Anthology of Jewish Culture – Rabbinic Sources (1880-1918)

# Separation of communities

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) was probably the most influential leader of German-Jewish orthodoxy and the founder of the Neo-Orthodox Torah Im Derech-Eretz ideology, promoting the observance of Halakhah alongside socio-cultural integration in the Non-Jewish society. On the other hand, he is also the father of the secessionist ideology, promoting the creation of Orthodox Communities (*Austrittsgemeinde*) separated from the general Jewish communities, once the German law allowed such a move (1876). Another prominent rabbi, Seligman Baer Bamberger (1807-1878), did not support that move. Rabbi Hirsch's public letter to Rabbi Bamberger, arguing for such communities and condemning Orthodox Jews who do not secede (1877), opened a heated debate regarding the secession policy. R. Hirsch's letter, R. Bamberger's reply and the public letter addressed by R. Naftali Z.Y. Berlin (1816-1893) to the editor of Machzikei Hadas, expressing objection to the idea of "importing" secession to Eastern Europe, demonstrate the variety of Orthodox approaches on this question.

## Texts:

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Collected Writings, VI (New York: Feldheim, 1990), p. 201 (from "Thus, according") to p. 204 ("genuine Judaism").

R. Bamberger's response, ibid, from p. 248 (from "Did you, Rabbi") to 250 ("unjustifiable act").

ר' נפתלי צבי יהודה ברלין, שו"ת משיב דבר, 1894, סימן מד.

# Against the "Evildoers" in Hungary

Rabbi Yekutial Yehudah (Zalman Leib) Teitelbaum of Sziget (1808-1883) was probably the most powerful hasidic rebbe in Greater Hungary of his time, and the father of Hungarian hasidic zealotry. In this 1883 *teshuvah* he rules that a Jewish community should not bury an uncircumcised Jewish boy who passed away at the age of 9 in order to teach his parents a lesson.

## Text:

ר' יקותיאל יהודה טייטלבוים מסיגט, שו"ת אבני צדק, ירושלים תשנ"ג, הוספות יורה דעה כד (עמ' טו).

# Halakhah and Technology

Rabbi Yitzhak Shmelkes (1827-1904), a famous Galician rabbi, was the first halakhic authority to address the question of electricity in Jewish law. In the following comment he added as an addendum to his book of responsa he prohibits use of telephone on Shabbat.

Text:

ר' יצחק שמעלקעס, שו"ת בית יצחק, יורה דעה, פרמישלא 1888, מפתחות והגהות לסימן לא (דף קנח ע"א וע"ב).

# Civil Marriage

By the end of the 19th century Jews married in civil marriage. A debate broke out among the halakhic authorities whether the Halakhah recognizes such marriage ex post facto or not. The two opinions are presented through the responsa of Rabbi Shlomo Zvi Schück (Hungary, 1844-1916) and Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann (Germany, 1843-1921).

Texts:

ר' שלמה צבי שיק, שו"ת רשב"ן, אבן העזר, סימן צו (1899).

ר' דוד צבי הופמן, שו"ת מלמד להועיל חלק ג (אבן העזר וחושן משפט) סימן כ.

# Against emigration

"The Great Migration" of the Jews to America, usually dated 1881-1814 usually met a strong rabbinic opposition. The United States, often dubbed as *Di Treifene Medineh* ("The Unkosher country"), was portrayed as a place in which Jews almost necessarily lose their religious observance. Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan (1839-1933), known as "the Hafetz Hayim", a key figure in the rabbinic stratum of the period, wrote a whole booklet against emigration to America. On the other hand, he also wrote a book of Halakhah and Musar for the emigrants, Nidahei Israel (1894). He might have changed his opinion with regard to emigration. Interestingly, his children from his second marriage and some of his grandchildren emigrated to the New World.

## Text:

ר' ישראל מאיר הכהן, קונטרס נפוצות ישראל, מתוך ספרו שם עולם , חלק שני, 33-31 (וורשה תרנ"ח) (קטעים מסומנים).

# Pragmatic Religious Zionism

Rabbi Yitzhak Ya'akov Reines (1839-1915) is the founder of the Mizrachi Party (1902), and therefore the founder of Religious Zionism. Before his political activity Rabbi Reines took part in various educational enterprises, including the founding of modern yeshivas that integrated secular studies to their curricula. His Zionist activity was often castigated by fellow rabbis who blamed him for collaborating with the "evildoers". Anti-Zionist writers leveled allegation that the Zionist movements is actually secularizes the Jewish identity and attempts to bring a secular redemption by natural means. Rabbi Reines rejected these claims by stating that collaboration with non-religious people is legitimate when aimed at attaining common good purposes, and by embracing a pragmatic, non-messianic explanation for the character of the Zionist enterprise.

## Texts:

6 הרב יצחק ריינס, אור חדש על ציון, וילנה תרס"א, פרק י דף ל ע"ב – לא ע"א, עד המילים 'שם בקירוב'.

הנ"ל, מכתבים, בתוך: נפתלי בן מנחם, מספרות ישראל באונגאריה, ירושלים תשי"ח, עמ' 67-66.

# Messianic Religious Zionism

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook (1865-1935) was nominated the rabbi of Jaffa and the colonies in 1904 and then the Chief Rabbi of Mandatory Palestine in 1921.His theology was based on the notion that the perfect, infinite Good only appears in our world only in partial, finite segments. Therefore, ideas which seem conflicted are actually parts of the same supreme Good. The course of history brings the conflicting ideas to confrontation, but then also to a higher synthesis, the ultimate synthesis being the Redemption. Rabbi Kook saw the conflict between secular Zionism and anti-Zionist Orthodoxy as an example of this process, and therefore viewed the return to Zion as a harbinger of the Redemption.

## Texts:

הרב אברהם יצחק קוק, שמונה קבצים, א, קלה (Translation in the Blackwell Reader in Judaism, pp. 239).

שם, קפו.

שם, ג, א (Translation ibid, pp. 241-243).

# Anti-Zionism on practical grounds

Rabbi Hayim Soloveitchik (1853-1918) is considered as one of the greatest talmudic scholars of the modern age. During his tenure as a senior teacher at the Yeshiva of Volozhin he developed a methodology for the study of the Talmud and Jewish Law based on formal conceptualization, that was later known as "the Brisker Method". While he usually refrained from political involvement, his objection to Zionism was clear-cut, loud and staunch. His main argument was that the true goal of the Zionists is not to establish a Jewish state – the latter being only means thereof – but to secularize the Jewish people.

## Text:

ר' חיים סולובייצ'יק מבריסק, מכתב מתוך 'אור לישרים', וורשה 1900, עמ' 55.

# Anti-Zionism on messianic grounds

Some Ultra-Orthodox leaders objected Zionism not on the grounds of its alleged harm to Jewish identity, but on the basis of the arguments that it contradicts the belief in the coming of the Messiah by heavenly decision. Rabbi Hananya Yom-tov Lippa Teitelbaum (1836-1904) of Sziget, known as the Kdushas Yom-tov, was probably the most powerful rebbe in greater Hungary. His father was the Yatev Lev (see above) and his son, R. Yoel, the Szatmar Rebbe, would become the staunchest ideologue of radical anti-Zionism and a key figure in 20th century Orthodoxy. The Kdushas Yom-tov's argument against Zionism is based on the claim that the Jews should wait the miraculous Redemption. Rabbi Sholem Dovber Schneersohn (1860-1920) was the fifth rebbe of the Habad dynasty and the founder of the Habad Yeshiva, is probably the first to raise the allegation that Zionism "pushes on the Redemption", i.e. takes a pernicious human endeavor to bring the messianic era before God wills it. Paradoxically, by this propelled, though softly, the acute Messianism of Habad.

## Texts:

ר' חנניה יום טוב ליפא טייטלבוים מסיגט, מכתב, בתוך: נפתלי בן מנחם, מספרות ישראל באונגאריה, עמ' 85.

ר' שלום דובער שניאורסון מלובביץ', מכתב מתוך 'אור לישרים', וורשה 1900, עמ' 59-57 עד המלים 'וימהר גאולתנו בב"א'.

# Non-Zionist Orthodox nationalism

Dr. Isaac Breuer (1883-1946) was one the most brilliant 20th century Orthodox thinkers. A grandson of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (see above) he was raised on the Torah Im Derech Eretz ideology, but gave it an original nationalist twist. He wrote his PhD dissertation on Kant's concept of law, engaged in political activity and became one of the founders of Agudat Israel. Breuer's political theology is based on the idea that the national identity of the Jewish people is not based on common language, territory, folk culture race and history, as the case is in other peoples, but its law – the Torah. Hence, the Jews are "the People of the Torah", who deserve to attain their self determination in a "Torah State. He perceived Zionism as a movements that seeks to create a new basis for Jewish identity, based on the above secular elements, thus leading to the split of the Jewish people into two.

Text:

Isaac Breuer, "The Law and the Individual", in Jacob Levinger, ed, Concepts of Judaism (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1974), pp 46-49, from the words "it is precisely" to the words "preserves the nation" (line 1).

# Anti-Communism

Rabbis and rebbes almost unanimously rejected communism. The texts in which they expressed this opinion, however, are surprisingly sparse. One of the earliest sources in which we hear a rabbinic opinion on this issue is a hearsay by Rabbi Yosef Hayim Karo (1800-1895), the rabbi of Kalisz (Poland), cited by the famous maskil Eliezer Z. Zweifel (1815-1888). Rabbi Yitzhak Zelig Morgenstern of Sokolov-Kotzk (1866-1939), who already lived during the turbulent time of the Bolshevik Revolution and the post-WWI failed communist revolutions did not attack communism directly, but ironically equated its ideal of equality to a "sodomean bed" – the Jewish equivalent of Procrustes' bed.

## Texts:

אליעזר צוייפל, סניגור, וורשה תרמ"ה, עמ' 164, מן המילים 'הרב הגדול ר' יוסף חיים קרא' ועד המילים 'במלות קצרות, ע"כ'.

ר' יצחק זליג מורגנשטרן מסוקולוב-קוצק, שארית יצחק, תל אביב תשמ"ט, עמ' 214, פסקה א.

# Radical Musar in the Lithuanian Yeshivas

Since the last two decades of the 19th century, Musar Movement was gradually expanding in the Lithuanian Yeshiva world. Within the intellectualist atmosphere of Lithuanian Jewry, the Musarniks put emphasis on improvements of the character, and for this purpose gave room to religious emotion. Among the various schools of Musar, Novardok (Novogrudok) was the most radical – and the most fascinating. Its founder, Rabbi Yosef Yozl Horovitz (c.1848-1919), known as *The Alter fun Novardok* ("The Elder of Novogrudok"), established an "ordinary" yeshiva in that city but soon turned it into a stronghold of fervent Musar ideology, whose curriculum included Musar homilies and practical Musar exercises. During the Russo-Ukrainian War he was infected by a typhoid pandemic, after he had insisted to attend his students by himself. His homilies, which were compiled to his book *Madregat Haadam* ("The Moral Stature of Man") show his contempt to this-worldly concerns and his enthusiastic call for personal self-improvement. His thought and educational path by no means represents all the schools of Musar, but is arguably the most intriguing among them.

## Text:

ר' יוסף יוזל הורוביץ, מדרגת האדם, ניו יורק תש"ז, בקשת השלמות, פרק ט, עמ' רנו מן המילים 'אמנם עכשיו' ועד עמ' רנח עד המילים 'למה לו חיים'.

# Orthodox combat for "pure" education

Jewish education went through changes during the 19th century, and modern schools, integrating secular studies and modern-styled religious studies, were open in the Jewish Pale of Settlement in Tsarist Russia. Rabbis and rebbes objected them firmly and forbade their followers to send their children to those schools. When Rabbi Israel Perlov, the Rebbe of Stolin (1868-1921), otherwise a moderate hasidic leader, heard that that some of his hasidim sent their children to a modern school in Turów, he hurried to write them a sharp letter, where he explains why this is a wrong move.

## Text:

ר' ישראל מסטולין, מכתב על בית הספר בטורוב, מתוך: ר' אהרן הויזמן, דברי אהרן, עמ' קח, מכתב ל.

# Military service and economic integration

When young Jewish men were drafted to the army, they could not observe the Sabbath properly. When Jewish businessmen became more integrated in the general commerce, they often preferred to open their businesses on the Sabbath, because otherwise they would have to close them for two successive days. Other people had other reasons and so the outcome was adecline of the value of the Sabbath as a religious day of rest. Rabbi Shaul Brach (1865-1940), a zealous Hungarian rabbi, says that the reality in which Jews violate the Sabbath in the army and in business is a result for not cherishing Torah study.

## Text:

ר' שאול בראך, משמרת אלעזר, קרולי 1911, חלק א (תשועה בישראל), לו, דף יב ע"ד עד דף יג ע"א.

# Religious decline in the United States

Jewish life in The United States was far different from that of Eastern Europe. Not only the halakhic observance declined, but also the entire atmosphere. There are numerous sermons by American rabbis deploring the deterioration of Judaism in the New World, and longing for the hearty and deep Judaism of the *Alte Heim* ("Old home") that they left. Here are presented one by Rabbi Shaul Shochet (1860-1925) of Louisville, the other by Rabbi Yosef Meir Levin of Cincinnati (1872-1926).

## Texts {{{if two are too much you may choose whichever you prefer}}}:

הרב שאול שוחט, אהבת שאול, ב (שיקגו תרע"ו), עמ' 40 ('כן רואין') עד עמ' 41 ('חינוך בניהם').

הרב יוסף מאיר לוין, לבית דוד (בולטימור תרע"ז), עמ' 80-78 (מן המילים 'ולמען הבין' עד המילים 'ועמלנו עבורם').

# Political turbulence and Jewish suffering

Rabbi Yehoshua Heschel of Rabinovitch (1860-1938), the Rebbe of Monastritch, was one of the first hasidic rebbes to settle in the United States. He was a man of broad horizons, eloquent language, with Zionist and modernist leanings. In 1930 he was asked to write his memoirs for a Jubilee volume that was published in his honour. The text I selected is one in which he describes a few episodes from the 1917 revolutions in Russia. Beyond the factual documentation, they reflect the perspective of a hasidic leader who could look back at his past homeland not only with nostalgia, but also with sober criticism and even a sigh of relief.

Text:

ר' יהושע השל רבינוביץ ממונסטריץ', חיי יהושע, בתוך: ספר היובל (שמריהו לייב הורויץ, עורך), ניו יורק תר"ץ, עמ' סז מן המילים 'בקיץ שנת' ועד עמ' סט עד המילים 'למען שמו'.

# Religious decline in Poland

Religious life in Eastern Europe was certainly more Orthodox than in America, but there, too, a steep decline was visible, especially among the young. Many of them joined new secular movements – Zionism, Socialism – while others simply opted for plain *hofshi* ("free", meaning secular) way of life. While many yeshivas were established and many of them were successful, the overall number of men committed to Torah learning and, paradoxically, the yeshivas themselves were hotbeds for secularization. Women, too, often preferred modern fashion over traditional attire. In the following text, the third Gerrer Rebbe. Rabbi Avraham Mordekhai of Ger, known for his strong leadership and political activism, complains about the loosening of religious norms such as Torah study and *Tzni'ut* (modest dress), probably among his hasidim.

## Text:

ר' אברהם מרדכי אלטר, אדמו"ר מגור, אוסף מכתבים, ורשה תרצ"ז, א, עמ' 12-11.

# Religious decline in Iraq

The Jews in the Islamic countries also went through a modernization process, that was different from the one in the West. Sephardi Judaism did not develop a Reform movement, nor ideological secularism. The Western norms were not an interior development but rather an "import" from the outside, brought mainly by colonial agents. The Paris-based  *Alliance Israélite Universelle* was another such agent. Their influence was especially felt in the big cities of the Orient, that served at commercial junctions. More and more Jews began to violate the Sabbath in public, often without giving up the prayers in the Synagogue, and certainly not their membership in the community. In these two cities, where the rabbinate was strong enough, we can even find signs of proto-Orthodox responses. One of these was Baghdad. Due to continuing drought and other disasters inflicted on Iraq, the economic condition of Iraqi Jews deteriorated and some even died of hunger. In a long 1912 sermon, Rabbi Shim'on Aghasi (1852-1914) reproaches them and explained how all this comes from the increasing violations of the Sabbath and other sins.

Text:

הרב שמעון אגסי, דרשה משנת תרע"ג, ירושלים תשכ"ד.

# The Kabbalah polemic in Yemen

Even the Yemen, usually remote from main scenes of modernization, went through a kabbalist-rationalist struggle. Following the influence of a French-Jewish emissary, a small group of rabbis in Yemen developed anti-kabbalistic opinions, but did not publicize them. The group grew into a small movement named "Darda'im". In 1912 a polemic over the Kabbalah burst and Rabbi Yehie Kafah (1850-1931), the leader of this rationalist movement, summed up its arguments in a short book, *Milhemot Hashem* ("The Wars of the Lord"). The Yemenite community saw them as heretics, and even today many people refuse buy tefillin and mezuzot written by them.

## Text:

הרב יחיא קאפח, מלחמות ה', ירושלים תרצ"א, עמ' 27-26.

# Women's modest appearance

With the ongoing process of modernization, Jewish women began to take off their head-covers. I the United states this norm became prevalent even among the Orthodox, and some rabbis even endeavored to find justifications for it. Rabbi Yehiel Mechel Epstein (1829-1908), who wrote one of the most important halakhic books of the period – *'Arukh Hashulhan*, rules that women must cover their heads, but the fact that they actually don't do so may result with a lenient approach regarding prayer at the presence of women's hair.

## Text:

ר' יחיאל מיכל אפשטיין, ערוך השולחן, אורח חיים (פיוטרקוב תרס"ז), עה, ז.

# Orthodox Girls' education

The education of Orthodox girls bothered many parents in Eastern Europe. While Neo-Orthodox Jewry in Western Europe developed a school system for girls, in Eastern Europe parents had to send their daughters to public schools, where they were prone to modernization and assimilation. One of the obstacles for opening Orthodox schools for girls was the traditional prohibition against women's Torah study, on the one hand, and the prohibition against secular studies, on the other. Discussions and debates over this question ended up with no result. Sara Schenirer (1883-1935), by all means the most influential Orthodox-Jewish woman in the 20th century, broke the standstill. The young seamstress from Cracow left a diary where she describes how a sermon she heard as a refugee in Vienna in 1915 made he crystallize her ideas about the urgent need to develop Orthodox education for girls in Eastern Europe. Two years later she established the first Beis Ya'akov school in Cracow. The Rebbe of Belz gave his blessing, and the Hafetz Hayim wrote that the prohibition against women's Torah study does not hold today. Short after that, the Agudat Yisrael Party took over the school and systematized its programs. When Schenirer died in 1935 it was already the largest Jewish education network in the world.

## Texts:

שרה שנירער, געזאמעלטע שריפטן, (Brooklyn: Beth Jacob, 1955), עמ' 8 (מן המילה: 'תרע"ה') עד עמ' 10 (עד המילים 'קומענדיקער ארבייט').

ר' ישראל מאיר הכהן, ליקוטי הלכות על סוטה, דף כא.

# Sports and "the New Jew"

The Zionist enterprise was not just about political and demographic change. The Pioneers also called for a change of ethos. The Diaspora Jews, they contended, focused only on "the tiny letters" and discarded the developing of the body. "Diaspora Jew" was presented as degenerated, and calls to create a "New Jew" were sounded by authors and ideologues. Agricultural work and joining quasi-military forces became top priorities and those who engaged in them were heroes of the day. But besides these necessities, a the Zionists fostered a positive approach to sports. Rabbi Kook, a supporter of the Jewish renewal, viewed this development with favor. His rivals, Rabbi Yosef Hayim Sonnenfeld (1848-1932) and Rabbi Yitzhalk Yeruham Diskin (1839-1925), took a very different approach, viewing such an activity as walking in the paths of the Gentiles.

Texts:

הרב אברהם יצחק קוק, שמונה קבצים, קובץ א, תשט"ז. קובץ ג, רעג.

הרבנים י"י דיסקין, זוננפלד ואח', 'קול השופר', ירושלים תר"פ, עמ' 3-1.