochmal, on the other. Eventually, their ideas inspired the notion of a national moral spirit espoused by Ahad Ha’am and his contemporaries and were imported into the United States, mainly by Mordechai Kaplan and later by Abraham Joshua Heschel. In Central and Western Europe, it was the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* circle in Germany who developed the idea that would culminate in Hermann Cohen’s *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism* in the early twentieth century and in Emmanuel Levinas’s writings in the second half of twentieth century. The analysis of the notion and those who espouse it, both in its academic iteration (Yehezkel Kaufmann, for example) and its rabbinic one (Samuel David Luzzatto, Elijah Benamozegh, Yehuda Ashlag, and others), will be carried out using the tools proper to the study of Jewish thought and the history of ideas.

The discussion of the various thinkers will be segmented based on the various schools of thought, and will review the chronology of each from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries.

The idea of ethical monotheism in nineteenth and early twentieth-century thought will be examined with an emphasis on the writings of Nachman Krochmal, Samuel Hirsch, Heinrich Graetz and Hermann Cohen.

The idea of a national moral spirit will be examined through the writings of Ahad Ha’am (Gottschalk, Zipperstein) and the string of authors they (even partially) influenced.

Ahad Ha’am did not follow in Nachman Krochmal’s footsteps. He was far too secular to place monotheistic faith at the center of the national spirit, since he and the members of his generation had traded in the belief in one God for atheism. Nevertheless, he isolated the ethical component contained in certain passages in the Torah and the prophecy books of the Hebrew Bible, which, according to him, was meticulously developed into the Halakhah. Even though, in his view, the Jewish Halakhah tends to be overly punctilious, it rests on principles of biblical law, which, in turn, is based on moral law. That is the concept of the national moral spirit. Ahad Ha’am’s formulation of this position is not particularly nuanced or sophisticated—but it is the first link in what would develop into a long chain of philosophical thought. It is important to remember that while the moral element in the Judaic sources is based on the religious—“and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness”—for Ahad Ha’am, the moral element is based on nationalism. In the words of Hayim Nahman Bialik, “it is not that he downplayed or diminished the value of religion, but he positioned it within nationalism, as one of the forms of national existence. He imbued the national idea with a religious sacredness and raised it to the level of the holiest of holies, with religion included part and parcel” (Barshai, p. 67). Not all the thinkers who continued where Ahad Ha’am left off shared his staunch secularism. Yehezkel Kaufmann (*History of Israelite Faith*, *The Mystery of the Bible*) was very close to him on this point, whereas the philosophers Samuel Alexander, Leon Roth and Martin Buber (“Hebrew humanism”) took different positions in relation to the religious/moral dimension of Judaism. In the United States, Mordechai Kaplan (*The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*) and Abraham Joshua Heschel (*the Prophets*) also held different shades of moral religiosity.

Socialist intellectual circles embraced the ethical aspect of Judaism, beginning with the work of Moses Hess (Margolin). Other thinkers such as A. D. Gordon, Nahman Sirkin (Alon Shamir, “Sirkin’s Attitude Toward Jewish Heritage”) and Berl Katznelson, to name a few, all espoused this approach despite the differences between them. It was likewise echoed in David Ben-Gurion’s ideology and his speeches about the moral destiny of the State of Israel.

On the other side of the secular-religious divide, the founder of the Neo-Orthodox movement, Samson Rafael Hirsch, also ascribed a central position to the moral dimension of Judaism. And while the *Musar* movement in Lithuania, founded by R. Israel Salanter, ostensibly focused on the classical interpretation of the moral scriptures as aimed at instilling reverence and educating the reader in the *mitzvot* between man and God, for Salanter, the concept of *musar* refers very much to ethics. In his teachings, adherence to the commandments pertaining between man and his peers must serve as a counterbalance against the prevailing tendency to adhere slavishly to customs and ritual laws.

In modern Orthodox thought it is possible to point to different currents that can be said to espouse the perception of Judaism as morality, even if most of them are not as radical as Samuel David Luzzatto in their claims. Despite Luzzatto’s renowned opposition to the Kabbalah, it was ironically two modern Kabbalists who were closest to him out of all the Orthodox rabbis and thinkers in emphasizing the centrality of the moral dimension in the Jewish scriptures. Elijah Benamozegh, the rabbi of Livorno, continued in Luzzatto’s footsteps, albeit with a Kabbalistic twist. Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, whose philosophy was not far removed from Marxism, was likewise a modern Kabbalistic thinker whose interpretation of the Kabbalah was based on a moral view of the Kabbalistic principle of influence. Other East European rabbis, such as Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamares and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, combined distinct nationalist elements into their ideologies while underlining the moral aspect inherent in Jewish sources.

The map of thinkers that will be sketched out in this section, according to the guidelines laid out above, is in itself proof that the attempt to reduce the conception of Judaism as morality to a product of protestant influence—as has been claimed, for example, against Jewish thinkers in Germany—is overly simplistic. It is therefore not a question of a specific zeitgeist, but that of a basic notion that had crossed boundaries and touched both rabbis and secular thinkers who represented a wide spectrum of Jewish experience.

**Part Two**

The reasons for the decline in the importance of the ethical element in the perception of Judaism in recent decades are partly internal and partly a product of general changes in Western culture and the status of ethics in this culture. This section will be devoted to examining the waning and deterioration of the conception of Judaism as morality in the second half of the twentieth century and to clarifying the ideological and social factors that led to changes in the ability of the broad Jewish public to adopt this conception in Israel and the Diaspora. This section will consist of three chapters, each devoted to a different aspect of the issue:

1. **The tension between moral and national obligation**

A fundamental characteristic of ethics in Western philosophy, which has been strengthened in modern thought, is the humanist dimension that makes the rules of morality universal. Despite Baruch Spinoza’s claim in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* that the biblical idea of the Jewish people as chosen was misinterpreted in rabbinic literature as an immoral supremacy of the Hebrews over other peoples in contradiction to the principles of universal morality, Ahad Ha’am, for example, argues that the moral decrees of the Bible and the Halakhah are a “bulwark” meant to prevent the formation of an “egoistic Jewish nationalism.” This position is undoubtedly influenced by prevalent ideas in German philosophy. The Kantian categorical imperative is a pinnacle of the universalist trend in ethics but already his disciple, Johann Gottfried Herder, who was also a well-known admirer of Spinoza and Mendelssohn, developed a humanist conception of nationalism claiming that national particularism was intended to enable the implementation of universal moral principles in human culture.

Echoes of Herder’s views can be identified in the works of several prominent thinkers who formulated the conception of Judaism as morality at the turn of the twentieth century, including those of A. D. Gordon and Martin Buber. The historical reality of the Jewish people in the twentieth century consisted of contradicting extremes – on the one hand they experienced the Holocaust and the destruction of European Jewry, and on the other hand they witnessed the establishment of the State of Israel three years after the cataclysm. These events reinforced the perception of the good of the nation as having priority over any moral argument during conflicts between moral imperatives, as formulated in Jewish sources, and national interests. The view of Jewishness as an ethnonationality tends, especially in light of the abovementioned events, to paint the commitment to the particular group as critical in instances where universal morality clashes with the needs and demands of the particular group. In point of fact, the Zionist reality led leaders such as Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky to place national interest above moral principles on many occasions, in contradiction to what was supposed to be implied by the humanist nationalism envisioned by Herder and his successors.

This chapter will examine this claim in light of various historical events in the attempt to determine whether the conceptions of Jewishness as an ethnonationality has weakened the standing of the Judaism as morality approach to the point where the two notions are now mutually exclusive.

An academic comparison between the writings of Mendelssohn and Hermann Cohen against the background of their identification with German culture (Jeremy Fogel) suggests that even back in Germany this tension was revealed in the difference between a philosopher like Mendelssohn, who operated in Prussia out of a cultural but apolitical affiliation with his German environment, and Cohen, who fully identified with the new German state that granted citizenship to its Jews. Cohen thus inadvertently lost the moral sensitivity he boasted of as a Jew in his enchantment with the first buds of the notion of German racial superiority.

1. **Decline in the centrality of ethical monotheism following the rise of Jewish myth**

A premise of nineteenth-century Jewish philosophy culminating in Hermann Cohen’s writings was that the monotheistic belief characteristic of biblical and rabbinic thought is evidence of a rational religion that holds moral imperatives parallel to Kant’s rationalist ethics. Twentieth-century advances in Jewish Studies have cast doubt on some of the major theories of the nineteenth century and in doing so also influenced the value conclusions that accompanied the early research. As a result, they tend to give less support to the identification of Judaism with morality (see for example Luzzatto’s anti-Kabbalistic writings and David Neumark in the early twentieth-century).

The rise of the study of Kabbalah and Jewish myth in the twentieth century challenged the unequivocal connection between the religion of Israel, rationalism and morality that characterized the perceptions of the nineteenth century. One of Gershom Scholem’s main motivations in cultivating the study of Kabbalah for the examination of Jewish myth was linked to his understanding of the importance of mythical thinking in consolidating the nationalism that rests upon it. An interesting question that arises out of this assumption is whether the cultivation of the national myth as an adaptation and reformulation of the Jewish myth, freed from the limitations of rational monotheism, has necessarily weakened the perception of the centrality of the moral element in Jewish sources. Does the turn toward myth in Jewish studies reflect the decline in the centrality of ethics in Western culture and the subsequent decline in the centrality of the idea of ethical monotheism in Jewish thought? Or does it in fact reflect the rise of the national myth that contributed to the decline of ethics in Western culture in general?

1. **The rise of the Halakhic element as undermining the autonomous dimension of Judaism (Urbach and Leibowitz)**

Jewish thinkers in the nineteenth century found a resemblance between the Jewish Talmudic principle of *lishmah* (“for its own sake”) and Kant’s duty-based ethics. In the twentieth century a clear rift was revealed between the element of duty and the moral autonomy of reason that underlies Kant’s ethics as opposed to Mill’s principle of utilitarianism. The presentation of Judaism as a heteronomous religion, as reflected in Halakhic law, became for rabbinic thinkers and scholars the advantage of the Jewish Halakhah over Kantian autonomy. This distinct tendency is manifested both in the works of scholars such as Ephraim Urbach (*The Sages*), the philosophy of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and in the rulings of rabbis in Israel and the United States. It was also influenced, among other things (as in the case of Leibowitz), by Kierkegaard’s philosophy of religion, which placed religion above morality. This approach reflects the rise of the general inclination among Orthodox Jews to perceive the Halakhic foundation as independent of the autonomous moral order. Avi Sagi, who deals with this issue extensively in his book, *Religion and Morality*, shows that there are two coexisting tendencies in the Halakhah and rabbinic jurisprudence: one sees morality as decreed by God and the other sees God as independent of morality. The study of rabbinic jurisprudence in the State of Israel reveals that in recent decades there has been a significant increase in rulings that reflect the second tendency, which views the decree of God and the decrees of morality as independent of each other (Irit Ofer). How can we explain the dominance of the model that imposes a conflict between autonomous morality and heteronomous morality on Jewish thought (see Sivan Peretz’s work on Buber and Kant) and to what extent does this model contribute to the weakening of the conception of Judaism as morality? To what extent can one point to a connection between the heteronomous Orthodox trend in the jurisprudence and the intellectual arguments of Orthodox thinkers from Leibowitz to Rabbi Soloveitchik in his work, *Halakhic Man*? Is this a typical response to the discomfiture of modernity and the slackening of Halakhic life, or is it an expression of ideological trends that aim to anticipate a gradual retreat from freedom? What are the possible connections between the decline of the conception of Judaism as morality among religious circles and the rise of the heteronomous Halakhic element?

**Part Three**

Since the assumption of the present study is that, despite the influence of temporary intellectual movements, Judaism as morality is grounded in the historical sources of Judaism, we will begin this section with a fundamental investigation of the relationship between religion and morality in philosophical literature and religious studies. This issue will be examined in light of the writings of David Day, Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, George Edward Moore and Rudolf Otto, as well as later research conducted by the likes of Adams, Taylor, Quinn, Sagi and Statman. Once we establish the background of the general discourse on the question of the connection between religion and morality, this section will be devoted to a re-examination of the ethical dimension in the Jewish sources.

The core part of this section will be dedicated to reviewing the state of research in the field of Jewish Studies with regard to the presentation of Judaism as morality. The discussion will turn to the historical and philosophical tools utilized in Jewish Studies with the aim of conducting a critical examination of the conception of Judaism as morality by looking back at Jewish sources that precede nineteenth-century thought. The intention is to examine the themes that emerge in these contexts from scholarship produced over recent decades.

The meaning of morality in the Jewish sources will be looked at according to the four genres of Jewish sources – the Hebrew Bible, works of the Jewish Sages (Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud), Jewish philosophy, Kabbalah and Hassidism – while striving to avoid bias in favor of the positions espoused by modern Jewish thought. The sources identified as having moral significance will be examined according to their historical context, on the one hand, and the relative importance of the ethical element within the specific genre, on the other. For example, in the study of the Hebrew Bible, the relative place of moral admonitions in the text will be examined within the context of prophetic admonitions as a whole and the meaning of morality informed by conclusions drawn from the field of Near East Studies. In a similar way, the Sages’ treatment of moral issues will be examined in light of the chronological rift between them and the biblical world, and in the context of the reality in the Greek, Roman and Persian worlds. We shall also inquire into the moral aberrations, in terms of the treatment of non-Jews and the like, created as a result of the rabbinic work on the issue. This is a seemingly mammoth task, but the intention is to focus on relevant sources and secondary literature only, and to make a comprehensive summary of the state of research in the field in the wake of a series of seminars held on the topic at Tel Aviv University in recent years.

This chapter will be divided into the following sub-sections:

a. The ethical element in the Hebrew Bible. This element will be examined in light of biblical scholarship and Ancient Near East Studies and will include an examination of the argument that the conception of Judaism as morality was influenced by the ethical worldview of Protestant biblical scholars. We shall also re-examine Yehezkel Kaufmann’s ideas (*The Religion of Israel*)in the face of more complex positions such as that of Israel Knohl in his book *Sanctuary of Silence*, which distinguishes the priestly school of holiness from other schools, or that of Moshe Weinfeld in *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*. (Buber; Greenberg).

b. The ethical element in the works of the Jewish Sages and rabbinic jurisprudence. The ethical element in these sources has been discussed in a host of studies, starting with the articles of Leon Roth, who followed in the footsteps of his mentor Samuel Alexander, the research of Ephraim Urbach, Moshe Halbertal’s book *Judaism*, Avi Sagi’s *Religion and Morality*, Christine Hayes’s *What is Divine About Divine Law?*, and many more.

c. The ethical element in Medieval Jewish philosophy. This element has been explored over recent decades in a number of books and articles, going back to David Neumark and others who wrote about Plato’s moral fervor and its influence on Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages. Many studies have discussed the teachings of Maimonides, as well as those of Saadia Gaon, Judah Halevi, Gersonides, and others. One of the central questions they raise is the extent to which the ethical notions of Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages were directly influenced by Greek ethics, as opposed to being a synthesis of classical philosophy with the ethics of the Hebrew Bible and the Sages.

d. The ethical element in the Kabbalah and Hassidism. The focus of theosophical Kabbalah on divinity and its complexity, as well as the focus of prophetic Kabbalah on the connection between man’s consciousness and God, have left scholars in the field with the distinct impression that the Kabbalah is by and large indifferent to the moral dimension of Judaism. However, an in-depth look at the text reveals that alongside the practice of divine reverence for its own sake, this literature includes distinct ethical aspects that have been passed down to the Hassidic world. The disagreement between Gershom Scholem and Martin Buber over the nature of Hassidic mysticism profoundly influenced the study of Kabbalah and Hassidism on this issue. Scholem and his disciples saw the rise of mysticism within Hassidism as a sign of withdrawal from the material world and a growing desire to connect with divinity. Martin Buber’s position, which attributed great importance to immanence in Hassidism (evident in concepts such as material work) was apparently rejected and influenced many scholars. Recent research, however, has uncovered the textual grounds for the Buberian argument (Kaufman, Margolin) and altered its standing. The ethical dimension in the Kabbalah and Hassidism was therefore not only preserved but actually gained a distinct metaphysical reinforcement.

**Part Four**

This section will be devoted to examining the possibilities of reviving the thesis of Judaism as morality, despite its reductionist nature, in the twenty-first century. There is no doubt that a positivist view of Jewish sources as reflected in one hundred and fifty years of scholarship reveals immense complexity and various contradictory elements coexisting both in the sources themselves and in the realities of life revealed by historians. The question of renewing the conception of Judaism as morality is not just a historical question about the ability to anchor it in the sources per se, but a pragmatic question of feasibility. Spiritual Zionism, led by personalities such as Ahad Ha’am and Hayim Nahman Bialik, placed the spirit of Jewish morality as the spiritual Archimedean point of the Jewish people torn between orthodoxy and traditionalism, secularization and atheism. The question that arises repeatedly relates to this conception’s viability in today’s world, especially in light of the great difficulties involved in maintaining the notion of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Many Israelis consider the principle of a Jewish and democratic state to be an oxymoron; the secular among them – based on their conception of Judaism, and the religious among them – based on their conception of democracy. The idea of a bi-national state, which always seemed far removed from reality, has become realistic in light of Israel’s demographic reality but completely unimaginable in terms of the view of Zionism held by the majority of the Jewish public. In light of this situation and in light of the continuing globalization processes, approaches such as those of the Supreme Court Justices Haim Cohen and the late Menachem Alon and their disciples, which insist on the description of the state as Jewish and democratic, are critical to the future of the State of Israel. However, legal interpretations alone are not enough, since in practice they require the renewal of the intellectual and educational effort to adapt the conception of Judaism as morality to the reality of life in Israel in the twenty-first century.

Haim Cohen and his successors proposed, for example, a way to emphasize the common ground between the values of democracy and the values of Judaism, based on the claim that these values are shared by Orthodox Jews, traditionalist Jews and secular Jews. In addition, this concept also includes the non-Jewish citizens of the State of Israel, since morality is, in essence, universal even when formulated as national duty. This part of the study will include a critical philosophical discussion of the limitations of Jewish ethics in light of the tension between the conception of the *mitzvot* as dependent or independent of moral imperatives, and in light of the tensions between Halakhic viewpoints and the fundamental values of a modern nation-state based on democratic principles, especially in terms of its treatment of minorities. Our hypothesis is that overcoming these limitations necessitates the development of the moral core of Judaism outside of the shackles of the Halakhah, on the one hand, and unilateral nationalism, on the other.

The questions discussed in this part of the study will address not only the issue of Judaism and democracy but also other questions about the place of morality in Jewish thought and its relevance to life in the modern state. Special attention will be given to the principle of charity and mutual assistance in the Jewish sources. We can see two distinct trends in the laws of *tzedakah* dictated by the Hebrew Bible and the literature of the Sages (see Benny Porat). The one strives for the rehabilitation of the weak, which was presented by Maimonides as the highest level of charity, while the other concerns itself with assistance in survival. The transition from *tzedakah* as help for the needy to *tzedakah* that cultivates responsibility toward others in order to facilitate their independence, as well as responsibility for the future of humanity, is a central goal that Jewish morality today must endeavor to achieve.

Among other things, this section will examine the question of the extent to which the principle of *tikkun olam*, currently seen among Diaspora Jews as an expression of the moral aspect of Judaism, is a continuation of the perception of Judaism as morality. To what extent does it expand the traditional principle, and to what extend does it stem from the separation in the United States between national identity and Jewish affiliation interpreted as morality? A *tikkun olam* morality does not bind the state in which those who promote it reside; instead, it is adopted by individuals. As a result, this approach is possible only for Jews living as citizens of non-Jewish nation-states, since their Judaism does not pose an obstacle in their public and/or civic lives, even though the political aspect is inseparable from the ethics dictated by Jewish sources. The great challenge facing Jews in the State of Israel is finding a balance and a connection between national and ethical imperatives, a task that of course must be achieved as part of Israel’s commitment to its definition as Jewish and democratic.

The premise of the discussions in this chapter is that the future relevance of Judaism largely depends on providing answers to these questions. If Judaism loses its connection to the public and national dimension and settles for being nothing more than a ceremonial-communal affiliation, then it will lose its uniqueness as a religion striving for *tikkun olam* in the full sense of this concept. The State of Israel as a Jewish state will be a state whose Judaism is evident only in the common ethnic origin of its Jewish citizens and it will not be able to point to any binding value system based on its definition as a Jewish state beyond the principle of ethno-biological affiliation. This situation may lead to an exacerbation of the enormous tensions between the various components of Israeli society to the point of risking the disintegration of civil society essential to the existence of a modern and moral state.

**Preliminary Results**

Various aspects of this study are based on earlier studies by Ron Margolin on related issues. The study of the conception of Judaism as morality is included in his articles on Samuel David Luzzatto, Moses Hess, Leon Roth, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas. Various Hassidic sources that clarify the Buber-Scholem controversy are analyzed in his book *The Human Temple*. In recent years, a series of research seminars have been held at Tel Aviv University dedicated to the study of the relationship between religion and morality in Judaism. Other scholars who have contributed to the study of this subject in recent decades have been mentioned throughout this research proposal. The aim is to aggregate the isolated studies mentioned above into an infrastructure for the complete research project described in this document.

**Conditions of Research**

In order to accomplish the tasks presented in this document, two partners were recruited by the lead researcher. Dr. Ari Eitan is a postdoctoral fellow with extensive scholarly knowledge and a high sensitivity to the issue of ethics in Judaism, and Mr. Amit Katsav is a doctoral student in the field of political science who specializes in matters of religion, morality and nationalism. Due to the modular structure of the proposed study, even though its various parts are interconnected and stem from each other, each can stand on its own. In the event that, by the end of three years of work, the latter parts of the study are not completed as planned, while their completion will doubtlessly continue over the following year or two, the publication of the first parts can most likely proceed without delay.