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Dear Reader,

In his seminal work, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik distinguishes between the two Adams of Genesis' two creation narratives. Adam I, says Soloveitchik, is creative. He seeks power and masters this world, transforms it, and builds upon it. Adam II, however, withdraws from creation and approaches the world and his existence with metaphysical questions: how did I and everything around me come to be and why? Soloveitchik writes, "He encounters the universe in all its colorfulness, splendor, and grandeur, and studies it with the naivete, awe and admiration of the child who seeks the unusual and wonderful in every ordinary thing and event."[1]

While the essence of man includes both of these important instincts, this Journal is a prime example of the work of Adam the Second. In the following six articles, Brandeis undergraduates explore seemingly ordinary phenomena in Judaic studies–ranging from state interactions and modern media portrayal of Jews to biblical translation, Hasidic movements in America, and much more in between–with seriousness, depth, and a constant search for meaning. I am privileged to have overseen the publication of these pieces, in large part because they highlight the enduring struggle to understand the ultimate purpose behind the mundane.

Before I conclude, a brief note about the occasion upon which we publish our fourth issue. To mark Brandeis' 75th anniversary, our initial intention was to publish articles exclusively on the theme of Jews and American Universities. While we had to set that goal aside for now, I know that these articles demonstrate the true greatness of Brandeis upon this important milestone: an intellectual student-body dedicated to the flourishing of Jewish ideas. Without further ado, I present the fourth edition of the Brandeis Judaic Studies Journal.

Michael Schwartz
Editor in Chief, Brandeis Judaic Studies Journal

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[1] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Three Leaves Press Doubleday, 2006), 21-22.

The *Brandeis Judaic Studies Journal* is grateful to many people and institutions.

First and foremost, thank you to Sylvia Fuks Fried, editorial director of Brandeis University Press and executive director of the Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry. Sylvia, as our faculty advisor, is a constant source of support and advice. Her desire to see student scholarship published and her ability to view things at the 30,000-foot level has made her a great help in the publishing of this issue.

The Journal is indebted to the Brandeis Library, which hosts the journal, especially University Librarian Matthew Sheehy, Mark Paris, and Annie Harrison.

A sincere thanks to our sponsors who have made it possible to print this issue of the Judaic Studies Journal: the Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry, The Near Eastern Judaic Studies Department of Brandeis University, and the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education.

We extend our appreciation to President Ron Liebowitz, Bill O'Reilly, Nate Herpich, Stewart Uretsky, Sam Solomon, Angelito Santos, Steve Monti, Beth Fong, and many others, all of whom have made this issue and previous ones possible. Thank you to President Liebowitz for writing a letter from the President and to Rabbi Seth Winberg for his support of the journal and this issue's foreword.

While this journal is not officially affiliated with the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department, it is honored to have the continued support of its faculty, especially Professor Jon Levisohn, and Academic Administrator Jodie Parmer.

Thanks to all the professors who have historically nominated student papers for publication or recommended students to publish their work, especially Professors Eugene Sheppard, Jonathan Sarna, and Alexander Kaye.

I am deeply grateful to the editors who have worked with me on this issue. To Assistant Editors in Chief Doron Polonetsky and Dov Ratner and to Editors

Stephanie Kallish and Allan Feldman, thank you. It took the whole team to put this together, and you should all be proud of the final product which would not have been possible without you. Thank you also to Manny Cohen for modifying the design for the Journal's cover.

The past editorial team always demonstrated a willingness to assist no matter the task. A particular thanks to Josh Hopen for his constant guidance and support. It will come as no surprise to Josh that publishing the Journal carries with it significant logistical pressures. His readiness to guide me through the process ensured a smooth editorial-team transition.

Lastly, I want to thank you, the reader, for engaging in the following excellent student scholarship in Judaic Studies. I hope you enjoy our journal, and I'm sure you will learn a great deal!

Michael Schwartz, *Editor in Chief*

Dear reader,

I'm delighted that you've decided to peruse the Brandeis Judaic Studies Journal – Brandeis' first entirely student-led publication devoted to academic writing on Jewish studies.

In 1948, Brandeis was established as the only non-sectarian university founded by the American Jewish community – a singular origin story which, in the words of its inaugural president Abram Sachar, promised that Brandeis would be a "center of Jewish learning."

Since then, it has been such a center, and then some. Our university boasts one of the richest Jewish studies faculties in terms of breadth of expertise, and it offers diverse Jewish studies offerings for undergraduate and graduate students alike. This issue of the Journal provides a unique look into the diversity of Jewish perspectives that exist on our campus, with topics ranging from the portrayal of Orthodox Jews in the media, to Israel-Russia relations, to Biblical translation.

I'm inspired by the impressive scholarship of our students reflected in these pages, and with our students' willingness to engage with some of the most difficult issues facing Jews today. Now, as much as ever, as the world faces a widely documented rise in antisemitism, it is critical that we continue to explore, and better understand, the richness of the Jewish experience, past and present, and in Israel and throughout the Diaspora, toward finding ways to improve a collective future.

Warmly,

Ron Liebowitz
President

It is a pleasure to see the Brandeis Judaic Studies Journal publish another volume of scholarship by students.

Knowing the founding editors–Jonathan, Eliana and Benji–well from their student days when they first pitched the idea of this journal, it is easy to see how their interests in intellectual rigor converged with their personal engagement with Jewish texts and ideas. They produced a strong collection of undergraduate essays. As is often the case at Brandeis, where Jewish student leadership thrives, their vision of a journal by students has continued to inspire and educate new generations.

At Brandeis, academic Jewish Studies and the work of organizations like Hillel combine to strengthen students' personal Jewish commitments. Students can carefully study texts in the classroom with critical tools and in the *beit midrash* in the original Hebrew or Aramaic. I cannot think of other instances of a university, a department of Jewish Studies, and a Hillel all being founded at virtually the same time. Brandeis is home to established and new world-class scholars who are committed to scholarship as well as contemporary Jewish life, and has produced leaders who are better for having learned in Waltham how to think and how to study the Jewish experience across millennia.

Students can choose to pursue all sorts of extracurricular pursuits outside of their coursework. It should inspire all of us that there are students who spend their leisure time doing work that looks very much like what professors and students do in courses: writing, editing and then publishing their ideas in Jewish Studies.

Seth Winberg
Executive Director, Hillel
Senior Chaplain, Brandeis

Dalya Koller

SHARKS, SHIPS, AND BEASTS OF THE DESERT:
The Mystery of Psalm 74

אַתָּ֣ה רִ֭צַּצְתָּ רָאשֵׁ֣י לִוְיָתָ֑ן תִּ֝תְּנֶ֗נּוּ מַ֝אֲכָ֗ל לְעָ֣ם לְצִיִּֽים

Accurate translation is a key component to the accessible study of biblical texts and commentaries, but sometimes that goal is blunted by the rare instance of an untranslatable or unknown word. One such word, of the few scattered throughout the Hebrew Bible, is the last word of verse 14 in Psalm 74: לְצִיִּֽים, which has stumped commentators and translators for centuries. While the rest of the verse is relatively straightforward to translate, the last word has yet to have any definitive translation. "You crushed the heads of the Leviathan, and gave them as food to the nation, to the (ציים). ציים is, to date, a mysterious word, although there have been many different potential explanations for both the word's translation and its root.

The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB) suggests two options for the meaning of the word, both of which serve as foundations for subsequent translations and commentaries. BDB's suggested root for the word is צי. The first possible translation BDB proposes for the word צי is "ship," explaining that צי is a loanword from the Egyptian word *t,aī*. The second possible definition listed is "wild beast," which, it states, "proposes either desert-dweller… or crier, yelper."[1] Should the latter translation be accurate, BDB clarifies that the word refers to "a specific animal, but not certainly identifiable." These two translations serve as building blocks for many later commentaries and translations of the verse. Many people opt to work with the second definition given by BDB, understanding the word צי to mean "wild animal of the desert," and translating the word ציים literally as "nation of wild beats," which tends to then turn into "people of the desert." Others are more inclined to choose the

[1] Francis Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: Based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius, as Translated by Edward Robinson, and Edited with Constant Reference to the Thesaurus of Gesenius as Completed by E. Rödiger, and with Authorized Use of the German Editions of Gesenius' handwörterbuch über Das Alte Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), Psalm 74.

former definition of the word צי, "ships," taking the word ציים to mean "nation of ships" or "men of ships."

When looking at the Jewish Publication Society of America's (JPS) translation of the *Tanakh*, we see that they too are unsure which translation is accurate and present both options offered by BDB. In JPS's translation of verse 14, the last two words are translated as "the denizens of the desert, or sea-faring men,"[2] and there is a note clarifying that the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. Sefaria, an internet-based library of Jewish biblical, legal, and cultural texts, follows suit in JPS's combined translation.

Other commentators are less ambiguous in their translations of the word. In the *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, by Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, the word is translated as "the creatures of the desert." Keil and Delitzsch explain that "the ציים, the dwellers in the steppe, to whom these [heads of the Leviathan] became food, are not the Æthiopians or rather the Ichthyophagi, but the wild beasts of the desert."[3]The commentary explains that עם, the word in our verse immediately preceding ציים, is typically translated as "nation," but is used in Proverbs 30:25 to refer to a group of non-human animals, in that case, "the ants and the rock-badgers." Keil and Delitzsch use this as proof that the word עם in Psalms 74:14, can refer to "wild beasts of the desert," and does not necessarily need to refer to a human collective. They continue: "לציים is a permutative of the notion לעם, which was not completed: to a (singular) people, viz. to the wild animals of the steppe."[4]

In *Psalms 51-100: Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 20*, Marvin E. Tate also translates the words as "the creatures of the desert." Tate, however, mentions many different possibilities for the root of the word, acknowledging that the meaning of the word ציים is ultimately uncertain. He first translates the phrase "לעם לציים" literally, writing it as "for a people, for desert ones," but he clarifies that this is an "obscure construction which is equivalent perhaps to — for a people of desert ones."[5] Tate suggests that the word ציים might also be a denominative of the word ציה, meaning dryness, and therefore can potentially mean something along the lines of an animal who lives in a dry, desert-like place.

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[2] *Tanakh, a New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text: Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), Psalm 74.

[3] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1892), Psalm 74.

[4] Ibid

[5] Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 20 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990), Psalm 74.

Tate writes that Aubrey R. Johnson, in his book *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel*, translates the word ציים as hyenas. The aforementioned translations of "wild beasts of the desert" serve as indications of this possibility as well.

Tate, following the first BDB translation, mentions the possibility of the word ציים meaning something in relation to ships. He writes that the word צי means "ship" in multiple Biblical contexts, such as Isaiah 33:21 and Numbers 24:24. He writes that if one chooses to work with the definition "ship," the word ציים can mean "people belonging to ships – sea-farers, sailors, or the like." Tate mentions that the plural of the word צי is typically written "צים," as can be seen in Numbers 24:24, but he brushes this off as a minor discrepancy, asserting that "it is possible to disregard the pointing and read לצי ים – for the people of the ship of the sea – sea-farers."[6]

In Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger's book, *Psalms 2: A Commentary,* they, too, translate the words as "the crowd of desert creatures." In their analysis of this verse, they write that "לעם לציים" literally translates to "for a people, beasts of the desert." What this commentary focuses on is the parallel between the Leviathan mentioned in the first half of the verse with the mystery animal in the second half: "אַתָּה רִצַּצְתָּ רָאשֵׁי לִוְיָתָן תִּתְּנֶנּוּ מַאֲכָל לְעָם לְצִיִּים." Hossfeld and Zenger argue that in this context, the Leviathan is considered a "chaotic wilderness dragon," and they say that "the placement of sea serpent and desert dragon alongside one another is not impossible in an ancient Near Eastern depiction of chaos, since watery floods and the dry desert are 'interchangeable' images of chaos."[7] They compare this with the very beginning of Genesis, in the second verse of the first chapter, where they write that watery chaos is mentioned alongside "*tohu va'vohu*," which they explain to mean desert. They also write that this verse includes an allusion to an Ugaritic and Babylonian myth revolving around the battle with the chaos that came before creation.

What sets Hossfeld and Zenger's commentary apart from the rest of the commentaries mentioned thus far is that, when they explain the parallels between this psalm and the myth of the battle of chaos, they write, "verse 14a speaks of the decisive battle with the ancient seven-headed dragon… According to verse 14b, he is thrown as food to the 'sharks.'"[8] Here we encounter a brand-new translation of the word ציים: sharks. Hans-Joachim Kraus, in *Psalms*

[6] Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Psalm 74.
[7] Frank-Lothar Hossfeld et al., *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), Psalm 74.
[8] Ibid

60 - 150: Continental Commentaries, uses the same translation. To Kraus, the verse reads as follows: “You have crushed the heads of Leviathan, have given him as food to the sharks.”[9] Somewhat strangely, Kraus does not even mention the confusion that every other commentator stumbled through in his commentary and analysis of the psalm. He seemingly does not think his translation of the word ציים is noteworthy at all and provides no explanation or elaboration regarding why he chose to translate it this way.

To trace back the origins of the word ציים being translated as shark, we must look back to an issue of the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums,* or *the Monthly Journal of History and Science of Judaism*, a nineteenth and twentieth-century German journal. Felix Perles, a German rabbi, published an article in the journal titled, “Zur biblischen Fauna und Flora. Ein nachträglicher Beitrag zur Festnummer für I. Löw” (“To the Biblical Fauna and Flora. An additional contribution to the [unknown word] I. Low”). Perles addresses the complication and mystery of the words לעם לציים. He writes that, in an attempt to solve this mystery, he first spaced out the letters to read ל ע מ ל צ י י ם, and then shifted the spacing of the letters to read לעמלצי ים. He explains that he noticed an Arabic word, *amlas*, or عملس, which sounds very much like the Hebrew word עמלץ, and which literally translates to “wolf-like” — but can even be describing a shark, according to Perles. He mentions a slight linguistic dilemma, that the Arabic letter س (s) does not correlate with the Hebrew letter צ (tz). However, he easily brushes this issue off, explaining that because these words have four-consonant roots, they are likely not of Semitic origin; generally, Semitic words have three-consonant roots. Therefore, Perles does not believe that these two words are directly cognates of one another and instead suggests that both words were likely borrowed distantly from some other non-Semitic ancient language and thus used different letters to express the “hissing” sound found in the word. Perles argues that the Hebrew word עמלץ and the Arabic word *amlas* need not sound exactly alike to be originally derived from the same word.

Perles writes that he brought this idea to Immanuel Low, a Hungarian rabbi, scholar, and botanist. According to the article, Low taught Perles that the word *amlasu,* عملسُ*,* can mean smooth. Some sharks, writes Low, do not have scales, and their skin is smooth and slippery. He claims that the word עמלץ can mean “smooth of the sea,” which could refer to a shark, or some other smooth, slippery sea-faring animal. Low uses Psalm 119:103 as proof for this argument:

[9] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), Psalm 74.

"מַה־נִּמְלְצוּ לְחִכִּי אִמְרָתֶךָ מִדְּבַשׁ לְפִי," which can be roughly translated as, "How your words glide through my palate, like honey to my mouth." Here, the word נִמְלְצוּ translates to "glide" or "smooth."

The Academy of Hebrew Language, however, does not seem to think that Perles and Low's creative theory was based on well-established understandings and reject that the word עמלץ existed before Low's assertion. In the Academy's etymology of the word עמלץ, they write that the origins of the word come from Low's translation of the verse in Psalms. The Academy writes that the word עמלץ only began to enter dictionaries, translated as the word shark, after this suggestion made by Low. Later, they state that the word began to mean a specific species of shark, one that is especially large and dangerous. They also write that there are multiple species of sharks whose habitats are found in the Mediterranean and Red Seas that feature the word עמלץ in their zoological names, which have been used for decades. According to the Academy, the word עמלץ was only approved as a word in the list of a cartilaginous fish in the year 2000, over a century after Low was born.

One may question, however, whether Low was truly influential enough to alter the lexicon of the Hebrew language so significantly. Did a suggestion in one paragraph of an article — not even written by Low himself — featured in a small journal, and focusing on a singular word in the book of Psalms really have a demonstrable etymological impact? Even if it is possible that his suggestion had that effect on the Hebrew language, it would be odd for Low, who was not a commentator on Psalms nor a translator by any means, to come up with his own new word for a species. Conversely, Low *was* an expert in the vocabulary of the natural world in a Jewish context, publishing a four-volume collection entitled *Die Flora der Juden* (The Flora of the Jews). Considering his extensive knowledge in such a niche field, it is possible that he encountered a word that the Academy of Hebrew Language did not know about.

While Low's assertion is satisfying and attractive, in *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, James Barr raises further issues with Low's translation. Barr brings forth multiple reasons why the suggestion is not feasible. He writes that he doubts that any words related to עמלץ have existed or been used in any Semitic language, let alone Hebrew in specific, to mean a kind of fish. He mentions that the transliteration of the word from Arabic to Hebrew likely would have resulted in the less guttural "אמלץ" and not "עמלץ." There is a yet more concerning grammatical concern raised by Barr, one that is difficult to refute. The verb م.ل.س. (m-l-s) in Arabic seems to mean "be slippery."

Barr writes that the word *amlas*, عملس, has been used to mean both "smooth-headed man" as well as "a thing that slips out of one's hand by reason of its smoothness."[10] Perhaps surprisingly, though, Arabic has an entirely different word for a fish that slips out of one's hand by reason of its smoothness: مَلِصَةٌ, or *malisa*. While the two words share the same root, slippery fish has its own separate word, while the word *amlas* is used for other slippery things.

The compendia of post-biblical Hebrew *Compendious Hebrew - English Dictionary,* written by Reuben Grossman and edited by M. H. Segal, and Wilhelm Gesenius' *Thesaurus* seem to cast doubt on the potential of "shark" as a valid translation. Barr writes that the Grossman-Segal dictionary "indeed enters this word with the gloss 'shark' but marks it as a 'modern' word. I have not been able to find any previous history of usage. There is no entry in Ben-Jehuda."[11] Barr notes further that the word עמלץ in the Grossman-Segal *Thesaurus* even seems to be a modern proposal based on Low's suggestion, just as the Academy of Hebrew Language asserted. In the *Thesaurus*, "it is indeed mentioned… but even there it is treated only as a suggestion, and a doubtful one at that. This hardly suggests that the word had an authentic history." [12]

While Low's suggestion to switch around the spacing and to define the word עמלץ as "shark" is appealing, and while it fits beautifully with the verse's theme of water and sea animals, it still requires stronger proof before it can be considered the dominant translation. Until then, translators, commentators, and regular readers of Psalms will continue to struggle with the word ציים, debating whether it refers to a beast of the desert, a ship, or something else entirely.

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[10] James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of The Old Testament* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 236-237.
[11] Ibid
[12] Barr, *Comparative Philology,* 236-237.

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Adena Cohen

THE PROBLEMATIC PORTRAYAL OF JEWISH INEQUALITY IN POPULAR CULTURE

Nowadays, much of the world is experienced through a screen. Why would one put in the effort to go out and explore, when they can do it from the comfort of their own home? Even more, how amazing of an opportunity is it to be able to learn and explore so many different experiences with this widely accessible option! With the complexity that is cinema and popular culture, there are a lot of advantages and disadvantages to using this mode of presentation and portrayal. In an instant, one can be inspired, develop a new interest, or discover something they never knew existed. At the same time, with easy access to media, one can instantaneously be misled, not think before reacting, and internalize a lie or misrepresentation without even noticing. One thing that is often lost through popular culture is the nuance that is involved in a culture. Specifically in regard to Judaism, popular culture tends to present an oppressive society in which women are not valued or treated equally to men. In this paper I will explore how inequality within the Jewish community is portrayed in popular culture through a gendered lens, and establish how that common portrayal is a narrow perspective that misses the nuance involved in Judaism. In doing so, I will acknowledge the fact that there are in fact different castes of people within the Jewish community and explain how these castes differ from the Indian caste system in regard to the lack of associated inequalities and oppression.

Media is the ultimate opportunity for consumers to learn about cultures and practices outside of their own personal experience. Human nature craves new experiences, and what better way to do it than through a screen? In the context of religion, people are especially interested in exploring cultures that seem out of the norm to them from a perspective that they are not normally offered in their daily life. With this desire, popular culture loves to take “deep dives” into religious communities, and in essence “expose” them for their seemingly wrongdoing in comparison to the secular society that dominates popular culture. While this can be seen across all religions, it is abundantly clear with Judaism in recent years. The media generally portrays the two polar extremes of Judaism. *Jew in the City*, a nonprofit organization working to change

negative perceptions of religious Jews and effectively make Orthodox Judaism known and accessible to those outside of the community, speaks on this occurrence in popular culture frequently. According to Allison Josephs, the founder and executive director of this organization, "You see the Jerry Seinfeld, totally secular kind of mocking their heritage, or you see the crazy Hasidic Jew who hates women and is judgemental and extreme."[1] These representations are extreme dramatizations of these two groups of Jews that play into harmful stereotypes and tropes associated with Judaism. Along with exaggerating these two groups of Jews, the media is also missing a large section of Jews in these depictions—religious Jews that fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

Unorthodox, a German-American drama television series that debuted on Netflix, is a great example of how inequality within the Jewish community is portrayed in today's popular culture. In this Netflix limited series based on Deborah Feldman's memoir, a Hasidic woman in Brooklyn flees from an arranged marriage. When describing the accuracy of the portrayal of Esty's Hasidic community, Feldman states, "I think it is an accurate depiction. However, I don't believe that total accuracy is ever possible in representation because to achieve total accuracy, you have to sacrifice the narrative completely."[2] While this film may be an accurate representation of Deborah's personal experience, it misrepresents the broader Hasidic community. In this show, Jewish society is portrayed as a "patriarchal system" where women are inherently oppressed.[3] In response, members of the Jewish community spoke up against this portrayal. Izzy Posen, a chassidic researcher and commentator, offers the perspective of a secular Jew who was formally in the ultra-Orthodox community in London. He states that "it portrays a community that is one-dimensional, emotionless, and eternally bitter."[4] Arguing against this narrow

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[1] Abrar Al-Heeti, "Netflix's My Unorthodox Life Perpetuates Harmful Jewish Stereotypes, Some Say," CNET, October 19, 2021, https://www.cnet.com/news/netflixs-my-unorthodox-life-perpetuates-harmful-jewish-stereotypes-some-say/.

[2] Katie Lockhart, "Unorthodox's Deborah Feldman Reveals Why NetflixChanged Her Life Story," Digital Spy, August 4, 2020, https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/a32079659/deborah-feldman-unorthodox-true-story-netflix/.

[3] Günseli Yalcinkaya, "What a Young Ex-Hassidic Jew Thinks of Netflix's Unorthodox," Dazed, April 17, 2020, https://www.dazeddigital.com/film-tv/article/48844/1/what-a-young-ex-hassidic-jew-thinks-of-netflixs-unorthodox.

[4] Ibid

portrayal, Posen declares that "that's not what the community is like—it's true that there's lots of suppression of personal freedom and you do have to toe the line, but there's also plenty of joy, heart, empathy, good-naturedness, and humor there."[5] One would be remiss to ignore the conformity and structure that a Hasidic community requires from its members. However, despite the interpretation of someone who is uneducated on this type of community, this lifestyle is not inherently oppressive. The strict organization of a Hasidic community does not exclude kindness and compassion, nor does it exclude the nuanced emotions that the community experiences when an individual leaves. In fact, the lifestyle that is associated with Hasidism is beautiful in many ways, with incredible values emphasized. With this beauty, many individuals actively choose to be a part of this tight-knit community that offers support and love to all of its members. As Posen phrases his personal experience within the ultra-Orthodox community, "when I was kicked out from home, shunned from the family, and left alone, I know my parents were experiencing very strong emotions, which included anger, but also empathy, love, and worry."[6] What *Unorthodox* is missing at its root is the human aspect of the Hasidic community—the depth and nuance involved within the society.

Additionally, *My Unorthodox Life* is another modern piece of media that acts as a primary example of Jewish inequality. This nine-episode reality series follows Julia Haart, the CEO of Elite World Group, who was a former member of a Haredi Jewish community in Monsey, New York. Describing her own experience, Haart "grew increasingly uncomfortable with the community's strict principles and practices" over time, eventually leaving to pursue her passion for fashion, design, and female empowerment.[7] Throughout the series, Haart and her children reflect on their previous experiences within the Jewish community they grew up in, and claim that women were suppressed from many normative activities, including dancing, singing, riding a bike, and playing sports. The reality series perpetuates negative misconceptions of oppression and sexism in the Orthodox Jewish community, despite Haart specifically stating, "It has nothing to do with Judaism or religion; this has to do with fundamentalism."[8] This disclaimer does little to convince viewers that religion is not at fault for the

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[5] Yalcinkaya, *What a Young*.
[6] Ibid
[7] Emily Strohm, "How Fashion CEO Julia Haart Went from a Strict Religious World to Style Star," PEOPLE, July 8, 2021, https://people.com/tv/how-julia-haart-went-from-strict-religious-world-to-fashion-ceo/.
[8] Al-Heeti, *Netflix's My Unorthodox*.

hardship, discrimination, and oppression that Haart and her family are portrayed to have experienced.

In response to this show's release, women identifying as a part of the Orthodox community used the hashtag #myorthodoxlife on a variety of social media platforms and shared their positive experiences within the Orthodox community. For instance, one post reads: "People are nuanced, the Jewish people are nuanced. I'm concerned that people will see #myunorthodoxlife and it will perpetuate the antisemitism that has risen significantly in the U.S.."[9] Similarly, a YouTuber who goes by Classically Abby spoke about the series's narrowness: "To the average person, this is a true representation of the religious Jewish community."[10] While Haart and her family do speak about their religious life briefly, the remarks are consistently vague and hasty. These comments do not offer a lot of detail or depth to the critical conversations that viewers expect about religious life and why she chose to leave her community in the way that she did. This lack of depth is unfortunate, as this series has a platform and opportunity to make a real difference in the perception people have of the Jewish community. This show is a clear example of a piece of media that portrays Judaism and the Jewish community without all of the nuance involved.

When viewing depictions of Judaism in popular culture such as the previously stated examples, it is crucial to establish two things—(1) that most, if not all, societies possess some amount of discrimination and (2) that this oppression may or may not be accurate within the communities portrayed. On the first point, being that human nature leads people to categorize their interactions, it is not surprising that individuals are categorized and consequently discriminated against.[11] While all societies have aspects of discrimination within them that must be worked on and rooted out, these flaws do not make the society oppressive and discriminatory by nature. Rather, it is an aspect of the larger picture. As for the second point, these pieces of media are one-sided portrayals of specific personal experiences. A broader, more holistic view of a Hasidic community may be more revealing as to what equality looks like within their society. Whether one experience is the norm or a highly unique case is hard to say, as the many average, everyday experiences within the ultra-Orthodox community are not documented in the same public manner. Analyzing *My Unorthodox Life*, Josephs explains that "there's this fascination in reporting on

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[9] Al-Heeti, *Netflix's My Unorthodox*.
[10] Ibid
[11] James Morris, "We Are Family" (unpublished article, Moodle, 2021).

ex-ultra-Orthodox Jews, but really what it is is the most dysfunctional stories of our community being amplified by secular media, as if this is normative Orthodoxy, when in fact, the normal people don't make TV shows or movies or news, they just live their life quietly and happily."[12] In fact, while it would be helpful for the Hasidic community to be portrayed in popular culture from an inside source in order to ensure that nuance is involved, it is not a viable option because a significant aspect of the Hasidic community involves refraining from media. With that in mind, the inaccurate depictions are hard to prevent in regard to this specific community. In addition, people living peacefully is not interesting to viewers. Instead, people want drama and conflict. This fascination with particular, singular experiences within the Jewish community is undeniable, as more media focused on ultra-Orthodox communities is produced each year. These particular stories are just that—particular. While they may accurately depict one individual's story, they do not accurately represent the broader community.

Further, it should be noted that these portrayals emphasize a concept of inequality and social hierarchy in the Jewish community that is not supported in traditional Jewish texts. Historically, social stratification has existed in the majority of societies since the beginning of human society. Many civilizations were built on the basis that "people are not created equal; rather, that the human community is like a pyramid, with the privileged few perched at the top, and the feeble masses below them."[13] Resisting what was expected in normative society, the first philosophy that went against this accepted concept of inequality and caste was in the ancient writings of Judaism. The Torah, the ancient Jewish biblical text also known as the Old Testament, narrates the story of the Jewish people from the time of creation until the eventual entrance of the nation into the land of Israel. Along with storytelling, the Torah also provides the Jewish people with detailed *halacha*, the Hebrew word for Jewish law. Through both narration meant to inspire and textual law meant to be followed, the Torah offers clear indicators that equality and justice must be at the forefront of society. These lessons were then used throughout the world in a variety of societies and cultures, essentially "revolutionizing social and political thought in ways that still influence us today."[14]

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[12] James Morris, *We Are Family*.
[13] Joshua Berman, "The Biblical Origins of Equality," *Azure: Ideas for the Jewish Nation*, no. 37 (Summer 2009), http://azure.org.il/article.php?id=503&v=1.
[14] Berman, *The Biblical Origins*.

The argument for equality can be seen by specific stories and laws found within the Torah. One story in favor of equality can be seen by the mass escape of Jewish slaves from Egypt, found in the book of Exodus. "Propagating the story of an enslaved nation rising up and breaking its chains," the Torah emphatically promotes freedom and equality for all.[15] This narrative places all Jews at an equal status, and is mentioned frequently in order to remind members of the Jewish community of their equal status. Along with reading it three times a day by prayer services, the entire holiday of Passover revolves around this story of unity and equality. During the seder, a ritual meal during which the story of the Exodus is read and explained in depth, Jews are reminded of their complex cultural history and called to help those that are oppressed go "from bondage to freedom."[16] Following this story, the account of the Jews accepting the indispensable ten commandments at Sinai continues to embrace the concepts of equality. This narrative "depicts the origin of an *entire* people—a seminal, but, most important, *equalizing* event.[17] These narratives that are fundamental to Jewish faith argue for equality unequivocally.

In addition to the fact that these inaccurate depictions seen in current media ignore the Torah's significant demand for equality, what makes these representations of Jewish society wrong and harmful is not necessarily the inequality being portrayed, rather, it is the lack of context and representation involved. Within the wide scope of popular culture, one group of religious Jews receives the most screen time in the media—Haredi/Hasidic Jews. As of 2018, only 6% of American Jewish households identified as Hasidic/Haredi.[18] This narrow portrayal excludes the stories and experiences of 94% of American Jewish households. If this perspective is a minority within the broader Jewish community, why is it so frequently used as the one sect of Judaism that deserves screen time? In general, popular culture attempts to intrigue audiences. Content nowadays always needs to contain a certain level of shock value, and nothing contains more shock value than the oppression of women in the supposed insular, cruel Jewish communities that the media presents to viewers. With this in mind, the choice to focus solely on ultra-Orthodox communities is understandable, but unacceptable.

It would be dishonest to ignore the fact that there are various categories

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[15] Ibid

[16] Pesach Haggadah, Magid, First Half of Hallel (Sefaria).

[17] Berman, *The Biblical Origins*.

[18] "American Jews by Religious Affiliation," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed December 7, 2021, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-jews-by-religious-affiliation.

of people within the Jewish community while discussing the inequality portrayed by the media. These categories look remarkably similar to the Indian caste system when looked at from a certain perspective. According to Alan Brill, a Rabbi who focuses his research on the comparison between Jewish society and Indian society, "a certain common way of thinking, of always doing categorization and creating a rule for it" exists in both communities.[19] Continuing, Brill states that, "with Hinduism and Judaism being alike in their all-encompassing natures, it is understandable that both religions include social hierarchies that define an individual's roles in all aspects of day to day life." In this way, the two hierarchies are similar.

Within the Indian form of hierarchically organizing society, known as the varna caste system, there are four divisions, beginning with the priests whose scriptural literacy lead to them dominating at the top as *Brahmins*. Similarly, at the top of the Jewish caste system are the

Kohanim, who also act as priests within the Jewish community. Following them, the warriors and rulers are known as *Kshatriyas* in India. On the Jewish end, *Leviim* come next in the hierarchy, acting as musicians, gate keepers, guardians, temple officials, judges, and craftsmen. Below these groups come the *Vaisyas*, those involved in business, and the *Shudras*, peasants and workers, in India. The Jewish caste system ends in the *Yisraelim*, the common folk who are not directly involved in the temple practice and work in a variety of occupations.

A further common thread seen throughout these two societies is that of *kedusha*, the Hebrew word loosely translated as holiness associated with an individual's purity. Whether an individual or object is pure or impure then goes on to determine whether they are holy or not. With daily rituals that revolve around purity that originated from the biblical times and have continued all the way until the current day, purity (and impurity) is a determining factor of one's religious well-being in Jewish society. This is true of Indians as well—everyone involved in the caste system is expected to maintain a certain level of purity.

In this sense, biblical Jewish society cannot be deemed an egalitarian society by most modern definitions of society's egalitarianism. The crucial difference between the castes involved in Jewish society and Indian society however is in regard to the inequality that is associated in one but not the other. For instance in Jewish society, purity is expected of all groups of people, regardless of their caste. This can be seen by the introduction of the book of

[19] Alan Brill, "Rabbi on the Ganges: A Jewish-hindu encounter" (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020).

Leviticus written by the Abarbanel, a Portuguese Jewish statesman, philosopher, and Bible commentator:

"It is true that this book is divided into the first two parts. The first is in the holiness of the priests and the ways of their work and it begins from the order of Leviticus until the act of the land in Egypt which is five and a half orders. And the second part is in the sanctity of the people in what they will do and beware of, as He said, 'And you were sanctified and you were holy,' and in that came the rest of the orders of this book." [20] Here, it is clear that while there are differences between the castes (as seen by the separate section of laws specifically pertaining to the *Kohanim*), there are purity/holiness-related expectations of all members of the Jewish nation. On the other hand, everyone involved in the Indian caste system is expected to maintain certain levels of purity, but the specific level is determined by their individual caste. For a *Brahmin*, this may mean drinking from a specific well, while a *Shudra* may venture far away from his/her home in order to reach a well designated for their lower level of purity.

In this way, unlike the surrounding societies, Judaism did not allow for a divide between castes. Rather, "a new social, political, and religious order [was] founded upon egalitarian ideals and the notion of a society whose core is a single, uniformly empowered, homogenous class."[21] Politically, while there are different levels of rulership, Jewish society is one of early democracy. The Torah speaks to the collective "you" when discussing who is charged with assigning a king: "Then you may appoint a king over you … one from among your brethren shall you set king over yourself."[22] This implies that the entire community has this responsibility, as opposed to a specific group whose role is to appoint leaders.[23] Including *all* people in determining who should lead the nation was radical at the time. Additionally, the king's authority is also limited in the Torah, with absolute rule being denied. These limitations include not being able to have a large number of wives and not being allowed to accumulate too much treasure. While kings around the world ruled with no restrictions, all leadership positions in Judaism were (and still are) governed and regulated by *halacha*.

As for the social aspect of equality, there is no apparent separation between people of different castes within the Jewish community. This social

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[20] Yitzchak Abarbanel, "Leviticus 1:1" in Torah Commentary of Yitzchak Abaranel, Warsaw 1862, (Sefaria, accessed December 10, 2021), https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.1.1?lang=bi&with=Abarbanel&lang2=en.

[21] Berman, *The Biblical Origins of Equality*.

[22] Deut. 17:14-20.

[23] Berman, *The Biblical Origins of Equality*.

mobility that is possible is a defining difference between the two communities. Referring back to how a king is appointed, the Torah states that the individual should be "one from among your brethren."[24] This vague phrasing implies that anyone who is a member of the Jewish community is eligible to be appointed as king. Similarly, the Torah also allows for any member of the Jewish community to become a judge. In this way, authority and power was available to everyone, and determined in a fairly democratic fashion.

Along similar lines, the economic system in Judaism was also a new, egalitarian version of what previously existed. In biblical times, the primary economic system was centered around agriculture. Supporting an equal society, the Torah requires individuals to support one another, with specific requirements regarding farming and assisting those who are suffering by harvesting. In addition, when the distribution of land came up, the Torah strayed yet again from the normative practice of the time. While other societies determined that the land belonged to the king and/or priests, the Torah placed the ownership of land among all members of society. "The idea that broad expanses of available land should be divided among the commoners was unprecedented."[25] While inequality and oppression are undeniable aspects of the Indian caste system nowadays, the Jewish social system does not invite inequality. In fact, Judaism actively preaches against inequality, oppression, and judgment towards others.[26]

Many people who are uneducated may view popular culture and recent media that depicts the Jewish community, and believe that Judaism fosters an oppressive, patriarchal society. At the same time, the Jewish community is a complex society with a multitude of perspectives that must be acknowledged and explored. This narrow perspective fails to take a holistic approach to Judaism, not taking into account the fact that Judaism inherently opposes inequality and oppression from the beginning in its ancient, sacred texts. These portrayals also ignore the fact that there are many different denominations existent within Judaism that hold varying views and practices. While Jewish representation is slowly gaining more depth, there is *a lot* of change still necessary. Along with being blatantly inaccurate, the current narrow perspective that is seen in popular culture can have dangerous consequences for the broader Jewish community, such as an increase in antisemitic incidents as a result of these harmful misrepresentations. This danger requires immediate action in regard to the

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[24] Dt 17:14-20.
[25] Berman, *The Biblical Origins of Equality*.
[26] Jewish Virtual, *American Jews*

depiction of Judaism and Jewish society in popular culture.

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Elisha Gordan

SATMAR AND CHABAD:
Dueling American Hasidic Visions

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the world is filled with his glory."[1] This verse, which contains a fundamental contradiction–How can God be holy (separate) while the whole world is filled with God's glory?–is a central theme of Hasidic thought. In seeking connection to God, many Hasidic sects have balanced this paradox of transcendence and immanence in differing ways. Two groups stand at the extremes of this spectrum and have, perhaps paradoxically, found the most success in the United States. These groups are Chabad-Lubavitch and Satmar. The latter has defined itself as a separatist anti-modern group, while the former has done the opposite, deliberately spreading its message of Torah through *shluchim* (emissaries) across the globe. With the backdrop of post-World War II Jewish America, with its non-Orthodox masses and new position at the center of world Jewry, the two groups took differing paths. Although both viewed post-War American Jews as spiritually adrift, Satmar decided to retreat from the scene and live within, while Chabad preached to the Jewish masses. Both approaches, while radically different, have found great success in America, demonstrating the opportunity and variety provided to American Jews, especially in the 20th century.

Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum came to America in 1946 already the head of the Satmar dynasty. Continuing ideas he had promoted in Europe, he immediately began to strengthen Satmar's anti-modernism and anti-Zionism.[2] These ideas were strengthened in America and seemingly stemmed from the perceived total openness of America's culture: "In America, it would become far more aggressive, precisely because here society was wide open… When Jews could by law move and live wherever they chose and could afford to, residential and cultural insularity had to be reinforced by those *inside* the ghetto."[3] Whereas in Europe Jewish insularity had been reinforced by antisemitism, Rabbi Joel

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[1] Isaiah 6:3
[2] Samuel C. Heilman, *Who Will Lead Us? The Story of Five Hasidic Dynasties in America* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 152-209.
[3] Heilman, *Who Will Lead Us?*, 173.

believed that in America, Jews would have to enforce their separation themselves.

Paradoxically, Teitelbaum's group was based in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, at the center of New York City, America's cultural capital. This incongruity was used to fuel a separatist agenda. "If a city has no wicked Jews, it would be worthwhile to pay some wicked Jews to come and live there so that the good Jews would have someone to separate from."[4] Crucially, this teaching does not refer to contemporary culture or the wider American public. Instead, reflecting the way Rabbi Joel viewed American Judaism at this time, it refers to "wicked Jews," which in his eyes are those who have assimilated, even to a minor degree, into their American surroundings. This negative portrayal of American Jewish life, which followed the traditionalist European Hasidic designation of America as the *treife medina* (the unclean land), helped Rabbi Joel win support and fervor among his followers. Another teaching emphasizes the despair Teitelbaum felt toward the American Jewish community:

> If a house is on fire, you try to salvage as much as possible, even if partially damaged. But if the flames are threatening to engulf the neighboring houses, it is foolish to spend time saving charred items…In our generation, the fire of assimilation has taken hold of many Jewish homes. We must devote our energies to saving those homes that have not yet been damaged.[5]

Instead of wicked, as mentioned before, the Jews are lost, unable to be redeemed. Conversely, Rav Joel's followers were the last remnant. This teaching is highly suggestive of post-Holocaust Hasidic teachings, where those who survived the Nazis must rebuild for the sake of those who were lost. For Satmar, however, assimilated American Jews seem to also be in this category.

Satmar's educational philosophy differed from the American Jewish mainstream as well. Classically, and especially since Mordecai Kaplan's ideas became influential, the synagogue was the center of American Jewish life.[6] Rabbi Joel centered his community around the yeshiva, believing that the education of youth in the culture was the key to its survival. Since secular subjects were taught so little, Satmar education made it hard to leave "the

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[4] Heilman, *Who Will Lead Us?*, 172.

[5] Dovid Meisels, *The Rebbe: The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum, The Satmar Rebbe* (Lakewood, NJ: Israel Bookshop, 2010).

[6] Mordecai M. Kaplan, J*udaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2010).

bubble," and it became an important method for separating from the outside world. These new educational systems won Satmar followers, as they often educated children of religious Jews unaffiliated with Satmar. As much as Satmar positioned itself against the rest of the American Jewish community, there was at least one thing that they learned from the existing American Jewish educational system. In 1955, Satmar established its first summer camp in the Catskills, following other denominational educational camps.[7]

As time passed, Teitelbaum's separationist practices increased. He gradually banned television and all Yiddish newspapers except one, *Der Yid,* which Satmar eventually bought.[8] These efforts culminated in the creation of Kiryas Joel, Satmar's self-run community in upstate New York. The "move from a crowded urban center to more spacious suburban surroundings was a classic American white middle-class step."[9] The Satmar sect here showed both their assimilation into American culture and their differentiation from fellow American Jews. "Unlike other American Jews, they didn't aspire to enter the American middle-class. Nor did they share the quest of other American Jews to pass as white."[10] As with education, Satmar differentiated itself from the American Jewish mainstream while adapting to the wider American scene.

A third, and perhaps the most famous facet of Satmar's difference from standard American Jewish life, is their virulent anti-Zionism. Before Satmar, American Judaism had a near-universal tolerance, if not promotion, of Zionism. Even the Reform movement, which had renounced Zionism at their infamous Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, reintroduced it in 1937. Like much else in his platform, Rav Joel increased his anti-Zionsim in America, using it as another tool in separating his community from the larger Jewish community. Between 1959 and 1961, Teitelbaum published his magnum opus, *VaYoel Moshe*, which theologically displayed his anti-Zionism. His attacks focused on the secularism Zionists possessed, which increased as the State of Israel advanced the aims of its non-religious majority. Interestingly, he specifically targeted the revived Hebrew language and its perceived secularization. Teitelbaum writes: "The blasphemers and the heretics have made such significant changes to the

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[7] Jonathan D. Sarna et al., "The Crucial Decade in Jewish Camping: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping." In *A Place of Our Own*, (The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 27–51. Notably, Camp Ramah in 1947 and Olin-Sang-Rugby Union Institute in 1952 were the camps of the Conservative and Reform movements, respectively.

[8] Heilman, *Who Will Lead Us?*, 176.

[9] Nomi M. Stolzenberg and David N. Myers, *American Shtetl: The Making of Kiryas Joel, a Hasidic Village in Upstate New York* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 116.

[10] Stolzenberg and Myers, *American Shtetl*, 118.

pronunciation… that are unimaginable to our fathers and ancestors… They have come to deny the sanctity of the language… It is forbidden to study the heretical language. It is totally forbidden even outside the land of Israel."[11] The language Teitelbaum uses here suggests that he has no issue with the Hebrew language, only the "changes" made by the Zionists. The thrust of this polemic seems to be the preservation of the language of "our fathers and ancestors."[12] Rav Joel thus furthered the traditionalist and separatist attitude of his following.

Chabad-Lubavitch is the opposite of Satmar in many ways. They took very different approaches in their views of American Jews, education, and Zionism. Led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Chabad-Lubavitch movement transformed into the most prominent Jewish group in the world. Schneerson became the leader of Chabad in 1951, one year after the death of his father-in-law Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson. Yosef Yitzchak, upon arrival to America, had "declared that sinful American Jews were responsible for the Holocaust. But for that very reason, if they repented, the messianic redemption would start in America."[13] This became the driving message of Chabad, especially under Menachem Mendel: to bring the teachings of Judaism to every Jew and eventually bring the Messiah.

Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Rebbe, immigrated to the United States in 1941, escaping the destruction Chabad Hasidim faced in the Holocaust. Before becoming Chabad's leader, he studied engineering in both Berlin and Paris, where he was exposed to the ideas and norms of the modern world. After becoming the leader of Chabad, Schneerson immediately began working to revitalize his Hasidic group, drawing on its intellectual tradition to promote *kiruv* (Jewish outreach).[14] The Rebbe sent out his *tzivos Hashem* (armies of God) on a drastically larger scale than his predecessor. Their goal was to use their mitzvah tanks to fight in the "war" for Jewish souls. This militaristic language strongly reflected the contemporaneous Cold War. While the USSR persecuted the Jews in its domain, Chabad would counter by increasing Jewish observance

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[11] Ariel Evan Mayse and Sam Berrin Shonkoff, eds. "Satmar Hasidism." In *Hasidism: Writings on Devotion, Community, and Life in the Modern World* (Brandeis University Press, 2020), 257. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1595mrh.42.

[12] Ibid 256

[13] Arthur Green et al., "AMERICA: HASIDIM'S GOLDENE MEDINAH." In *Hasidism: A New History (Princeton University Press, 2018),* 677. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc77bk8.36.

[14] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, "Lessons in Tanya - Text of the Tanya - Chabad," Chabad.org (Kehot Publication Society, 2006), https://www.chabad.org/library/tanya/tanya_cdo/aid/6237/jewish/Lessons-in-Tanya.htm. The first Lubavitch Rebbe.

everywhere they could. These *shluchim* were sent all over the world and acted as "a kind of Jewish Peace Corps, pioneers sent out by the Rebbe into the harshest condition."[15] The campaigns have been a remarkable success, and today there are Chabad houses in all 50 states and around the world.

The Rebbe, clearly influenced by the political atmosphere of the time, promoted the use of opportunities provided by living in America to enhance Chabad's goals of spreading religious observance:

> Everyone needs to find himself in a place where he can be most useful. Here in the United States one finds the key to global influence; here is the steering wheel of the world. Here there are historic changes that can affect the destiny of nations, among them Israel. Here we find possibilities of influencing matters for the benefit of Israel, and from here we can influence as well the situation of religion in the Land of Israel.[16]

Refraining from religious language, Schneerson specifically calls on his followers to use all available resources. This is a radical view for a Hasidic group. Not wary of its modernity and its newness, Chabad embraced technology such as the internet. The pattern is clear: Chabad would use all means necessary to advance its agenda.

With their sense of responsibility toward all Jews, *shluchim* endeavored to build Jewish schools. These schools were open to all Jews, regardless of background. The emphasis placed on education was so strong that it was recognized by the U.S. government, which made the eleventh of Nissan, Schneerson's birthday on the Hebrew calendar, National Education and Sharing Day. The fact that Chabad's emphasis on education was even on the radar of the U.S. government reflects how far Chabad's reach extended. The active pursuit of political means was the only way they could have been as successful as they have been.

The most famous part of Chabad's outreach is their emphasis on the holiday of Hanukkah, and its menorah. Before Chabad's campaign, Hanukkah was seen by the Orthodox Jewish community as resembling Christmas, and lighting the menorah outside was even declared forbidden by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the leading authority on Jewish law in America.[17] The Rebbe,

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[15] Green et al., "AMERICA: HASIDIM'S GOLDENE MEDINAH." 697.
[16] Ibid 682
[17] Maya Katz, "Trademarks of Faith: 'Chabad and Chanukah in America.'" *Modern Judaism - A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 29, no. 2 (May 1, 2009): 239–267. https://doi.org/10.1093/mj/kjp007.

however, saw the candle lighting as a unique opportunity to publicize Judaism. One of the ideas surrounding Hanukkah is *Pirsumei Nisah*, publicizing the miracle, which the Rebbe emphasized. In 1979 the White House held its first annual candle lighting, where President Jimmy Carter made his first public appearance in 100 days since beginning to confront the Iran hostage crisis.[18] The Chabad menorah, conspicuously a different shape than the one on Israel's coat of arms, has become the main symbol of the movement today.

Overall, Chabad and Satmar viewed the post-war American Jewish scene similarly. As refugees from Europe, they saw the Jews of America as spiritually adrift. For Satmar, that meant strengthening from within, deliberately railing against the larger Jewish community, which it saw as hopelessly lost. For Chabad, the reaction was the opposite. They saw an opportunity and responsibility to reach out to these Jewish souls. Both approaches have had remarkable success, and Satmar and Chabad are the two largest sects of Hasidic Jews in the United States. It also may be the case that the success stories of these two groups at opposite ends of the Hasidic world in the United States reflect the exact openness of the American Jewish culture the two groups were so wary of.

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[18] Katz, *Trademarks of Faith*.

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Miriam Fisch

BLOODY BAVLI:
Talmudic Metaphors for the Uterus

Niddah is a system of purity and impurity within Jewish law which legislates the bodies and actions of menstruators.[1] The codex prescribes several days of bleeding, followed by several days ensuring that there is no additional discharge, an immersion in a ritual bath, and a return to ritual purity, all in a calendric process. However, this religious lens highlights the dissonance between the lived experience of menstruators and the legislating bodies seeking to understand it. This concept is found in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem talmudim, both of which use a series of logical questions to redefine medical phenomena within known metaphoric realms to provide schema for Rabbis who were more accustomed to the *beit midrash*. While the imagery used for the menstruating body and its anatomy attempt to be inclusive, certain terms deem it abject and immodest. When it becomes difficult to comprehend the visceral nature of menstruation, the Rabbinic texts tend toward spiritual metaphors to mask the discomfort and act with extreme modesty.

Metaphors are utilized throughout the Talmud to make the incomprehensible attainable; likening the woman and her uterus to a house is just one example of many. Throughout Mishnaic and talmudic texts, women are referred to houses, particularly ones which men possess. This image reflects the hermeneutical desire to appease the female audience while simultaneously praising women for their place in the private, domestic sphere. Ideological discourse around the house metaphor provides insight into its discursive role, especially as it appears in the descriptions of the week of preparations leading into Yom Kippur. The text debates the meaning of the phrase "his house" in the text, with one opinion taking it to mean that the *kohen gadol* can only atone for the people if he has his wife. This is based on the verse's declaration that he "'atones for himself and for his house'—his house, this is his wife" as proof.[2] The Mishnah simultaneously makes her role fully essential to him and his work

[1] Note: The author would like to assert that not all women menstruate, nor are all menstruators women. However, the terms will be used interchangeably for ease of reading.
[2] m. Yoma 1:1

in the public sphere while also reducing her presence to a fully transient title. Establishing this link between the woman and the house, while serving as praise for women who remained in the private sphere and maintained the upkeep of the space, also sets the stage for further legislation of menstruation as a necessarily private and rigid event. By likening the wife of the *kohen gadol* to a house, the underlying tendency—legislating domesticity within the modest space of the home—is established.

The combination of excessively detailed legislation and the metaphor of a home in lieu of a woman's body continue through descriptions of her physical anatomy as well. When deciding which sources of genital blood impart a state of impurity, the Mishnah states: "The sages had a metaphor for the woman: [She possesses] a chamber, a vestibule, and an attic. Blood of the chamber is impure; If it is found in the vestibule, a situation of doubt [regarding its origins] is [treated as] impure."[3]

Chambers, which function as common architectural images to distinguish the boundaries of a space, turn a woman's body into a series of houses and rooms. This description aligns with other talmudic declarations throughout the Bavli, including the assertion that "female bodies possess additional 'bolts' and 'doors' absent from male bodies" which compose the primary and secondary sex characteristics.[4] It is a euphemism which the Rabbis view as preferable to discussing actual anatomy in all its scientific and visceral detail. Instead, they rely upon that which they know and regularly discuss in the religious setting. The home, and other buildings which they frequent, establish the parameters of discussion around the body's inner workings. The Rabbis associate the domestic female with the domestic space, but the metaphors fall short in transferring over into the lived experience of menstruators. Instead of studying the organs and their fluids with empirical experimentation, it becomes the "house" of the blood; each room has a different status which appropriately emits unique fluids. While this does aid in limiting the non-menstrual circumstances which would deem a woman *niddah*, the metaphor nonetheless indicates the cognitive dissonance between intellectual perceptions and physical realities. Though modesty precludes discussion of anatomy used in sexual

[3] m. Niddah 2:5
[4] Shai Secunda, "The Construction, Composition and Idealization of the Female Body in Rabbinic Literature and Parallel Iranian Texts: Three Excursuses," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 23 (2012): 29.

contexts, the devout shame prevents the Rabbis from properly analyzing the uterus and its discharges in their cyclic discharge patterns.

The metaphor is a sticky image, extending beyond the menstruator to the fetus occupying this house during gestation. The contained, domestic space extends beyond the menstruator to other individuals and other stages of life. The Tosefta, authored by the same pool of scholars as the Talmud, classified the fetus as a domestic object. This is most obvious in the case of stillbirth where the text describes how, "Stillborn children do not open the tomb until they present a head rounded like the spindle-knob of the warp; [these are] the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah says: Like the spindle top of the woof."[5]

If a woman is a house with doors and bolts holding the fetus in, it in turn becomes a piece of furniture used for handiwork while inside of her. However, while the language of the fetus as a household object applies only in the context of stillbirth, the woman falls under the umbrella of household imagery regardless of gestational status. Instead, it is the fetus who maintains autonomy and humanity, whereas she, the house, expels objects from her uterine rooms. While the house may have been intended as praise for the woman housing and nurturing the fetus, the image is used both to legislate boundaries for and emphasize the failures of the tent-like uterus in lieu of recognizing the medical complexity.

The home is not the only metaphor used to reconstruct the uterus into a space men recognize and can discuss modestly; it also becomes the metaphor of a woman as a *beit midrash* (house of study). This image appears to lift up the pregnant mother and elevate her to the status of one who assists Torah scholars by facilitating fetal Torah study. Tractate Niddah in the Babylonian Talmud describes that "a fetus is taught the entire Torah [by an angel] while in the womb, as it is stated: […] 'As I was in the days of my youth, when the converse of God was upon my tent' (Job 29:4)."[6] The talmudic passage unifies the metaphors of the house, a neutral-to-positive image in the eyes of the Rabbis, with the image of a woman as a *beit midrash*, the ultimate positive image. Instead of being just a domestic space in which the fetus develops and is protected, the uterus is a holy space in which angels teach fetuses the texts which they will one day study again outside the womb. However, the intended praise falls short; the woman contains the text study, but she is not the teacher, further removed from the process in another section of the text. Instead of her speaking Torah to the fetus, it is an

[5] Tosefta Ohalot 8:8
[6] b. Niddah 30b

angel which teaches her fetus. Delegated to simply housing the fetus, her role is further reduced when the Talmud discusses that her role is to provide the seed whereas God's role is to "form the fetus in a woman's open womb, and [hold it in despite the uterine] opening [facing] downward, and yet the fetus is preserved."[7] Despite providing the nutrient-rich uterine environment in which the fetus can develop, the text treats a woman as an ontological fetal container. In the process, though, this excludes women not only from the biological process of fetal development, but also from the associated spiritual experience which is even more important in the eyes of the Rabbis. In lieu of an autonomous mother whose body works hard to maintain a healthy environment and who works to educate her child, there is a masculine God occupying the masculine space of the *beit midrash* for the masculine activity of studying Torah. The further assumption that the fetus is male is highlighted not only in the use of the *beit midrash* imagery, but also in the confident declaration juxtaposed in the passage that the blessing of having children is "all the more so if it is a boy!"[8] The Rabbis clearly seek to praise the woman for her role adjacent to the Torah study and Divine action. However, well-intentioned as this is, the intentions become clearer when it is read in comparison with contemporary Zoroastrian perspectives on the divine influence over fetal development. The Judaic texts "[displace] the birth/mother goddesses prevalent in ancient Near Eastern myth and cult" twofold. First, the divinity highlighted as responsible for creating life is male, just as it is in nearly every other aggadic text, rather than using the feminine terms for God which are used elsewhere. Perhaps more poignant, though, is the fact that this relegates the gestating mother to adjacent to her own uterus.[9] While surrounding cultures tended towards the feminine as the creator, shaper, and nurturer of the fetus, the Babylonian Rabbis responded by crafting a more modest, monotheistic response which simultaneously removes the woman from her pregnancy. Instead, what is left is the image of a mother as the four walls housing a scholarly child, or worse, a spindle knob.

As a building, the uterus is *halachically* considered a discrete unit which can contain impurity. This building contains a door, much like a house does, which is opened by the crowning fetus. At all other times, though, the uterus is considered a closed tomb. This "all-or-nothing" mentality serves as another

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[7] b. Niddah 31a

[8] Schick, Shana Strauch. "From Dungeon to Haven: Competing Theories of Gestation in Leviticus Rabbah and the Babylonian Talmud." *AJS Review*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2019, p.159.

[9] Ibid 150

example of modest metaphor displacing scientific discourse around the uterus. In truth, the cervix dilates slowly over the laboring process and opens over anything ranging from several hours to several days. However, with well-intentioned modesty, the Rabbis recontextualized the uterus within the realms of the known. She is now either blocked off like a closed tomb and therefore more modest because she is closed off, or else open and delivering a child. When the woman is to be praised, she is a house which creates a safe environment for the fetus; when the fetus is to be praised, she is a *beit midrash*; when the fetus is lost, she is a tomb. This dynamic turns the uterus into an "architectonic object waiting to be opened and entered. The female body's legibility is established and ensured by presupposing its comparability to a house" which can hold life or death, depending on the situation.[10] This dynamic interpretation is accusatory in the case of stillbirth, though. Because the uterus was seen as a structure in and of itself which could contain the fetus entirely, the impurity of death imparted by the stillborn is contained within the woman herself. If she were to be a closed house, they reasoned, would this not be akin to a house which encloses the impurity? Evidently, until the dead fetus crowns, the impurity must not be transmitted. As such, the Mishnah delineates that:

> "If a woman was having a difficult birth, and was carried from one house to another, the first house becomes unclean because of doubt and the second because of a certainty. Rabbi Yehudah said: When is this so? When she is carried out by the armpits, but if she was able to walk, the first house remains clean, for after the tomb has been opened, there is no possibility of walking. Stillborn children do not open the tomb until they present a head rounded like a spindle-knob.[11]

Her failures to deliver mean that the fetus is still inside her body, making her its sole container. While she contains the fetus, she is responsible for its purity and impurity. Consequently, if she is unable to push out the child, she is failing to produce the safe environment of a house either through her body or the house beyond her. Instead, the uterus is now described as a tomb, a place of danger for the fetus, now struggling to survive. Furthermore, being a tomb means that, having failed to produce even a passively safe environment, the mother is no longer passively able to save the child. Instead, all autonomous action occurs

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[10] Christiane H. Tzuberi, "A House inside a House · Mishnah Ohalot 7:4," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 28 (2015): 141-142.
[11] Mishnah Ohalot 7:4

through the actions of a dead fetus who controls when to open the "door" to the uterus. As a result, she is deemed fully physically distinct from her own uterus, just a vessel through which the head passes. When a fetus dies, the uterus is no longer held in any sort of regard; instead, the woman is secondary to her own body and the fetus performs all action and she is simply its previous container.

The metaphor of the tomb is reversed when the fetus survives delivery. After emerging from the uterus, the language used transitions from the uterus as a dark, enclosed space with a bolted door to a light-filled space where water flows freely. This discursive process is reflective of the talmudic context, crossing cultural lines to appear in many religious texts. In fact, this idea is prevalent in ancient rites like the Babylonian incantation which describes how:

> In the ocean waters, fearsome, raging… / Where the little one is—his arms are bound! / Inside which the eye of the sun does not bring light. / Asalluḫi, the son of Enki, saw him. / He loosed his tight-bound bonds, / He made him a path, he opened him a way… / She has spoken to the doorbolt: "You are released." / Removed are the locks, the doors are thrown aside.[12]

This incantation features the same three elements present in the talmudic metaphor. First is the conception of the fetus in the dark, watery environment of the uterus. The fetus is bound during its development, not unlike the image from the talmudic passage about the bolts of the uterus. It is only the masculine God who can shape and free the fetus, not the woman who pushes out the child. Instead, He is the one who opens the uterus and allows for development from the seeds provided by the parents, completing that which she and her partner have started.[13] At delivery, the uterus is unbolted and the viable fetus transitions from the dangerous confines of the uterine environment to the safety of the world beyond the tomb. Nonetheless, the two texts feature undertones of the local divinity playing the major role in the development and safe delivery of the fetus. The greatest distinction between the tones of these two understandings, though, is the presence of a female divinity who helps in delivery in the Babylonian text, as hinted at above. The woman, as well as the feminine presence overall, is fully removed from the talmudic text to "displac[e] the birth goddesses and ascrib[e] their roles to the (male) God of Israel."[14] No longer are any women involved in

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[12] Schick, *From Dungeon to Haven*, 155.
[13] b. Kiddushin 30b
[14] Tzuberi, *A House Inside a House*, 145.

the typically feminine process of labor and delivery. Instead, the woman is removed from the equation to prevent her from any degree of deification. In rewriting the narrative, she is a casualty of cross-cultural communication. The image of the tomb, which seems to be the most cynical and accusatory of the home images, functions to show the power of a single male God and the weakness of human beings, clearly leaning emphasizing the religious lens in the visceral context.

Not unlike the metaphors used to describe the uterus as the space in which life and death are held in balance, the discharges from the uterus are also considered within this framework. The Rabbis use the quantity of menstrual blood shed as a metric to assess a woman's fertility, asserting that "every woman who has abundant [menstrual] blood will have abundant children."[15] This folk belief aligns with the interpretation of uterine blood as the female seed, believed by the Talmud to be the mother's contribution to the fetal partnership with God. Not unlike the image of the house, the strength of the seed was indicated by the thickness of the uterine lining and therefore the safety provided to the fetus. Perhaps most interestingly, this appears to be an attempt at consoling menstruators who exceed the prescribed number of bleeding days and therefore are impure for a longer period, promising instead that this blood is "generative blood," something with both religious and physical undertones alike.[16] The images of the house and the practical applications of the laws of *niddah* are united in the asserted causational connection between fertility and menstrual blood.

This praise of the menstrual blood is rare, though; more often, the category is described as impure and icky. When men emit abnormal genital discharge, the language used in the text describes it as something distinct from him. In contrast, much of the talmudic corpus considers the menstrual discharges emitted by women as intrinsic to her own nature, marking her disgusting and dangerous because of her anatomy. In Leviticus 15, the text highlights this distinction through a shift from the language of "'from his body' [in cases of unexpected seminal or similar discharges to] the case of the woman [where] it is 'in her body.'"[17] The underlying message deigns menstruation something more unpleasant and contagious than abnormal penile discharges. This is consistent,

[15] b. Niddah 64b

[16] Shai Secunda, *The Talmud's Red Fence: Menstrual Impurity and Difference in Babylonian Judaism and Its Sasanian Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 39.

[17] Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 47.

though, with the ways in which the Rabbis ascribe the metaphors of the uterus to the menstruator herself. The bias against menstruators is reflected in the perspective on her nature as an impure being.

This danger is so real to the Rabbis that the folk literature is marked by concern for the welfare of men around a menstruating woman, implying a contagious impurity which extends beyond herself. Regarding her, the Talmud warns, "[Concerning] two men between whom a woman in her menstrual period passed—if it was the beginning of her *niddah*, she kills one of them, if it was the end of her *niddah*, she causes a rift between them."[18]

Whether this is a literal threat to life and limb, or a metaphor used to indicate that men ought to avoid a menstruating woman as another protection against illicit sexual contact, is unclear. Nonetheless, the perceived threat feels very real. If one is not careful around a menstruating woman, he can lose a close friend or be killed. This is even more poignant considering the language of a woman being the source of the impurity rather than her uterus from which she bleeds; now, she is fully ensconced in a wall of impurity and death as she menstruates. Her bleeding, though promised to be a sign of fertility, is indicative of failure to create life and harmony, and even serves as a harbinger of death. The deep repulsion to the uterus and menstruation is no longer masked, and masculine discomfort towards discussing behaviors of the uterus leads to liability in cases of life and death.

Because the uterus is deemed off-putting, religious scholars proposed origins for menstruation which ascribe it certain value and generate a system in which menstruation can justifiably be legislated. When considering the practical application of Eve's punishment, the midrashic works produced by scholars in talmudic-era Jerusalem do not address the menstrual cycle as one of the elements. In contrast, though, the Babylonian Talmud proposes menses as a punishment added on to intensify the pains of childbirth and the fertility cycle. The Talmud argues, "Eve was cursed with ten curses, since it is written: And to the woman He said, "I will greatly increase"—this refers to the two drops of blood, one being that of menstruation and the other that of virginity."[19] Eve's punishment is a visceral, bloody one which is passed on to her descendants. The menstrual cycle is a regular reminder of her sins, and the required *niddah* cycle following emission of hymen blood marks the beginning of a sexual relationship with shame and guilt as well. However, the impact extends further still to

[18] b. Pesachim 111a
[19] b. Eruvin 100b

regulate a woman's activity for decades of her life, with Eve's punishment deciding when she is unfit to even sit on the same surface as a man. The legislative system, generated by non-menstruators, is assigned a religious origin rather than biological roots, justifying the codex surrounding menstruation.

This idea of menstruation as a punishment or sign of misdeed is reflected in Zoroastrian texts as well. There, the creation of menstruation is the result of a primal prostitute freeing the evil spirits. It details that she said:

> Rise up, our father, for in that battle I shall let loose so much harm upon the Righteous Man and the toiling Bull that their lives will not be worth living. I shall steal their Fortune, I shall harm the water, the earth, the fire, the plant, and the entire creation established by Ohrmazd!" She enumerated her evil-doings in such detail that the Foul Spirit was pacified. He jumped out of his stupor and placed a kiss on the Whore's head. The pollution now called "menses" appeared on the Whore then.[20]

This narrative is strikingly similar to the talmudic explanation. Both stories detail the ways in which menses were dealt to a sinful woman to punish her for following her evil inclination. However, the Babylonian Talmud offers a more painful deviation from this narrative by proposing that God, the Epitome of masculinity and goodness, prescribed this punishment. Instead of the origin being an evil being spreading his own impurity through contact, not unlike what a menstruator is perceived to do, it began as a punishment from a wise, all-knowing Being. The shameful stories about the origin of menstruation provide justification for the legislation of the uterus across religions in the contemporary ancient Near East.

The attempts to legislate the uterus are based upon a set of indicators derived from semi-empirical inquiry, a phenomenon which is constant across cultural narrative and judicial texts. The underlying assertion of the Rabbis as having supreme authority as religious leaders is used to justify the Rabbis functioning as scientists investigating the execution of the law as they investigate certain questions. For instance, the method of determining whether blood was impure depended on the perception of the color and whether it could be one of the five prohibited colors which the Mishna mentions [as the] five colors of menstrual blood: red, black, yellow, turbid, and pale red. It is likely that his words are based on a commentary, as the Mishna's words in tractate Nīdda are as

[20] Shai Secunda, "Talmudic Text and Iranian Context: On the Development of Two Talmudic Narratives," *AJS Review* 33, no. 1 (2009): 69.

follows: "Five kinds of blood in a woman are unclean: red, black, a color like bright crocus (ke-qeren karkōm), or like groundwater (ke-meimei adama), or like diluted wine (wine mixed with water, ke-mazūg)."[21]

However, this prescriptive diagnosis relies upon minute differences between highly similar, oxidized colors. The distinctions between brown, black, and deep red stains are incredibly hard to perceive accurately, and if the garment is colored, even more so. This is a field of study in which Rabbis or professionals called *yoatzot halakhah* study for years to determine how to diagnose a blood stain. Though this system may appear outlandish, it should be noted that this method was common to contemporary surrounding cultures. Some of the shades which other cultures delineate, such as certain greens and yellows, do not even make the list in Judaism. However, the colors which do make the list arise under varying circumstances. Some of the more classic reds, blacks, and pinks are normal shades for menstrual blood. Even the deep purple of diluted wine and the browns of groundwater are typical. But the presence of yellow discharges, common during ovulation, are listed as a color which could impart a state of impurity. Yellow-green discharge in particular, a sign of sexually transmitted infection or otherwise strong immune response, would more accurately fit the category of *zavah* in Judaic thought, an abnormal discharge from the genitals which is legislated differently than menstrual blood. Nonetheless, in Islamic texts, this is deemed impure and akin to menstrual discharge.[22] Though much of Judaic legislation around uterine discharge differs from modern scientific understanding, there is an attempt at understanding unhealthy discharges as distinct from normal discharges. The Rabbis recognized the distinction between normal and unhealthy discharge, crafting different *halakhic* processes for purity according to the situation and therefore creating a framework to begin moving beyond shaming menstruating bodies in a discrete way.

The assertion that the Rabbis are authorities on menstrual science relies upon the principle that they are the supreme religious authorities; these two beliefs become intertwined in three narratives in the Bavli. In each one, the Rabbis examine a blood sample and successfully determine its origins as something other than uterine and menstrual. Each story features a single Rabbi, known for his expertise in the field, using a systematic, semi-empirical method to examine the blood and diagnose it as pure. However, in the process of

[21] Haggai Mazuz, "Islamic and Jewish Law on the Colors of Menstrual Blood," *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 164, no. 1 (2014): 97–106, 99.
[22] Ibid 104-105

diagnosing the blood, the message is conveyed that the Rabbis, rather than the menstruators themselves, know best when it comes to menstrual discharge. In fact, this field of study stems from the fundamental desire to use "the biblical purity and impurity regulations to think [about] women's bodies in their corporeal specificity and to turn women's bodies into discourse" rather than unique and autonomous beings.[23] In each narrative, when the Rabbi diagnoses the blood as something other than menstrual, he is praised profusely by the women or students who brought him the given sample. Fascinatingly, these stories all feature either confusion or deception which complicate the diagnosis. Be it blood of desire, louse blood, or blood from men, none are menstrual blood. However, the Rabbi is praised as being a Divine conduit of knowledge, and the woman is left looking foolish for believing she could trick the Rabbi into misdiagnosing the blood or looking simply for failing to recall what led to her bleeding.

Two stories, listed out back-to-back in b. Niddah 20b, follow this structure. First is the tale of a woman who brought blood to Rabbi Elazar, whereupon it was diagnosed as blood of desire. After hearing the ruling, the woman suddenly recalls the events which led to the discharge and praises him as knowledgeable, a reward for his devotion to God. Next, Zoroastrian queen-mother Ifra Hormiz sends blood of desire to prove how easily she can lead the Rabbi astray; when it is diagnosed correctly, she sends sixty more samples to test him. Divine intervention allows him to diagnose each correctly, including the sample of louse blood which motivates him to send her a lice comb, and she consequently praises him as a conduit of God and Judaism as true. The contrast between the two stories offers a powerful insight into the ways that the Rabbis see Jewish women as opposed to non-Jewish women. Whereas the language used in the story about the Jewish woman is respectful and her own response is included in the discourse about the Rabbinic diagnosis, the queen-mother is not given the same autonomy. Her son, who is used as a background character, speaks as much as she does. When she does speak, it is to say that a religion other than her own is correct. Another dimension, that of religious superiority, is added to the conversation. Whereas the third story, recorded in b. Baba Mezia 84b, also tells the story of a Rabbi whose students deceitfully presented him with different blood sources, the equally deceitful story of Ifra Hormitz features a unique expression: "the matter [of ruling] was aided by heaven."[24] Not only is

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[23] Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 42.

[24] b. Niddah 20b

the process deemed experimentally successful with its methods of smelling the stain and assessing its color, it is one which God has signed off on.[25] The surrounding nations therefore are both portrayed as lacking scientifically as well as spiritually. The blood science utilized by the Babylonian Rabbis is used to praise the Jewish leaders at the exclusion of surrounding nations and to instill authority in men over menstruators, thereby also justifying their religious—rather than lived or visceral—understanding of Jewish menstruators as well.

Metaphors, a common discursive device used to analyze that which is unfamiliar, is heavily utilized in talmudic metaphors for the uterus and the subsequent assessment of nature. Use of metaphor allows Rabbis to assert knowledge over realms which are uncomfortable or unfamiliar by moving it into a space in which they have authority and perceive to be more modest. The Mishnah describes the uterus considering the laws of houses, *batei midrash*, and graveyards it prescribes throughout the entire codex, covering everything from purity to physical boundaries to damages. As a result, the Rabbis shift the lived experience into a literary setting in which they can assert legislative authority. However, because a uterus is fundamentally not a location or a house with four walls, the metaphor falls short. It is in these gaps that the discomfort around discussing female anatomy is most apparent. Its life-giving abilities and its unique anatomical structure at times extend beyond the strictly spiritual understanding of the organ, leaving a void of misunderstanding and frustration. The masked discomfort, present in the talmudic texts as well as many surrounding cultures, reflects a desire to control that which cannot be understood.

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[25] Secunda, *The Talmud's Red Fence*, 99-100.

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Jack Granahan

THE HAMMER AND SHEKEL:
The Individual in Israeli-Soviet/Russian Relations

Introduction

In June of 2022, the Russian government filed suit to shut down the offices of the Jewish Agency within Russia.[1] The closure of this office, the world's forefront Zionist organization that assists Jewish immigration to Israel, combined with Israel's slowly-growing support for Ukraine in the Russo-Ukrainian War, indicates a start to the nadir of relations between Israel and the Russian Federation.[2] The relationship between Israel and Russia (and its predecessor state, the Soviet Union) has a tumultuous history. In the century since the Soviet Union was first established, Soviet and Russian foreign policy have taken different approaches to Zionism, Israel, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. This article will attempt to explain the reasons why Israeli-Soviet and Israeli-Russian relations developed in the way that they did. By doing this, I will argue that the history of diplomatic interactions between the Israeli government and the Soviet and Russian governments can best be explained by analysis of *Man, the State, and War* by Kenneth N. Waltz.

Soviet and Russian attitudes towards Israel have taken various forms throughout history. For virtually every leader of the Soviet Union and later Russia, a different policy regarding relations with Israel has been followed. Nevertheless, all of these geopolitical attitudes have shared one common trait: they have represented, first and foremost, the interests of the leader of the USSR or Russia. Contrary to other foreign policy decisions, there were no unified Soviet or Russian political interests that defined the respective country's

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[1] Judah Ari Gross, "Jewish Agency Trial in Moscow Postponed Again, Leaving Group's Fate Unclear," The Times of Israel, September 19, 2022, https://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-agency-trial-in-moscow-postponed-again-leaving-groups-fate-unclear/.

[2] Patrick Kingsley and Ronen Bergman, "Russia Shrinks Forces in Syria, a Factor in Israeli Strategy There," The New York Times, October 19, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/19/world/middleeast/russia-syria-israel-ukraine.html.

relationship with Israel. As will be explained in this article, the importance of individual decisions in the Israeli-Soviet and Israeli-Russian relationship is indicative of the international relations theory of the individual image.

The first section of this article will define and explain the implications of the individual image of analysis. The second section will focus on the original Marxist interpretation of ethnic nationalism and its connection to Vladimir Lenin's views on the growing Zionist and Arab nationalist movements during the formational years of the USSR. The third section will examine Joseph Stalin's personal views on and political approach to the establishment of the State of Israel. The fourth section will focus on the role of Stalin and later Nikita Khrushchev in the decline and eventual severing of diplomatic ties between Israel and the USSR. The fifth section will explain the reconciliation between Israel and the USSR under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, along with the strong relationship between Israel and Russia under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin. Finally, the sixth section will describe the powerful but often unstable bond that has developed between Israel and Russia under Vladimir Putin's regime.

The Individual in International Politics

Man, the State, and War by Kenneth N. Waltz details different images of analysis in international relations through which conflict can be explained. The first of these images places the blame for conflict on "the nature and behavior of man."[3] As explained by this image, foreign policy decisions in general and conflict in particular are motivated by the personal interests of the state's leaders. According to the individual image, personal grudges held by a leader result in tension and conflict, while personal amity expressed by a leader results in the fostering of positive diplomatic relations, regardless of any national or international interests.[4] Understanding the individual image and its consequences is integral to understanding why the USSR and Russia have taken such wildly variable diplomatic approaches towards Israel throughout the last century.

In *Man, the State, and War*, Waltz describes two more images of analysis: the domestic image and the systemic image. The domestic image postulates that certain geopolitical events are caused by fixed trends and interests within the

[3] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 16.
[4] Ibid 29-38

character of a single nation.[5] The domestic image fails to explain Soviet and Russian attitudes toward Zionism and Israel, as this would require Soviet and Russian interests to remain consistent throughout the entirety of the Arab-Israeli conflict. As is laid out in this article, various Soviet and Russian leaders have taken diametrically diverse approaches to the Russian relationship with Israel, demonstrating the absence of a singular Russian interest in Middle Eastern policy. Likewise, the systemic image, which instead places the blame for geopolitical decisions on the systemic anarchy of international relations, also falls flat in this regard.[6] An analysis of Israeli-Soviet and Israeli-Russian relations utilizing the systemic image implies that Moscow made its foreign policy decisions out of desperation, rather than out of the self-interests of its leaders. This failure of the systemic image can best be seen in the international political maneuvers made under the administrations of Mikhail Gorbachev and Vladimir Putin. Gorbachev's efforts to liberalize attitudes towards Israel and Putin's extensive intervention in Syria have not occurred in the interest of Soviet and Russian self-preservation; rather, they are the result of individual interests.

Herzl, Marx, and Lenin (1848-1922)

According to most understandings, communism in its original Marxist form was relatively incompatible with both Zionism (which supported the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine) and Arab nationalism (which supported the establishment of an Arab nation or nations in the Middle East, including Palestine), because it is incompatible with any form of ethnic nationalism. Karl Marx, an internationalist communist, believed that fostering division along ethnic and religious lines is a ploy to distract the working class from economic inequality.[7] However, Zionist pioneer Theodor Herzl often incorporated the rhetoric of the ethnically-Jewish Karl Marx by calling on Jewish communities in Europe to foster simple community living rather than engaging in the financial trade. Such rhetoric is often used as an example of Marx's alleged antisemitic tendencies.[8] Herzl's use of Marxist rhetoric was a powerful demonstration of the fluidity of Marxist thought, in that it can be utilized to represent seemingly incompatible belief systems, including Zionism.

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[5] Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, 99-100.
[6] Ibid 178
[7] Walid Sharif, "Soviet Marxism and Zionism," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6, no. 3 (1977): 80.
[8] Ibid 81

Despite this, Vladimir Lenin adopted the same views on ethnic nationalism as Marx when he became the leader of Russia following the Russian Revolution in 1917. Lenin held a particular disdain for the increasingly-common view that Jews constitute a nation, stating that this supposedly reactionary belief was only held by "the nationalist petty bourgeois, not among the Marxists."[9] Instead, Lenin believed that the solution to the problem of antisemitism in Europe was merely to dismantle the feudal capitalist institutions that had dominated Europe for centuries, and a precedent for Soviet economic policy was set based on Lenin's views on the subject.[10] In line with the individual image's outlook on politics, Lenin's personal values paved the way for Soviet rejection of Zionism in favor of a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Stalin's Change of Heart (1922-1948)

The interests of Joseph Stalin were more heavily influenced by Stalin's identity. An ethnic Georgian, Stalin was famously supportive of national autonomy for ethnic minorities (albeit under Soviet sovereignty or influence) in the form of autonomous republics or satellite states.[11] However, Stalin initially opposed Zionism despite his relative propensity towards nationalism, under the guise that, due to their supposed lack of a shared language and homeland, the Jewish people do not constitute a nation, and that Jewish nationalism would instead take the form of Western imperialism.[12] In 1934, Stalin established the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in the Russian Far East to serve as a Soviet-controlled alternative to a Jewish state in what was then British Mandatory Palestine. This plan fell flat due to the undesirable conditions of the autonomous area. Thus, Soviet efforts to facilitate Jewish settlement in the region ended in the 1940s without any sort of Jewish majority being established.[13]

Meanwhile, a variety of factors caused Zionism to become a more desirable ideology to the Soviets. Historian Walter Laqueur described Stalin's approach to the issue as "neither pro-Arab, nor pro-Israel," but "pro-Soviet."[14] In other words, Stalin's personal opportunistic beliefs were the primary motivation for the USSR's newfound support for Zionism. This was demonstrated by

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[9] Sharif, *Soviet Marxism and Zionism*, 85.
[10] Ibid 86
[11] Ibid 87
[12] Ibid 88
[13] Ibid 94
[14] Arnold Krammer, "Soviet Motives in the Partition of Palestine, 1947-48," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 2 (1973): 119.

Stalin's fears of Western influence in Middle Eastern nations such as Iran and Turkey. Also important were Stalin's desire for a Soviet-aligned warm-water port and his hopes of preventing Anglo-American domination of the Middle East's oil supply.[15] Additionally, Stalin saw the creation of a Jewish state in Mandatory Palestine as a means to an end–that end being the end of British imperialism in the Middle East–and may have believed that the new Jewish state would become a Soviet ally due to the influence of the pro-Soviet left-wing Poale Zion.[16] Regardless of the reasons for Stalin's support of Zionism, the USSR endorsed the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, which provided for the establishment of a Jewish state and an Arab state in the former British Mandate, in 1947.

In his speech to the Ad Hoc Committee on Palestine in September 1947, Soviet ambassador to the UN Andrei Gromyko cited "the right of self-determination of hundreds of thousands of Jews and Arabs living in Palestine" and "the sufferings and needs of the Jewish people, whom none of the States of Western Europe [had] been able to help during their struggle against the Hitlerites and the allies of the Hitlerites for the defense of their rights and their existence," in line with Stalin's support for ethnic self-determination ("The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem: Part II (1947-1977)"). In the ensuing 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the USSR pressed communist Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to sell arms to Zionist paramilitaries and later the newly-established State of Israel, although the latter did not do so due to the Tito-Stalin split.[17]

Deterioration of the Israeli-Soviet Relationship (1948-1967)

As Stalin's personal views on Israel changed, so too did Soviet foreign policy regarding Israel. In particular, animosity grew between Stalin and Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion's support for the UN intervention in the Korean War, 1951 visit to the United States, and refusal to include the pro-Soviet political party Mapam in his governing coalition all harmed relations between Israel and the USSR.[18] As a result, anti-Zionist and antisemitic sentiment surged in the Soviet government manifested particularly through

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[15] Krammer, *Soviet Motives*, 103.

[16] Sharif, *Soviet Marxism and Zionism*, 92, 97.

[17] Joseph Heller, "The Soviet Union and Israel: From the Gromyko Declaration to the Death of Stalin (1947–53)," chapter, in *The United States, the Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–67: Superpower Rivalry* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2010), 9.

[18] Ibid 10-13

crackdowns on Jewish refuseniks who sought to emigrate to Israel, as well as the Doctors' plot, which saw the summary torture and execution of Jewish doctors.[19]

Under Nikita Khrushchev's leadership, Soviet hostility towards Israel continued until the 1963 election of Levi Eshkol as Israeli prime minister. In contrast with Ben-Gurion, Eshkol was seen as less nationalistic and more restrained towards the increasingly pro-Soviet Arab world. This helped foster relations between Eshkol and Khrushchev.[20] However, the Soviet Union simultaneously embraced the anti-Zionist Arab socialist ideology espoused by Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who remarked during Khrushchev's 1964 visit to Egypt that "the Soviet Union has stood by Egypt while the imperialist powers have established a base of aggression in the heart of the Arab states," in reference to Israel.[21] The coup de grace for the already-faltering Israeli-Soviet relationship was dealt in 1966, when the Ba'ath Party took power in Syria. The Ba'ath Party, which was in part led by avowed communists such as Haled Bagdash, was the most pro-Soviet political faction to have ever ruled a Middle Eastern nation. This was the final push needed for Khrushchev to fully switch the USSR's support from Israel to the Arab world.[22] Sure enough, in 1967, following Israel's victory over Egypt and Syria in the Six-Day War, the USSR severed diplomatic ties with Israel.[23]

The Israeli-Russian Alliance Replaces the Israeli-Soviet Split (1967-2000)

For the remainder of Khrushchev's regime, as well as those of Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko, the USSR would remain a steadfast supporter of the Arab nationalist bloc against Israel. In 1975, the USSR successfully sponsored a UN resolution that declared Zionism a form of racism.[24] Similar to the other reforms that occurred under Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership of the USSR, Gorbachev's rule saw a complete overhaul of the Israeli-Soviet freeze. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were formally established in October of 1991, and the USSR co-sponsored a repeal of the "Zionism is racism" declaration. Additionally, Gorbachev's increased focus on civil liberties and human rights motivated him to permit mass emigration from the USSR to

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[19] Heller, *The Soviet Union and Israel*, 1.

[20] Yosef Govrin, *Israel-Soviet Relations: 1964-1966* (Jerusalem: Hebrew Univ Jerusalem, Soviet & East European Research Center, 1978), 41.

[21] Ibid 31-32

[22] Ibid 111

[23] Ibid 161

[24] Robert O. Freedman, "Israeli-Russian Relations since the Collapse of the Soviet Union," *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 2 (1995): 233-234.

Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews emigrated to Israel, which was the largest group of Soviet immigrants Israel had ever absorbed.[25]

When the USSR collapsed in December of 1991 and Boris Yeltsin became president of the newly-established Russian Federation, Russian support for Israel was strengthened even further. Under Yeltsin, Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev helped to mediate the 1993 peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinian Libertarian Organization, as well as the 1994 peace treaty between Israel and Jordan.[26] Russia's relationship with Israel at this time was, above all else, an expression of Yeltsin's personal support for Israel. Several political factions, particularly the far-left Communists led by Gennady Zyuganov and the far-right Liberal Democrats led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, fiercely opposed the normalization of relations, due to Israel's long standing status as an American ally.[27] Despite this, Yeltsin's desire for an Israeli-Russian alliance superseded the interests of other Russian politicians, resulting in a continuation of Gorbachev's pro-Israel approach to Russian foreign policy.

The Putin Era (2000-present)

In 2000, Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia, bringing with him a new approach to Middle East policy modeled after, in the words of political scholar Mark Katz, "Putin's personal calculation of Russian interests."[28] One such example was seen in the close personal friendship between Putin and Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon, a Russophone who also supported closer ties with Russia, particularly as both Israel and Russia each faced terrorist threats during the Second Intifada and Second Chechen War, respectively. This relationship boomed after Benjamin Netanyahu was elected prime minister of Israel. By 2014, trade revenue between Israel and Russia amounted to around $3.5 billion, more than three times as much as in 2005.[29]

However, Putin's personal connections have also complicated his country's relationship with Israel. In 2015, Putin, motivated by his close ties to fiercely anti-Israel Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, deployed Russian troops to

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[25] Freedman, *Israeli-Russian Relations*, 233-234.
[26] Ibid 241, 245
[27] Ibid 237
[28] Anna Borshchevskaya, "The Maturing of Israeli-Russian Relations," The Washington Institute, April 15, 2016, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/maturing-israeli-russian-relations.
[29] Ibid

Syria in order to fight alongside government forces in the Syrian Civil War.[30] Although this military intervention has primarily targeted ISIS, it has also attacked Syrian opposition groups backed by Gulf Arab states, most notably Saudi Arabia. [31] This, combined with Putin and Assad's occasional support for the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, is seemingly indicative of Russian support for Iran in their proxy conflict with Saudi Arabia–a conflict in which Israel is increasingly siding with the Saudis.[32] The presence of Hezbollah in Syria alongside Russian military bases also creates an uncomfortable balancing act for Israel's military, which must remain in the good graces of Putin in order to bomb Hezbollah targets in Syria without interference from Russia.[33]

Simultaneously, Israel has taken a mixed approach to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Despite expressing support for Ukraine, the Israeli government has repeatedly refused to provide arms or financial support to the Ukrainian military. Under the leadership of prime minister Yair Lapid, however, Israel has become more vocal in its opposition to the Russian invasion, which has further strained relations between Israel and Russia. In June of 2022, this culminated in the challenge to the Jewish Agency in Russia, a move that, despite lacking a proper explanation, is almost certainly the result of a personal grievance against the organization held by Putin.[34]

Conclusion

In *Man, the State, and War* Waltz states that conflict stems "from selfishness, from misdirected aggressive impulses, from stupidity."[35] Virtually every major Soviet or Russian foreign policy decision regarding Israel falls into two of these three categories. When Stalin sought to establish a Jewish state in Mandatory Palestine, it was because he had a selfish desire for an ethnic satellite state that would prevent Anglo-American hegemony in the Middle East. When he proceeded to fabricate an antisemitic conspiracy theory against dozens of Jewish doctors and refused to allow refuseniks to leave the USSR, it was because of his aggressive personal grievances against David Ben-Gurion, and by extension the State of Israel. And yet, none of the decisions outlined in this paper

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[30] Ehud Eilam, "Russian Military Involvement in Syria," *Containment in the Middle East*, 2019, 69.
[31] Ibid 78, 81
[32] Ibid 83
[33] Kingsley and Bergman, *Russia Shrinks Forces in Syria*, The New York Times.
[34] Gross, *Jewish Agency Trial in Moscow Postponed Again*, The Times of Israel.
[35] Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, 16.

can be maligned as explicitly stupid, even if they were based more on a leader's interests than a country's interests. Stalin's pseudo-support for Zionism fits into his general support for ethnic autonomy, Khrushchev's brief warming of relations with Eshkol fits into the former's desire for a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Putin's conflicting alliances with both Israel and Syria fit into his goal of strengthening Russia as a global power by any means necessary. Therefore, it is no surprise that Soviet and Russian foreign policy approaches to Israel have followed vastly different trajectories throughout history, for if a fixed Russian political interest were to be adhered to, no Russian leader would be able to command a foreign policy that matched his own interests.

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Neima Fax

BECOMING THE ARCHITECT:
Franz Rosenzweig on Observing Halcha

Moses Mendelssohn was the father of the Haskalah, a late 18th and early 19th century Jewish Enlightenment movement that began in Germany. The Enlightenment of the 18th century was characterized by the belief that in order to reach self-actualization, one needs to act out of personal reason and purpose, and should not blindly follow the instruction of another. This posed a threat to Jewish people because observing *halacha*, Jewish law, can often call for irrational action. Certain laws are characterized as Chokim, ambiguous laws, and the common theory behind them is that observing them is a way of proving faith to God. According to the ideals of the Enlightenment, a Jew who observes these laws could never reach self-actualization. This created a tension for German Jews between the two facets of their identity and their inclination to assimilate. Moses Mendelssohn proposed a new ideology that made it possible for Jews to observe *halacha* and be "enlightened." He argued that *halacha* does not command belief- it commands action. These actions create a framework in which one can achieve Jewish self-realization and reach "felicity." Furthermore, he argues that God only commands the Jewish people in action after earning the trust of the nation by redeeming them from Egypt. Once the trust was established with God, the Jewish people had reason to observe God's laws. However, Mendelssohn did not anticipate the danger in reshaping the way that religious Jews thought about their *halachic* observance.

When one considers the question of why they observe *halacha*, they might not have an answer. Following the *Haskalah*, many Jews stopped observing *halacha* and assimilated fully into German society. Franz Rosezweig writes about a view of *halacha* that is ever changing and evolving, adapting to the needs of the people, and therefore not something that can simply be rejected. His writings respond to the anxiety sparked by the era of Mendelssohn. He writes, "From Mendelssohn on, our entire people has subjected itself to the torture of this embarrasing questioning; the Jewishness of every individual has squirmed on the needlepoint of why? Certainly, it was high time for an architect to come and convert this foundation into a wall behind which the people, pressed

with questions, could seek shelter."[1] Perhaps, Rosenzweig himself was this architect.

Franz Rosenzweig was raised a non-observant Jew in Germany in the twentieth century. As a young adult, he had a semi-crisis of faith and considered converting to Christianity. Living in a predominantly Christian society, he could not see the advantages of staying Jewish. But in his conversion process he decided to give a chance at Judaism first. He attended high holiday services in a synagogue in Berlin which sparked a sense of revelation in him, and then proceeded to reshape his entire life revolving around his newfound interest in Judaism. Following World War I, Rosenzweig got married and became more observant in his Judaism. As a *Ba'al Teshuva*, (one who becomes observant later in life), he felt that his perspective as a Jew who chose to live an observant lifestyle, rather than growing up observant, was unique. Rosenzweig was enamored with the idea of Judaism as a lived experience, rather than sets of laws. Following the war, many felt a desire to return to Judaism. Rosenzweig felt this need and founded the Lehrhaus in 1920. The Lehrhaus was a place of study and discourse for disconnected Jews to gather and grapple with their Jewish identity. Members of the Lehrhaus were encouraged to connect to Judaism in personalized ways. The Lehraus was a space not for already educated Jews, but for Jews with questions. This dialogical style of learning was revolutionary for its time, but it fell in line with Rosenzweig's view that Judaism is about interaction and lived experiences. You learn from people and yourself, as much as from books.

In 1923 Rosenzweig wrote *The Builder*, a commentary on the Jewish people's relationship to their commandments. *The Builder* was originally a letter Rosenzweig wrote to his friend and co-philosopher, Martin Buber. In it, he explores the ways in which observant Jews approach *halacha* and offers a productive critique. Rosenzweig writes about the approach to *halachic* observance characterized by isolating *halacha* from Jewish peoplehood and modern realities. He begins by differentiating between essential and non-essential *halacha*, as defined by eighteenth century *halachists*. Rosenzweig notices in this method a separation between different levels of *halacha*. *Halachot* that are on a greater level of importance and more relevant to the lived Jewish experience, to the *halachists*, ought to be prioritized, while everything else should be brushed to the side. Rosenzweig, conversely, argues that all of *halacha*

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[1] Franz Rosenzweig and Nahum Norbert Glatzer, "The Builders: Concerning the Law," essay, in *On Jewish Learning* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 78.

should be categorized of the same importance, because observance is not about practice. Rather, it is about the peoplehood that surrounds practice. All of *halacha* contributes to living a Jewish life, therefore all of *halacha* should be prioritized and not separated by levels of importance. Rosenzweig writes, "Now we must learn to recognize the hidden essence in the non-essential; and to accept the essential as we face it in the realities of Jewish life."[2]

Rosenzweig argues that *halacha* should be in conservation with Judaism as it develops and changes. Additionally, Jewish tradition should be on par with *halacha*. It is as important for a child to learn the laws of Kashrut as it is for them to learn their mother's recipe. For Rosenzweig, this raises the stakes of learning Torah, because it puts one's personal identity on the line. He writes, "For inner power is what you demand when you ask him who learns to stake his whole being for the learning, to make himself a link in the chain of tradition and thus become a chooser, not through his will, but through his ability."[3] Rosenzweig is expressing the idea that one should become personally invested in their learning. The text you engage with should not be confined to a *beit midrash* (house of study), it should permeate throughout your life. Jewish people should use a so-called "inner power" in choosing to be a receiver and continuer of Jewish tradition. This mindset speaks to enlightened Jews because it appeals to the power of choice. One can practice *halacha* in an enlightened way by choosing to be invested. Rosenzweig was someone who chose his Judaism. He feels that doing so was not characterized by his actual practice, rather it was characterized by investing in the Jewish tradition, by choosing to be a "link in a chain."

Rosenzweig further claims that he rejects the 19th century "Western Orthodox" view of *halacha*, which to him, seems to be the worst approach. This approach is characterized by thinkers, like Samson Rafael Hirsch, who base their *halachic* observance on the blind faith that the law is from God at Sinai, and should not be concerned with changing times. This formulaic view is what Rosenzweig claims Buber rejects, but there is another viewpoint of *halacha* that he thinks Buber would be inclined to accept. The alternative view of *halacha* is inclusive of thinkers that build off of the original *halachic* texts, thinkers that are representative of humanity and the ideals of their time, rather than being stuck at Sinai. He writes, "Is that really Jewish law, the law of millenia, studied and lived…The law Akiba planted and fenced in, and Aher trampled under, the

[2] Rosenzweig, *The Builders*, 75.
[3] Ibid

cradle Spinoza hailed from, the ladder on which the Ba'al Shem ascended, the law that always rises beyond itself, that can never be reached–and yet has always the possibility of becoming Jewish life, of being expressed in Jewish faces?"[4] Rosenzweig here poses a rhetorical question, and he is challenging Buber to approach *halacha* more open-mindedly. He is arguing that *halacha* is about peoplehood and the ever changing nature of the Jewish nation. He references Spinoza, Rabbi Akiva, and the Baal Shem Tov, proving that Jewish thinkers are always grappling with modernity and the changing needs of the Jewish community. *Halacha* cannot fit into a box, because it is about lived experiences, not the letter of the law. Therefore, if *halacha* is something malleable, then one can not reject it when they have the ability to personalize it, because it will always, in some way, be relevant to them.

Rosenzweig, having established that *halacha* is flexible, continues in discussing why it is so significant to make it one's own. He again critiques Hirsch as being one-track minded and viewing *halacha* as "rigid and narrow, unbeautiful despite its magnificence."[5] He begins by describing the journey of learning Torah as walking a path. He says that some skip towards the end of the path, and some travel along it arduously. Both of these people eventually reach the same point, but the one who took the time to travel the path has an advantage. This is the difference between observing *halacha* blindly, and observing it with purpose. When one practices *halacha* blindly, they are acting without intention or reason. When one takes on the weight of the knowledge of Judaism, they reach a higher level of practice. Every action becomes intentional. This approach speaks to enlightened Judaism, it encourages understanding the laws by which one chooses to live, and furthermore, it allows room for one to to make personal choices and distinguish for oneself how they wish to practice.

Rosenzweig explains that the Jewish nation is defined by its moment of birth when God kept his promise and redeemed the Jewish people from Egypt. He writes, "And so only he who remembers this determining origin can belong to it; while he who no longer can or will utter the new word he has to say 'in the name of the original speaker,' who refuses to be a link in the golden chain, no longer belongs to his people."[6] In order to be part of the Jewish tradition, one needs to take part in the covenant from Sinai, in their own personal way. Rosenzweig describes that place that one can hold in the Jewish legacy. He

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[4] Rosenzweig, *The Builders*, 77.

[5] Ibid 80

[6] Ibid 82

writes, "For we are, as scripture puts it, children; we are, as tradition reads it, Builders."[7] In order to join in the Jewish tradition, one must chime in in *halachic* discussions and be a part of the discourse that grapples with the foundations of Jewish life. They cannot base their practice on previous knowledge, they must personally reaffirm their commitment to God and have their own path in their *halachic* observance.

Rosenzweig demonstrates his belief that *halacha* should be personal to the individual in his discussion of Shabbat observance. He discusses the framework of the day in a very modern sense, refraining from discussing actual law, but focusing more philosophically on what it means to celebrate creation. Rosenzweig observes that all Shabbatot are essentially the same, and that their only differing factor is the weekly Torah portion. In the cycle of a year, a congregation completes the reading of the five books of Moses. The consistency of Shabbat persists through the tumultuous stress of the holidays, it is a reliable constant. Rosenzweig writes, "Amidst the surging up of joy and pain, of suffering and bliss that comes and goes with the holidays, the steady flow of the Sabbaths goes along, and its steady flowing first makes possible the whirlpools of the soul."[8] Rosenzweig becomes very personal and honest in his description of Shabbat. He finds that it acts as a framework in which he can get in touch with his spirituality and his Judaism. He then goes on to explore the relationship between Shabbat and the week. He states, "For God created heaven and earth in six days and on the seventh he rested. Therefore the seventh day as the day of rest, as Sabbath, becomes a celebration of the remembering of the work of the beginning, more exactly, the completion of that work."[9]

Rosenzweig sees Shabbat as defined by the work during the week, and vice versa. Creation can only exist if there is time to bask in it. Shabbat is that time, to revel in all that is made by God and humans, and appreciate that which is novel. On Shabbat, by actively stepping back from creating, one is forced to exist in that which is created. For Rosenzweig, this is what it means to make *halacha* malleable and relevant to oneself: to take age-old concepts and find your place in them. There is a Hasidic idea in Judaism that every Jew has a letter in the Torah, a place where they belong. Rosenzweig encourages every Jew to find their letter, make it their own, and practice it.

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[7] Rosenzweig, *The Builders*, 91.
[8] Ibid 81
[9] Ibid

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